

INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

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FEATURE

Portugal's political impasse

Charles-André Udry

FEATURE

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

In support of the Kurdish people's struggle to live free and in dignity

Fourth International

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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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MACEDONIA

We Demand Removal of the Fence on the Macedonian-Greek Border!

Three refugees drowned in the Suva Reka River on Monday, in an attempt to cross into Macedonia, on their way to safety and a better life.

We are indignant at this occurrence, which represents a direct consequence of the barbed wire fence, which silently, far from the eyes of the public and under the auspices of the EU, was erected by our authorities at the border with Greece. The fence's length currently comprises approximately 100 km in two rows, but as announced by certain media, it is envisioned that it reaches 300 km.

The setting up of the fence commenced under the pretext of better "channeling" and registration of refugees so as to avoid "illegal" crossing into the country, and has turned into a complete blockade of the southern border. Thousands of people have their freedom of movement restricted, and their right to claim asylum denied, thereby coercing them into seeking alternative solutions. Thus, the border has become a hotspot for smugglers that lurk at every corner, resulting in 3 casualties on Monday who drowned whilst trying to cross the border via the Suva Reka River.

The fence takes us de facto back to the past, when cities were divided by walls and states by iron curtains. It is ironic that those who were the proponents of the fall of those walls and curtains, are the chief conspirators and patrons of erecting barbed wire fences today.

What's even more ironic is that the patrons of the fence, which restricts people's freedom of movement, have been intensively negotiating the ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Trade and Investment recently, which they present as an

agreement on free trade and investment. Free movement of goods and capital and fences for the living beings.

Concocting this dehumanised act, they sent a clear message that for them human rights are hollow phrases whilst human lives have no value.

The physical and psychological health of all people at the border has been jeopardised. People's health, especially the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls fleeing war-torn countries has been put in jeopardy as well. The health of pregnant women and newborns have been brought beyond human decency under these conditions. The risk of sexual assault on women and children has also increased.

Moreover, the border fence almost completely blocks certain vulnerable categories, often overlooked in the refugee crisis, from seeking refuge, such as unaccompanied minors or the LGBT community, seeking refuge from the persecution and death awaiting in their home countries, which in turn increases the otherwise high level of risk and violence exposure within the refugee groups.

In a country with record air pollution levels in Europe, in which green spaces experienced their own massacre in the past years, a great deal of greenery and thousands of trees will be destroyed in order to erect this fence.

Finally, the fence will also affect animals negatively, which won't be able to freely move, or will fall prey to the barbed wire. Many species' habitats will be destroyed with a political decision, and the migration of animals stopped as well.

That is why we, fighters for freedom, equality and human rights, nature preservation and animal pro-

tection, publicly raise our voice and say NO! to the barbed wire fence! If the fence exists, protection of the people in need will be deemed illegal. Thousands of people will remain stranded at the borders, and in lack of legal routes, will have recourse more often to illegal and dangerous alternatives, which will be conducive to more casualties. We demand that the fence is torn down! We demand the removal of segregating and discriminatory practices which illegally prevent people stranded at the borders from seeking asylum in a safe way!

We demand an end to the destruction of the habitat of all living beings in the area at the border. Many species, based on the territory in both states, will disappear from the area.

The removal of the fence would signify freedom, not only at a survival level, but also, freedom from all the inner fences and borders which we have built throughout the years.

A better and a more just world which encompasses all people and at the same time species with which we share the environment is not built by erecting walls. A more just world is built by tearing walls down, both physical and metal walls. A more just world is one in which human rights apply equally for everyone. Conscience cannot be injected, nor can it be upgraded with chips, and the living beings that are not humans have the same rights as humans, as well as the environment which we must preserve as an inalienable part of the whole biological ecosystem.

We call upon you as conscious individuals and organisations to join the informal coalition. Please get in touch with us to join us as signatories, so that united and in solidarity, we build bridges, not walls! If you would like to voice your support to this letter by having your organization added as a signee in the list below, please send us an e-mail at

ld.solidarnost@gmail.com, with the following subject: Solidarity with the people on the move.

Signatories:

Youth organisation "Mugra"

Student organisation "Izlez"

Organisation for animal protection "Anima Mundi"

Organisation for animal protection from Veles "Glas na zivotnite" (Animal Voice)

Organisation for animal protection from Struga "Animal World"

"Angelcats" – cats shelter from Skopje

H.E.R.A. – Association for Health Research and Education

Association for promotion of women's activism "Tiiit! Inc." – Skopje

HOPS – Health Options Project Skopje

"Clean Ohrid"- non-formal environmental organisation from Ohrid

"Legis"- Association of promotion and maintaining cultural and spiritual values

"Ploshtad Sloboda" – Skopje, Association for art, theory and activism

"Subversive Front" – Association for critical approach to gender and sexuality

Coalition "Sexual and health rights of marginalised communities"

The activists from the Autonomous Cultural Social Centre

Leftist movement "Solidarnost"

March 17

LeftEast

RUSSIA

Putin: First as Farce ...

ILYA BUDRAITSKIS ·

In a similar vein, during the depressive atmosphere of the Brezhnev stagnation, dissident Andrei Amalrik wrote his famous text *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?*. What was most shocking at the time was not the pamphlet's content – the majority of Amalrik's predictions were proven to be incorrect – but the title itself. No one, not even the regime's most radical critics, found it easy to imagine that Soviet reality could have an end point/ finite horizon, located in a historically foreseeable time.

However, this illusion of the end of history, of "the eternal present" is the only element that the Putin regime fully adopted from Brezhnev. In fact, everything about it seems artificial, drained of colour, rotten. No one believes in the slogans they themselves proclaim. An ideology, which, as it appears, rises above societal concerns, loses all content and preserves only its exterior form. The distinction to be made is that unlike Brezhnevism, representing the last stage of the Soviet regime's ideological decomposition, Putinism has represented a farce from the very beginning.

In 1999, when Vladimir Putin was named as Boris Yeltsin's successor, the Russian post-soviet statehood had finally lost all traces of a meaningful project with an idea of a future based on a strong belief in its place in history. The consensus that had enabled Putin's triumphant rise to power was a consensus of universal disappointment. A majority had been traumatised by poverty and the extreme violence of the primitive accumulation of capital and now found itself disappointed by dreams of individual success and self-actualisation in the marketplace. The intelligentsia, which had counted on

occupying first place in the new enlightened reality of liberal democracy, now experienced disorientation and social dispersion. At the same time, the newly victorious elite felt insecure due to a lack of security in their newly acquired status and property. As had happened before in history, such a sense of powerlessness coupled with the disintegration of society created space for a Caesar – a figure able to 'normalise' the country through sheer force of will. This situation called not for a real hero who believed in his mission, but for an actor who was able to play the required role with a greater or lesser degree of talent. In many ways Alexander Prokhanov's novel *Mr Hexogen* provides an accurate diagnosis of the state in which the country had found itself before Putin's ascent to power. The new president, who appears only on the final pages of the book, has no face. Fighting a bitter war against each other, liberals and patriots, members of the special forces and the military, seem to almost push onto the well-lit stage of history a person without a past, without ideas, an absolute tabula rasa, onto whom everyone projects what they wish to see. Putin's many faces, coupled with his constant change of masks, each of which could equally turn out to be his true image, have accompanied the entire history of his rule. In turn, the imperial nationalist, pragmatist, supporter of liberal top-down reforms or the nostalgic heir to Andropov are on show. What distinguishes such a slippery identity by the Caesar is that it always rises above politics, the state apparatus and unofficial lobbying groups, forever remaining a pure projection of desires. This is the simple secret to the mystery of the president's unfailingly high approval ratings: people don't trust the government, the police, political parties or their neighbours, but they do believe in Putin – as one believes in one's imaginary best friend.

The figure of the absent hero serves as justification not only for the atomisation of society, but also for the state's degradation. Defining the particular political system of Putin's Russia as either class-based, neo-feudal, or – further developing Max Weber's famous category – neopatrimonial, runs as a common theme across all political analyses. The large-scale redistribution of property was followed by the privatisation of the state itself. Offices and departments as well as regions and cities were turned into collective fiefdoms of private groups, who used their position in the power vertical for rent-seeking.

While any public investigation of this system's logic proves shocking to the enlightened public (the most recent illuminating instance being the reactions to the film 'Chaika'), it still manages to successfully avoid any open war for the redistribution of power and property. Not only does Putin lend it an air of stability in his role as final arbiter who is capable of balancing the appetites of different elite groups, through his very existence he reminds these groups of their common higher calling. Vladimir Yakunin's recent comments that the Russian ruling class should turn into a 'new nobility' reflect the elite's need for a collective Weltanschauung. Every single act by civil servants operating in Putin's regime is not only motivated by cynicism and mercenary corporate interest; it also represents an underlying idea of higher justice. Putin's portrait, which hangs in every manager's office, constantly serves to convey the illusion of a large state organism, of which this very manager represents a natural component, all the while being motivated by his own passions and desires. While he may think of himself as a statist, he simultaneously destroys all remnants of rationality in state institutions with his actions.

In essence, Putinist stability always represented an interminable succession of states of emergency: terror threats, special operations, and open and hybrid wars. This extremity, and the state's constant need to 'concentrate its efforts' have long since become the norm, part of the state apparatus' usual working regime. External and internal threats, as

well as artificially created 'historic events' (the Olympic Games, summits and anniversaries), are connected to an increasing concentration of resources, which on the one hand generates ever-new possibilities for the extraction and redistribution of rent, and on the other hand creates the, albeit temporary, illusion of solidarity among the ruling elite, seemingly united over the same cause.

The large-scale historical exhibitions, which took place over the last few years in Moscow's Manege, represent the essence of Putinism's philosophy of history. The absent, phantom state aims to convince itself of its existence through continuity of form; a 'historical Russia' with a continuous existence from Prince Vladimir to Peter the Great, and from Nicholas II to Stalin.

The hollow nature of these exhibitions, which are full of billboards and video re-enactments but without a single original historical artifact, completely highlights the farcical, artificial character of Putinism as a construct that tries to dress itself in the clothing of bygone eras.

After the annexation of Crimea it became fashionable to accuse Putin of 'romanticism', exchanging the contemporary pragmatic approach to international politics with references to archaic ideas of the «holy land» and the restoration of «historic justice». It cannot be said that these constant appeals to the past are merely a propaganda manoeuvre for Putin's elite. Rather, it seems that Putin and his surroundings truly want to believe in the possibility of a 'new Yalta' which will restore the global balance of powers, or in the possibility of restoring the 'tri-union of the Russian people' (incorporating Ukrainians and Belorussians). Such a hunger to believe is the reverse side of the gaping absence of any consistent Russian strategy in the post-Soviet space. This state's facelessness and its lack of a political or economic model that could serve as a template elsewhere constantly forces it to play someone else's role – badly, and with unintelligible words to boot.

Putinism is not the organic product of a thousand years of Russian despotism in its eternalised form (though this is exactly how it wants to appear), but a tragicomedy, with a beginning, climax and end. The comic element here consists of the fact that the denouement (even if it is extended over time) will involve and reveal everything that was already contained in its beginning, albeit in an unrealised form. One after the other, guns hanging on the walls will start shooting; repressed fears will materialise; ghosts of the past will appear and self-fulfilling prophecies will come true. One could say that now, in 2015, we have fully entered the play's

final act. And if the history of the Putin era represents a farce, then it is bound to end as a tragedy. Of course, this is not because the worst is still to come. It is a tragedy in the sense of the Hegelian philosophy of history, as a striving of people who, having found faith in their own power, defy fate, thereby putting into doubt the concept of history as an ugly infinitude of defeats and disappointments.

March 14

translated by Maria Brock

LeftEast

GREECE

The Third National Conference of Antarsya

TASSOS ANASTASSIADIS ·

First the numbers: there were 900 delegates, elected on the basis of one for every three members, which means that Antarsya has almost 3,000 members in its ranks, almost as many as three years ago, and it can be said that at least 2,000 of them are really active members.

The numbers are important because we have to take into account that last summer, after the defeat of Syriza, there was a split in Antarsya, including two constituent organizations (Aran and Aras) which broke from Antarsya and joined with a split-off of Syriza to form Popular Unity (LAE). So we can say that the present conference was held just after a crisis and a defeat, insofar as Antarsya did not attract the left splits from Syriza and further, that it lost forces itself! Despite the losses of last summer, the figures show that a substantial layer of activists from the workers' and social movement is organized in Antarsya. This is apparent also in the latest poll results to be published: Popular Unity, with its former ministers and well-known leaders, is on about 2 per cent, while Antarsya, whose leaders are little known, or even unknown, is on 1.5 per cent. But what is most important is that the framework for discussion and alliance of these activists remains very united and plural, as was demonstrated by the debates of the conference!

The focus of discussion, this time, was not centred on programmatic issues as such (the European Union, the euro, the transitional programme, etc.) but rather on what could be called the question of "alliances", in other words, how to intervene in a working class and a workers' movement that has experienced a splendid defeat of the "soft" (reformist) road in the face of capitalist barbarism, but which has known neither an outflanking movement

such as "June 36" nor a comprehensive defeat, something which was demonstrated by, for example, the most recent great mobilization on February 4 - comparable to the mobilizations of 2010-2012 - but also by practical solidarity in favour of refugees.

In the congress, there was a real discussion around this question, although it also came up through various channels, around several themes, mainly those of the organized workers' movement and of addressing the various forces that were breaking from Syriza (but also from the KKE) as well as how to characterize Syriza today.

In trying to summarize the main lines of the responses that were proposed, beyond the nuances and internal differences, one could say that there were three blocs formed within the congress.

One response was formed around the NAR (an old split from the KNE - Greek Communist Youth - which is the main Greek revolutionary group) and the minority of Aran that remained in Antarsya. This component finally had an almost overwhelming majority of delegates (over 60 per cent). Its analysis describes a situation of relative retreat of the working class, with as a perspective the task of trying to revive the workers' movement, including appeals and actions with the aim of immediately outflanking the trade union bureaucracy, considered to be a treacherous apparatus and to be recognized as such by the masses. In this analysis, the question of fronts, including political ones, remains relevant, especially with currents breaking from Syriza, those which refused its capitulation, without drawing clear programmatic conclusions: this involves basically Popular Unity (LAE), which has simply added to Syriza's programme the need for a monetary break (seen, moreover, as something rather to be negotiated). But confusion remains as

to the modalities of the necessary address to these currents, to the extent that it presupposes, without admitting it clearly, programmatic adaptation, considered as necessary to the extent that these currents do not necessarily bathe in a clear or consistent anti-capitalism!

A second response was formed around the SEK (the Greek current of the International Socialist Tendency). It was shared by about a quarter of the delegates, with an argument of "workers 'united front', i.e. a systematic address to the union bureaucracies and towards the layers of radicalized militants. This response, as "classic" as it may be in general, is fraught with real problems in the current situation, not to mention a questionable analysis of the SEK on the continuous and constant rise of the working class: in fact, even if it is not theoretically false, it is not easy to consider now as "reformist" a government party like Syriza that is carrying out one of the most violent attacks against the working class. And secondly, the attacks over the last five years against the workers' movement have completely discredited, destabilized and even disorganized the trade union bureaucracy, and even more so the real base of the unions. It is to this extent just an abstract address to the workers' organizations, which if it is not aimed simply at denouncing them, risks at least sowing illusions: this is in any case the criticism of this analysis by its opponents.

The third tendency was formed by the "Initiative for a revolutionary Antarsya" around the OKDE-Spartakos (Greek section of the Fourth International). It was approved by approximately 8 per cent of the delegates. To put it clearly, the Initiative's response was to refuse any unified political approach, except coexistence in the street, and to systematically put forward anti-capitalist solutions. It seems, moreover, that most of the activists of the "Initiative" (except the members of OKDE-Spartakos) rallied around this position of revolutionary retreat precisely as a result of the lesson of the past three years during which Antarsya, as such, has lost a lot of energy by trying to adapt to political "alliances" with "radical" (and not purely

anti-capitalist) forces, under the pressure of pessimistic analyses (especially from Aran and Aras, but also from a part of the NAR), according to which the relative position of the working class, of waiting passively, contaminated by parliamentarist illusions in Syriza, required transitional stages, in particular national ones, in the overthrow of capitalism and even of austerity policies. In drawing from the negative balance sheet of this search for programmatic alliances by Antarsya radical lessons of total refusal to collaborate with anyone, the comrades of the "Initiative" are paradoxically aligned on many aspects of the analysis of the first tendency, especially regarding trade union work.

In addition to questions of "alliances" or addresses, there was another issue that sharply divided the congress (two blocs this time) and which may seem organizational but has very political implications: this is the way of taking political decisions and the method of electing leaderships. On the first point, the system of decision-making has not changed and therefore maintains the different levels of "important" decisions that require a two-thirds majority and the others with a simple majority, plus the search for consensus. On the way of electing leaderships, there was no formal change either, but the refusal of proportional representation by the majority of delegates led this time to the exclusion from the leadership, unintentionally, of the third tendency, a situation that Antarsya is trying to correct ... after the event!

This situation provides a simple demonstration of the necessity of democratic procedures, beyond formulas. In addition, it links up with another problem, that of the existence of part of the members who are not organized in any current, and who are obliged by this system of decision-making to ally with the organized currents; a way of functioning that is not very attractive, including at the level of the grassroots organizations of Antarsya. An awareness of this aspect could also help correct the present functioning of the Greek anti-capitalist left.

For what is fundamental is not the organizational questions or even the functioning of the anti-capi-

talist left. What is fundamental are the tasks and the weight of this organized force to really take forward the working class, and it is in this context that questions of functioning and unitary questions take on their true meaning. We know from experience that in several crucial cases, the activists of the anti-capitalist left have played a role of catalyst. Not only in "small" battles (in a factory, a sector of activity, or on a local level) but also in the central battles, the role of Antarsya has been crucial: for the organization of the struggle against fascism, for solidarity with immigrants and refugees, or in launching the movement for No in the referendum. But we have also seen that neither the weight of the left nor its exemplary actions have been sufficient to prevent demoralization in the face of betrayals or

political failures. Because facing us, there is a system, capitalism, whose uneven crisis continues and is combined at its weak link, which in Europe is Greece, with a crisis of war and refugees. Admittedly, lost battles are demoralizing, but they also serve to take better account of the challenges and the real difficulties. The anti-capitalist wing of the workers' movement must have a clear vision, but it is not enough to explain it verbally: we must above all translate it into levers for unitary class mobilization to win the widest possible agreement with this understanding. In this country, but also in others, to the extent that the problems and the attacks intertwine, as we see now with the refugees.

Athens, March 15, 2016

USA

The Real John Kasich

BOB FITRAKIS ·

by Bob Fitrakis

But Kasich's real loyalty has always been to the rich and powerful. In the era of the 1970 Kent State shooting, he was one of Nixon's Stepford-clone youth. His new allegiance is to his media mentor, Rupert Murdoch. In 2012, the creator of right-wing agit-prop and faux news gave \$1 million to the Republican Governor's Association to get his bloviator elected in his first election. Kasich has returned the loyalty by pledging eternal fealty to "unnatural persons" called corporations.

John Kasich.

After working for Murdoch and prior to being elected, Kasich spent his time hawking junk assets for the now-defunct Lehman Brothers investment bankers. He helped sell these worthless assets to the tune of \$500 million into Ohio's public retirement system, particularly the State Teachers' pension funds. He made untold millions, which he refused to disclose, while looting the pensions of schoolteachers and public employees.

No sooner did Kasich enter office than he attacked the public employees he had just ripped off. On March 31, 2011, Kasich signed the draconian Senate Bill 5 into law. The new law required that no salary increases could be based on seniority and it drastically limited collective bargaining for the 360,000 public union workers in Ohio. Kasich told them to "get on the bus, or get run over." The quirky governor's campaign commercials claimed he "listened." Indeed, the bus was hijacked by working people in the form of 1.3 million signatures to repeal the bill. On election night 2011, Issue 2 supporting Kasich's anti-union law failed 61%-39%.

Who Kasich really listens to is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). More than

three decades ago, this corporate front masquerading as an advocate for "limited government" and "free markets" began plotting to make the 1% richer and steal the wealth of our nation's working class. ALEC lists among its key founders Paul Weyrich, who openly advocates suppressing poor and minority voters, as well as the white supremacist, the late Senator Jesse Helms. Also on the ALEC website there's a note stating "Among those who were involved with ALEC in the formative years were... John Kasich of Ohio." ALEC, now primarily funded by the notorious Koch Brothers, provided Senate Bill 5 as its model legislation and its legislation is a manual for destroying workers' rights under the guise of "saving taxpayers money."

Attacking Workers

Under Kasich, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Ohio stood as one of the two worst economies in the nation at the end of 2013. When he took office in January 2011, Ohio ranked 26th in private sector job growth. Kasich ran hard as a "job creator" in his 2014 re-election. At the time, the U.S. Department of Labor noted that his state was 46th nationally in job creation. From January-August 2014, the Buckeye state gained a mere 5,289 jobs.

The Kasich campaign keeps reiterating that "Kasich works." The question is, for whom? Here's is what the Bureau of Labor Statistics points out about Kasich's record: At the end of 2015, so-called "temporary workers" make up 2.5% of the workforce, a 50% increase over 2009 levels. During 2015, employment rose by 4.3% among temporary workers, while Ohio's overall private sector employment grew by a mere 1.7%. Ohio's temporary workers make only \$30,785 a year compared to \$45,482 for non-temporary workers. Rumors persist that

Kasich plans to turn Ohio into a "right to work" state before leaving office.

Leaving Children Behind

Kasich's ALEC handbook includes the destruction of public education. In his first term as governor, Kasich cut more than half a billion dollars from public education in Ohio. He increased charter school funding by \$57 million, in particular, rewarding White Hat Management which runs many of Ohio's charter schools and whose owner is a big Republican donor. After announcing his run for the presidency in 2015, Kasich minimally increased school funding. At the same time, he increased tax cuts, mainly benefiting the wealthiest Ohioans. The think tank Innovation Ohio points out that four out of ten Ohio school districts have less government funding now than they did prior to the Kasich administration.

He also failed to change the unconstitutional funding formula for the state's K-12 school system. The Ohio public schools have been declared unconstitutional five times by the Republican-dominated Ohio Supreme Court because their reliance on local property taxes has created massive disparity between schools in wealthy and poor areas. Ohio ranked 5th in EdWeek's public education performance rankings before Kasich took office. The state now ranks 23rd.

Environmental Neglect and Poisoned Water

When Governor Kasich first took office, he killed a train line meant to restore passenger service between Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Kasich's reasons may have made sense in a Tea Party world. But some \$400 million had already been secured. When it died, all that money left the state, along with untold jobs and income. Hugely expensive highway projects have followed with intense environmental damage and instant obsolescence. Columbus may be the western world's largest capital city without passenger rail service.

In June 2014, Kasich signed the controversial Senate Bill 310 that froze Ohio's renewable energy

and energy efficiency standards at their present levels for two years. A report from the Ohio Advanced Energy Economy documented that between 2009 and 2013, the law Kasich overturned—the Renewable Energy Standards (RES) law—cost \$456 million to implement, but saved Ohio residents \$1.03 billion. Since RES was implemented, more than \$1 billion had been invested in Ohio by private renewable energy companies, some who now say they will move out of the state. Six weeks prior to Kasich signing S.B. 310, oil magnate David Koch donated \$12,155 to Kasich's re-election campaign, the maximum allowed under law.

On people's right to clean water, Kasich has been a complete failure. Not only has he allowed the people of Toledo to be afflicted by toxic water, he has also permitted radioactive fracking water to be dumped in our state from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. And the city of Sebring, Ohio is now afflicted with lead, much like Flint, Michigan, with the same slow response from state environmental regulators. In one of the most cynical moves imaginable, when it was discovered that the fracking water being shipped into Ohio from Pennsylvania and West Virginia had high rates of radioactivity, Kasich assigned the rangers of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to solve the problem, relieving the more competent Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and Ohio Health Department of duty. These were the agencies that uncovered the radioactivity. And following in the footsteps of his original mentor Nixon, Kasich developed a fracktivist "enemies list" targeting environmentalists for harassment.

Slashing Women's Health

While Kasich's commercials made him sound like the next best thing to feminist Betty Friedan, the June 2014 *Cosmopolitan* magazine ran an article entitled: "How Ohio Became One of the Worst States for Reproductive Rights in the Country." It is like a time machine taking us back to the 1950s. He supported a gag order on rape crisis counselors on talking about abortion and the "heartbeat bill" banning abortions on pregnancies over 20 weeks.

Because of Kasich's and the state legislature's new laws, abortion clinics all over the state are closing.

Ohioans protest Kasich's attacks on women and education.

Kasich defunded Planned Parenthood in Ohio by signing House Bill 294 in February 2016, cutting funds for programs that delivered critical preventive care services like contraception, sex education, cancer screenings, HIV/AIDS testing and abortion. In January 2015, Kasich came out strongly against parental leave, stating that paid leave hurts "equal pay." Regarding women's income and employment rates, the Institute for Women's Policy Research ranked the Buckeye State a mediocre 33rd out of 50 states in 2014 in economic opportunities for women.

Opposing Marriage Equality

On marriage equality, Kasich is a hater. He fought alongside Ohio Attorney General Michael DeWine to overturn federal rulings supportive of same-sex marriage in Ohio. One would think the ambitious Kasich would at least adopt the decade-old 2004 George W. Bush strategy of supporting "civil unions." He briefly embraced the position in 2013, before his spokesperson stepped to clarify things—that Kasich didn't really understand what civil unions meant, and the governor would not support any recognition of any same-sex relationships.

In his last year in Congress in 2001, the Human Rights Campaign gave Kasich a 10% out of 100% rating for supporting equality for LGBT people. Kasich still clings to Issue 1 from 2004, telling the Columbus Dispatch that "marriage is between a man and a woman" (even if he occasionally invites a four-way with the Koch brothers).

Tax Cuts and Service Cuts

Kasich decided to balance the state budget on the back of local governments. He not only stripped half a billion from schools, but has decreased funding intended for cities, townships, and counties. One of his techniques was ending the Ohio inheritance tax. The bulk of the proceeds from the inheri-

tance tax went to counties and municipalities. The tax was progressive in nature, falling heaviest on the 1% (wealthiest people in the state).

Kasich's much-touted state income tax cut benefited his rich friends as well. The 21% decrease, to be fair, started under Governor Bob Taft, but the net effect embraced by Kasich was that very few of the tax savings were passed on to working and middle class Ohioans. If you made \$40,000 a year, you paid \$72.88 less in state tax under Kasich. If you made \$206,250 a year, you'd pay \$977.63 less. If you were one of Kasich's millionaire donors you would have saved thousands of dollars a year. Kasich has announced his goal to totally eliminate Ohio's income tax by 2016. He plans to use the money in Ohio's nearly \$2 billion "rainy day fund" for a sound bite about how he'll eliminate the income tax in Ohio as he runs for president.

Ohioans will be further plagued by unconstitutional schools, vicious prisons, declining public services, deteriorating roads, bridges, and sewage treatment facilities—public services formerly funded by the state income and inheritance taxes. Budget analysts predict that Kasich's defunding of public education and his inheritance and income tax cuts will raise property taxes by 12.5% to continue to fund schools. Meanwhile, Kasich eliminated a homestead property tax exemption, thereby cutting funds to thousands of seniors and disabled Ohioans. Seniors on fixed incomes will be hit the hardest.

In a cynical and shocking move, Kasich rejected a federal waiver in 2013 and instead reinstated Dickensian work requirements for the poor. With a bad economy, the federal government was allowing Ohio not to require hundreds of thousands of welfare recipients to report for make-work jobs. Social welfare agencies pointed out that it would cost more to pay staff to supervise the workers than the value of their work. The Columbus Dispatch quoted Marilyn J. Tomasi, Vice President of the Mid-Ohio Food Bank, as stating, "What happened is the state rejected the waiver. 134,000 Ohioans showed up at food pantries."

Rigging the Vote

In a state where Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are fairly evenly divided, Kasich and his Republican cohorts gerrymandered the Congressional districts to give 12 out of the 16 Congressional seats to Republicans and make sure that the seats are non-competitive. Kasich also tried to eliminate his own competition in 2014. Federal court records document that Kasich's office directed the removal of the Libertarian Party from the ballot in Ohio prior to his run for re-election. On the day when Libertarian gubernatorial candidate Charlie Earl announced his campaign and was showing 6% in the polls, Kasich and his Republicans partisans in the legislature set out to destroy the third party.

First they outlawed the party, but a federal court blocked their attempt. Using Republican political operative Terry Casey, the governor then orchestrated a challenge to signatures on the Libertarian Party candidates' petitions. The Libertarians sued. Then Kasich had his lackey, Jon Husted, appoint well-known Republican partisan Brad Smith as the supposedly neutral arbitrator in the case. Smith was the intellectual force behind the infamous "Cit-

izens United" decision that proclaimed corporations are people and donations to candidates are the same as free speech. Kasich was successful in keeping a Libertarian opponent off the ballot and made the state even more repressive toward minor parties, other points of view, and democracy.

Prisons for Profit

One of Kasich's original budgetary plans was to further privatize Ohio's prisons. He didn't succeed with that plan, but did save the state money by hiring Aramark for prison food service, a company that is famous for serving prisoners maggots. A recent demonstration by prison workers and unions was prompted by budget cuts to prison security staff. The Ohio Civil Service Employees Association called our prisons "violently dangerous" for prison workers. Under Kasich, the prison population has risen, causing overcrowding and dangerous conditions for both prisoners and prison staff.

Of course, Ohioans could not have asked Kasich about any of these issues, since he refused to debate his opponents. But now that he is running for president in 2016, he's become Mr. Congeniality, ready and willing to debate and to hug it out.

March 23, 2016

Statement of Purpose for the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists

Almost half a million people, mostly Sunni Arab Syrians, have been killed mainly by the Assad regime. The population faces a situation that is worsening daily. Russian air raids, Hizbullah and Iranian supported ground forces as well as the December 18, 2015 United Nations Security Council Resolution backed by the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain have all given new life to the Assad Regime.

At the same time, the Saudi monarchy and the Iranian regime are intensifying their competition for control over the region by fanning the flames of religious sectarianism. The Turkish government has in turn intensified its attacks on and repression of the Kurds in Turkey and northern Syria and also plays a role in promoting religious sectarianism in the region. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has praised Hitler's "presidential system" as a model of "efficiency."

The Syrian refugee crisis, with over 8 million refugees inside and over 4 million refugees outside Syria has become a much larger version of the Palestinian al-Nakba. The European Union is setting refugee quotas, closing its gates and implementing an agreement with Turkey based on which Turkey would take more refugees in exchange for 3 billion Euros and a possible future membership in the European Union. This is clearly not a solution. Neither Turkey nor any other country in the Middle East region is willing to admit over 12 million refugees and give them the possibility of a decent life.

As Syrian and Iranian socialists, we call on you to join us in taking a stand against this inhumanity

and for finding real solutions:

First, we refuse to accept the myth that the Assad regime is the lesser of the two evils and that stabilizing it will end the war in Syria or stop the rise of ISIS and other Jihadists. On the contrary, the Assad regime is responsible for the majority of the deaths which are now estimated at half a million. This regime's destruction of the democratic forces embodied in the Syrian revolution has created a fertile ground for the rise of ISIS and other Salafist-Jihadist groups.

Secondly, given the fact that both the Assad regime and ISIS are capitalist, racist, misogynist governments, no viable alternative to them can be shaped without tackling the class/ethnic/religious divisions and gender discrimination that are present in the Middle East.

Thirdly, while we insist on upholding a principled position of support for the Kurdish national liberation movement and its struggle for self-determination in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, we think it is also necessary to challenge many of those on the left who separate the struggle for self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria from the dynamics of the Syrian revolution. It was the 2011 Syrian revolution that made it possible for the autonomous cantons in Rojava to come into existence. Without a Syrian revolution there can be no democratic Rojava. The latest evidence of the coordination and collaboration between the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian regime and the Russian air force is alarming and does not bode well for the Kurds. The liberation and emancipation of the Kurdish people is linked to the liberation and emancipation of the people of the region.

It is time for Syrian and Iranian socialists to work together to challenge class, gender, ethnic and religious prejudices and speak to the struggles of women, workers, oppressed nationalities such as Kurds and Palestinians, oppressed ethnic and religious minorities, and sexual minorities. It is time for us to restate socialism as a concept of human emancipation not only opposed to the regional and global capitalist-imperialist powers but also as an affirmative vision distinguished from the totalitarian regimes that called themselves Communist in the former Stalinist Soviet Union and Maoist China.

Toward that aim we are asking you to join us by collaborating with the forthcoming trilingual (Arabic, Persian, English) website of the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists. Our goal is to promote solidarity between Syrian and Iranian socialists on the basis of addressing some very specific questions, both through articles and through joint activities such as conferences. Questions such as the following:

How can we challenge Shia and Sunni prejudices that promote hatred in the region?

What will happen in Syria if Iranian and Russian support for the Assad regime end?

How will Syrian and Iranian socialists answer the criticisms/concerns of Kurds and other nationalities who want self-determination?

Do Syrian and Iranian socialists think that federalism can be an initial solution?

What is your vision of social justice when it comes to class and gender struggles?

What does socialism mean to you and how do you distinguish your concept of socialism from the totalitarian regimes that existed in the Stalinist Soviet Union and Maoist China?

What appropriate joint actions of Syrian and Iranian socialists would you suggest in order to help us express our opposition to the Assad regime

as well as ISIS and other jihadist organizations, and engage in solidarity with the Syrian democratic opposition?

If you would like to participate in this effort, please contact us.

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SyriaFreedomforever

March 15, 2016

Persian Version

Arabic Version

MEXICO

The San Andrés Accords—Twenty Years Later

DAN LA BOTZ ·

The Chiapas Uprising of 1994, led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), brought about, after a brief period of military conflict, negotiations between the Mexican government and Zapatistas. The government created the Commission for Peace and Pacification (Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación – COCOPA, made up of senators and representatives, to negotiate with the EZLN. The Zapatistas, based in the historically Mayan region of Chiapas, insisted that the negotiation involve not only themselves, but also representatives of indigenous people from all over Mexico as well as experts from civil society, largely university professors and social movement activists. After weeks of negotiation, both sides agreed on a document that recognized the indigenous people and their rights and granted the indigenous considerable autonomy. The accords were signed on February 16, 1996 with the presumption that, the government having signed them, they would become law.

However, when the Accords reached the Mexican legislature they were modified, changing the language in ways that weakened the rights and the autonomy of the indigenous. The Mexican Congress passed the Bartlett-Cevallos Law—named after the senators of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN) who had written it—with the votes as well of the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The Zapatistas consequently repudiated the new law and broke off any relations with the govern-

ment and have since then refused to support any of the country's political parties.

The Accords and the Bartlett-Cevallos law did contribute to the eventual passage of Article 2 of the Constitution, adopted in 2001, that established indigenous rights. While the Bartlett-Cevallos law did contain language that has been used by lawyers to defend the interests of indigenous communities, it by no means recognized the indigenous, their rights, and their autonomy in the way that the Accords had.

R. Aida Hernández Castillo, a researcher at the Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), who was one of the civil society participants in negotiating the Accords, argues that the situation of the indigenous people is worse today than it was then in two ways in particular. First, there is a new capitalist offensive aimed at appropriating the land and resources of the indigenous. Second, legal reforms have led to the criminalization of social protest. She writes:

"The indigenous people through their organizations have resisted the privatization and the commercialization of their resources, based on epistemologies and visions of the world that challenge the utilitarian and individualist capitalist outlook. It is because of this resistance that those in power have described them as being 'backward and anti-progress' and in the worst of cases as terrorists and violent. Their territories are being violated by the transnational mining company, by energy mega-projects, by the drug war, and by hydroelectric projects, often leading to displacements that leave their land 'free' for capital." Hernández also argues that one will find a coincidence between the places where the drug war is being fought and the loss of indigenous territory.

So today, twenty years later, the Zapatistas and the many indigenous groups in Mexico—150 different peoples and indigenous barrios and 50 communities of indigenous residents—continue to fight for

recognition, rights, and autonomy throughout the country.

February 19, 2016

New Politics

SYRIA

Syria, and the So-Called Russian Military "Withdrawal"

In the town of Maaret al-Numan, near the city of Idlib, protesters continue to oppose the authoritarian practices of Jabhat al-Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria). Demonstrators also stormed and burned Jabhat Al-Nusra's offices in the city and demanded the release of democratic activists and members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) imprisoned by Jabhat Al-Nusra. The regions around the town have shown their solidarity with revolutionaries of Ma'aret al-Numan and their opposition to Jabhat Al-Nusra.

Russian military withdrawal?

The announcement of the withdrawal of the main Russian military forces in Syria by President Putin on March 14 has not yet prevented the continuation of the bombing campaign by Moscow's military air forces in several regions of the country, in particular to support the army of the Assad regime, and the maintenance of Russian troops in some military bases. Hmeymim Air Base, southeast of the city of Latakia, for example continues to be used by the Russian air force as well as the naval base of Tartus. Putin has promised to protect these bases from land, sea and air. Russian helicopters, armor, long-range rocket batteries and most of the estimated 5,000 Russian personnel also appear to have remained in Syria. Russia is also leaving behind its most advanced S-400 air defense system and Putin declared that Moscow would not hesitate to shoot down "any target" which violated Syrian air space.

The Russian military withdrawal remains therefore very partial and should be highly nuanced. Besides Russian President Putin said on March 17 that

Moscow could scale up its military presence in Syria again within hours and would still bomb "terrorist groups". He added that Russia would also continue to strengthen the Syrian army with weapons, training and operational guidance.

Russian bombing has also killed 55 Syrian civilians, including 13 children, on the weekend of 19 and 20 March in the city Raqqa and its outskirts. Moscow also supports Assad regime's army in its current offensive to take back the city of Palmyra occupied by Daech. Lieutenant General Sergei Rudskoi said Russian aircraft based in Syria were still conducting 20-25 sorties a day in support of the Palmyra offensive.

The announcement of Russian military withdrawal came mainly as a diplomatic gesture before the new round of "peace negotiations," which resumed in Geneva in mid-March with the participation of representatives of the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition of the Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (known as the Etilaf in arabic) dominated by right wing, liberal forces and the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. The main Kurdish force in Syria, the PYD, was not invited to these new rounds of negotiations because of the Turkish government's opposition that holds the organization as a "terrorist" group. Harsh skepticism around the negotiations is nevertheless the rule. The representatives of the Assad regime have for example submitted a document to the United Nation's mediator Staffan de Mistura as a basis for discussion of a political solution in which the official propaganda of the regime is repeated. You can actually find within this document the necessity of maintaining the secular nature of the state (while it is far from being the case currently or in the past

under the Assad regime), maintaining Syria's territorial integrity and the importance of fighting terrorism, but it said nothing about a political transition. Previously, the Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem had actually said that the Presidency was a red line and that this issue was not subject to discussion.

Establishment of the "federal democratic system of Rojava — Northern Syria"

On March 17, 2016, the "federal democratic system of Rojava – Northern Syria" in areas controlled by the PYD in the north of the country was established officially. Following a meeting of more than 150 representatives of Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian parties in the city Rmeilane in north-eastern Syria, participants voted in favour of the union of three "cantons" in majority populated by Kurdish people (Afrin, Kobanî, Jazireh). The Assad regime and the Syrian National Coalition have both stated their opposition to this announcement, while Washington, despite its support for the PYD, and Turkey have both declared they would not recognize this federal entity. The Syrian Foreign Ministry said that "the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic warns anyone tempted to undermine the unity of the land and the people of Syria," and adding that "Any such announcement has no legal value and will not have any legal, political, social or economic impact as long as it does not reflect the will of the entire Syrian people". The Syrian National Coalition called the PYD initiative as "illegitimate" and "unacceptable". 69 armed groups, including the Army of Islam, Islamist and FSA forces, also signed a statement opposing the Kurdish federalist project dominated by the PYD.

The demand for a federal system in Syria is a demand of the near quasi majority of Kurdish parties in the country, but other Kurdish parties gathered around the Kurdish National Congress have opposed this announcement because it has to be established, according to them, following discussions and explanations with actors of the Syrian Arab opposition, whom for a large majority see it as a step towards separatism and division as we have seen

on many placards in demonstrations on Friday, March 18. In addition to this, the policies of the PYD towards the Assad regime, which includes maintaining communication channels open since the uprising began in 2011, cohabiting with regime forces in the cities of Qamishli and Hassake, (despite occasional confrontations as recently when the YPG, PYD military force, has arrested more than 60 members of the Assad regime security services in Qamishli) and numerous abuses and violations of Human Rights against Syrian Arab civilians in areas dominated by the military forces of PYD, raise suspicions and opposition of a part of the Arab population of Syria.

We also have to understand that the demand for a federal system by the Syrian Kurdish political parties is rooted in decades of state oppression on a national basis (policies of colonization in the framework of the "Arab belt" and cultural repression) and on socio-economic as well. The most impoverished areas of the country were the areas mostly populated by Kurds such as in the Jazireh. The Jazireh is the region with the highest level of poverty, hosting 58% of the country's poor population before the occurrence of the 2004 drought, and illiteracy rate. In 2010, poverty increased considerably reaching 80 per cent of the Jazireh inhabitants according to the de Shutter report. In addition to this, the Jazireh region for example produced two thirds of the country cereals (70 percent of wheat) and three quarters of its hydrocarbons. The industrial underdevelopment of the Jazireh, industrial installations were scarce in the region, comprising only 7% of the overall sector, was nevertheless important, for example 69 per cent of Syrian cotton was produced in the region, but only 10 per cent of cotton threads were spun there. Of course all the populations, Arabs, Assyrians, and Kurds, of the regions suffered from the State lack of service and poverty.

That said, I believe we must provide unconditional support to the self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere, without meaning being uncritical of the policies of the leadership of the

PYD or any other Kurdish political party, while stating very clearly that it is the unity of the Syrian people, including Arabs and Kurds, on the basis of a democratic and inclusive program that will allow their liberation and emancipation against the counter-revolutionary forces of the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces.

The international solidarity of democratic and progressive organizations around the world, which is still lacking to the Syrian people in struggle for freedom and dignity, is absolutely necessary and must be intensified.

22 March 2016

Peace News

BELGIUM

On the Brussels attacks

LCR-SAP ·

The LCR-SAP also calls for greater democratic vigilance in the face of the new war-mongering, racist and Islamophobic security drive that these terrible events are likely to encourage, in Belgium and beyond, on the part of politicians and the mainstream media. Just days after the cries of triumph from the authorities following the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, after the shameful European agreement to turn back the refugees, after another deadly attack in Istanbul and a Russian bombardment of Raqqa in Syria, which left dozens of civilians dead, we can see once again that we do not fight terror by bombing the Syrian people, supporting dictatorial regimes, putting the army on the streets, stigmatizing a community (with racist

measures such as deprivation of nationality), by throwing refugees into the sea and limiting democratic freedoms. And that on the contrary, these policies of terror only fuel terrorist organizations and correspond perfectly to their goal, which is to deepen sectarian hatred and to suffocate society.

We reiterate our conviction that nothing will protect us as long as our society is based on injustice, violence and exclusion, at home and abroad.

In these tragic circumstances, the LCR intends to honour the victims by advocating a radical shift towards a generous social policy, based on solidarity, democratic freedoms and the fight against inequality in this country and in the world. It is with life that we combat a policy of death

GREECE

When will workers start the next act in Greece?

ANTONIS DAVANELLOS ·

Antonis Davanellos is a leading member of the Internationalist Workers Left (DEA, by its initials in Greek) and the Red Network, which are both part of Popular Unity. In this article, first published in DEA's press, then in French at the A l'encontre website, and translated here by Todd Chretien, analyzes the escalating antagonisms, inside and outside the government.

Greece's Council of Political Leaders was convened on March 4 by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras who heads a Greek government determined to apply every deadly austerity demand made by the international institutions—known as the Troika—along with the core of Greek capital.

However, Tsipras may face an internal crisis within his executive leadership at the end of March when a whole collection of laws is rolled out, including social security reform, a new employment law, regressive taxes, and so on.

The Council brought together representatives of all the parliamentary parties under the chairmanship of Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos, a member of the conservative New Democracy (ND). More

than a year ago, Pavlopoulos was elected president of the Greek republic by a parliament controlled by SYRIZA, with only a single dissenting vote cast against him—that of Ionna Gaïtani, then a member of SYRIZA and of DEA. The significance of Pavlopoulos' appointment was confirmed by the evolution of the SYRIZA leadership and of its governing apparatus.

A meeting of the Council of Political Leaders is usually convened to deal with particularly important

matters. Officially, the agenda will take up the refugee crisis. In reality, everyone knows that the real object of discussion was the attempt to come to a consensus about much more among key players.

There are many predictions being made that the government could seek to enlarge its parliamentary base beyond SYRIZA and ANEL [the Independent Greeks, according to its initials in Greek, a right-wing party that has been part of the governing coalition with SYRIZA since it took office in January 2015]—an expansion that could take the form of a government of national unity [including the participation of ND, a former ruling party] if there is a sense that the political situation might lead to a loss of control.

Only a few months after his triumphant showing in the September 2015 elections, Tsipras was forced to turn to the defeated parties to ask for their help. In this way, he is being forced to admit that he cannot overcome Greece's deep social and political crisis.

The government's credibility and its composition are disintegrating at an accelerated rate as it faces a two-pronged dilemma.

On the one hand, the government is encountering difficulties in implementing the third Memorandum [a package of austerity measures demanded by the creditors that the SYRIZA government accepted last year].

On the other, it is faced with the refugee crisis as well as conflicts in its relations with NATO, Turkey and within its own army that it is incapable of responding to in even a minimally satisfactory manner. Instead, the government is organizing camps for the refugees, as far from urban centers as possi-

ble, surrounded and guarded by the army and other forces. All this to prepare for tourist season—which is a very important part of the Greek economy—in May!

But for the many solidarity actions carried out by the public, which has substituted itself for the failure of responsible institutions to act, the refugees would find themselves in even more dire conditions. This concrete solidarity has created an obstacle to any attempt by the Nazis of Golden Dawn to exploit the crisis. Golden Dawn's presence has only been notable in the north of Greece, where it finds a hearing around the "Macedonian Question"—that is, where nationalism is historically the sharpest.

The first test that confronted Tsipras since the mutilation of SYRIZA with the signing of the July 13, 2015, agreement with the creditors, was the obligation to apply the savage counter-reforms to the social security system. The main effect of these cuts, put forward by Minister of Labor Georgios Katrougalos, would result in the final disintegration of the public social security system, and, therefore, lay the basis for the entry of private firms into the pension and health care sectors.

These proposals provoked large demonstrations from farmers and some of the liberal professions, which were quite evidently meant to be the measure's first victims. The government has tried—and they are extremely anxious about this—to avoid mobilizations by workers, especially in the wake of the very successful February 4 general strike, promising that workers' pensions will not be touched. Everyone knows this promise is bogus.

For the moment, we are in between such mobilizations. The leaders of the farmers and liberal professionals relented after receiving promises of dialogue from Tsipras.

Here, the position of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) plays a very important role. The party voted in favor of the general strike inside the unions, but proposed moving it to a later date. This gave the government time to maneuver in order to prepare for the end of March deadlines.

The role that the KKE played in the farmers' disputes was worse. It accepted Tsipras' offer to participate in the dialogue and proposed halting the mobilizations in order to wait for his response...later. Once again, this shows why we believe that each political force in Greece must be judged by its actions, not its statements.

Be that as it may, everyone knows that the "intermission" between struggles will be brief. The government must present its social security law by the end of March or the beginning of April at the latest. And from that moment on, it will have to confront, once again, a generalized mobilization.

The worst problem facing Tsipras is that the creditors are asking for more and more cuts as the European economic crisis intensifies. The Troika is demanding further pension reductions—it actually characterizes them as "too generous"—while the IMF says the condition of its continued participation in the "aid program" for Greece is additional measures equivalent to cuts of 7.5 to 9 billion euros, including cuts in the already miserable minimum wage!

It will be very difficult for the SYRIZA government—despite all the contradictions between its rhetoric and actual policies—to carry out such measures.

Today in Greece, we are witnessing a truth that the anti-capitalist left knows well, or at least ought to know well: A government that is willing to retreat on economic questions and that turns to the right in terms of its class orientation is a government that will retreat on all fronts.

The policies of the Tsipras government regarding the refugees backpedal in the face of racism, even as the refugees continue to drown in the Aegean Sea. Those who manage to reach dry land in Greece are detained in miserable conditions that have only worsened after the decision of Balkan countries to shut their borders, thus closing the "Balkan corridor" to European Union nations.

In these circumstances, Tsipras invited NATO to launch naval operations to intercept refugees in Turkish waters and send them back to Turkey, where some 3 million people are already crowded.

The presence of the NATO armada in the Aegean complicates the refugee crisis since there is, as a result of the war in Syria, already a Russian naval force in the southeastern Mediterranean Sea. The armada also increases antagonism between Turkey and Greece over who will dominate in this area with so many islands, as well as raising tensions over gas and oil resources. Today, anti-racism is intimately related to antiwar and anti-imperialist struggles.

The Tsipras government cannot effectively manage these combined problems. Thus, a deep political crisis has reopened, a crisis that could lead to a National Unity government. Or the situation could unravel further and force new elections.

Popular Unity (PU) is trying to respond to these conditions. PU was defeated in the September elections, narrowly missing the 3 percent threshold required to win seats in parliament with its 2.82 percent of the vote. However, it did succeed in bringing together many of the militants who left SYRIZA and grouped them together in local organizations throughout the country. These are militant forces that are experienced in organizing struggle. It is a reality that nobody can deny.

Internationalist Workers Left (DEA) organizes within Popular Unity. In preparation for the party's founding conference, most likely in May of this year, we are participating in a discussion and debate about achieving a truly radical anti-capitalist policy. We are also campaigning for a democratic constitution and functioning of the party, as well as enlarging its membership.

Currently, the Red Network, in alliance with DEA, is organizing discussions throughout the country. In these events, we defend the need to unite the entire radical anti-capitalist left around Popular Unity, from ANTARSYA (the Front of the Greek Anti-Capitalist Left) to those radical groups that quit SYRIZA, but have not yet joined PU.

We are discussing the need for a transitional program of radical reforms to confront the EU and the necessity of putting forward, linked closely to current struggles, a socialist perspective for the radical left. This perspective must get to the roots of the social needs felt by the majority of the population.

At the same time, we are aware that we do not have the luxury of time. Events in Greece are, most likely, once again moving in the direction of a great social and political crisis.

March 21, 2016

Socialist Worker

Translated from Greek into French by Sotiris Siamandouras at the A l'encontre website, and translated into English by Todd Chretien

USA

Making Race Disappear

MALIK MIAH ·

Many black intellectuals, academics and activists of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) have echoed Alexander's amazement at Hillary Clinton's Black support. "Establishment" African-American "leaders" are mainly backing Clinton and highly critical of the "democratic socialist" Bernie Sanders for challenging her in the 2016 presidential campaign. They say his calls for a "political revolution" are unrealistic and a fantasy.

Some BLM activists have joined the #feeltheBern campaign because of his self-proclaimed radicalism on class issues. Sanders has focused his effort on denouncing income inequality, making the one percent pay more in taxes and demanding that big Wall Street banks be broken up.

His program embodies a liberal view that "lifting all boats" (except the one percent) will resolve the root cause of the race issue, since income inequality hits African Americans hardest. Although improving his stand since the campaign began, Sanders clearly does not see the social issues of racism and extra-legal police violence and murder as central to his election campaign.

In a biting commentary "Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve the Black Vote," Michelle Alexander points to a perspective that goes even beyond Bernie Sanders' position:

"Of course, the idea of building a new political party terrifies most progressives, who understandably fear that it would open the door for a right-wing extremist to get elected. So we play the game of lesser evils. This game has gone on for decades. W.E.B. Du Bois, the eminent scholar and co-founder of the NAACP, shocked many when he refused to play

along with this game in the 1956 election, defending his refusal to vote on the grounds that "there is but one evil party with two names, and it will be elected despite all I do or say." . . . After decades of getting played, the sleeping giant just might wake up, stretch its limbs, and tell both parties: Game over. Move aside. It's time to reshuffle this deck."
[1]

Race and Class

The burial of race into class is as old as the socialist and radical syndicalist movements in the United States and internationally. Many socialists once claimed that the nationalism of the colonial and oppressed peoples could only be resolved by working class revolutions, and that all nationalisms were reactionary. (Lenin and the Bolsheviks, correctly, explained that the nationalism of the oppressed could have a revolutionary dynamic and that their struggles must be supported.)

Improving the conditions of workers does not automatically or eventually eliminate racism and racial divisions. "Disappearing" race becomes a way to evade the false consciousness of white workers regarding race and racism. It is easy to confront class issues, but becomes very emotional and personal when dealing with racial tensions.

It is not a surprise to me that Sanders rejected the criticisms made by Ta-Nehisi Coates, national correspondent of *The Atlantic* magazine, of his refusal to take a positive stand on reparations for Black slavery. Responding to the argument that Clinton doesn't support reparations either, Coates explained ("Bernie Sanders and the Liberal Imagination," January 24 issue):

"Hillary Clinton has no interest in being labeled radical, left-wing, or even liberal. Thus announcing that Clinton doesn't support reparations is akin to announcing that Ted Cruz doesn't support a woman's right to choose. The position is certainly wrong. But it is hardly a surprise, and doesn't run counter to the candidate's chosen name."

"There is no need to be theoretical about this," Coates continues.

"Across Europe, the kind of robust welfare state Sanders supports — higher minimum wage, single-payer health-care, low-cost higher education — has been embraced. Have these policies vanquished racism? Or has race become another rubric for asserting who should benefit from the state's largesse and who should not? And if class-based policy alone is insufficient to banish racism in Europe, why would it prove to be sufficient in a country founded on white supremacy? And if it is not sufficient, what does it mean that even on the left wing of the Democratic party, the consideration of radical, directly anti-racist solutions have disappeared?"

Black Skin Always Targeted

Race is interwoven in U.S. history and our current reality. It isn't a sidebar. It impacts everything, and class struggle without an understanding of its connection to race will never lead to a successful political or social revolution in the United States, Europe or elsewhere in the world.

Eugene Robinson, an African-American columnist for The Washington Post, made this same point about race when writing about the white armed occupiers of public property in Oregon: "What do you think the response would be if a bunch of black people, filled with rage and armed to the teeth, took over a federal government installation and defied officials to kick them out? I'm pretty sure it wouldn't be wait-and-see.

"Probably more like point-and-shoot." (January 4, 2016)

African Americans are 13% of the population but nearly 60% of all males incarcerated in prisons (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Legally sanctioned violence by cops against unarmed Blacks is carried out across the country daily. Black unemployment is double the national average, no matter the health of the economy.

Why is this? It is clearly not simply a class question.

The first Black president, who declines to talk about race, knows this. He also advocates a classic liberal position: helping everyone will help poor Blacks too. The reality is different: Blacks making six figures a year tend to live in the kind of neighborhoods that whites live in who make much less.

Facts show that only some Blacks benefit, which is okay for a majority of whites — so long as those educated, upper income African Americans don't talk about historical racism and the need to do something about it today.

W.E.B. Du Bois in his famous 1903 essay "The Talented Tenth" explained the responsibilities of the educated Black middle class of the time to help lift up the community as a whole. As a leading Black intellectual, civil rights fighter and founding member of the NAACP, Du Bois firmly believed it was the obligation of educated and better off Africans Americans to be involved in struggles for freedom and full equality.

In the 1960s and 1970s, after the victory over Jim Crow in the South, the debate sharpened over the role of the new middle class and Black intellectuals in the fight for full equality. Was it enough to become elected officials in the Democratic Party and get jobs in formerly all-white institutions now that legal rights were won?

Martin Luther King Jr., like Du Bois before him, pushed the educated to fight for the poorest in the community. Legal equality was not economic equality. His assassination in 1968 cut short his Poor Peoples' Campaign that focused on affirmative action for African Americans and economic advancement for all working class people.

The far left of the Black liberation movement (Black Power advocates) pushed for revolution against the status quo and state power. The revolutionary wing was crushed by the government and its police. The assimilationist wing of the civil rights leadership won as the Black Elected Officials, most from the movement, pushed the traditional organizations off center stage. Left out in the cold are the working class and those permanently underemployed, homeless and without representation.

Class Divisions Deeper

Today that same class divide in the Black communities is stronger than ever. The Talented Tenth has increased its wealth. But the class stratifications have grown even larger. The Black working poor are much poorer.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University discussed this division in the February 1 issue of *The New York Times*, "Black America and the Class Divide:"

"The Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson calls the remarkable gains in black income 'the most significant change' since Dr. King's passing. When adjusted for inflation to 2014 dollars, the percentage of African-Americans making at least \$75,000 more than doubled from 1970 to 2014, to 21 percent. Those making \$100,000 or more nearly quadrupled, to 13 percent (in contrast, white Americans saw a less impressive increase, from 11 to 26 percent). Du Bois's 'talented 10th' has become the 'prosperous 13 percent.'"

But, Dr. Wilson is quick to note, the percentage of Black America with income below \$15,000 declined by only four percentage points, to 22 percent.

"In other words, there are really two nations within Black America. The problem of income inequality, Dr. Wilson concludes, is not between Black America and White America but between black haves and have-nots, something we don't often discuss in public in an era dominated by a narrative of fear and failure and the claim that racism impacts 42 million people in all the same ways."

The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement reflects a new generation of young Black women and men taking up the banner first raised by African Americans of earlier activist generations. They are not fighting simply for themselves but all Black people. It is not about symbols such as the Confederate flags, but real structural racism.

Centrality of Race

The debate between Hillary Clinton's corporate "liberalism" and Bernie Sanders' "radical" democratic socialism misses the underlying racial issues in U.S. society. It is not an accident that the Republican presidential candidates appeal to the white working class who believe that Blacks and immigrants have taken what they believe is theirs. "Take Back Our Country" and "Make America Great Again" is about white supremacy.

In the heyday of industrial unionism in the 1930s and 1940s, in most unions racism was not considered a class issue. Segregated locals in the South, and a hands off policy for the most part towards the civil rights battles, largely prevailed until the 1960s.

The great gains white workers won under the New Deal in the 1930s and later in the 1950s, including buying homes, largely excluded Blacks. Banks would not lend to qualified Blacks, or gave them exploitative loans. Redlining was common in every urban city. Realtors enforced the blacklisting of African Americans.

Race is crucial to understanding politics, laws and economics. It affects all classes — the working class the most. It impacts housing, education and employment. It is a matter of life and death, as every person of color knows when confronting police.

Black lives are discounted in the eyes of whites and official arms of the state. It is not conspiracy theory to say this. It is hard fact.

Black Women Leadership

What's especially powerful in today's new generation of Black activism is the disproportionate num-

ber of women leading the fight — on college campuses, in the streets and in all spheres of the movement. They are articulate, educated and don't accept that being relatively privileged and better off than their brothers and sisters in the community makes them more like whites than not. It is a breath of fresh air.

The disappearance and subordination of race in liberal politics is why so many young African Americans are less than excited by either Clinton or Sanders.

The activists joining the Sanders campaign see it as a way to bring race and fight against racism into the class debate, to push forward a political and social revolution. The Sanders campaign, however, cannot substitute for a strong BLM movement effort.

The reality of racial and national oppression is a daily grind. Antiracist change comes through struggle, not elections.

Against the Current

CATALONIA

"Municipalism of change" and metro workers

OSCAR BLANCO ·

Media and public attention was drawn at this time by the coincidence of the strikes with the Mobile World Congress, but this is a conflict that has dragged on for months, within a struggle in TMB which has been going on for years. It concerns the negotiation of the agreement in Ferrocarrils Metropolitans de Barcelona, the public company that manages the Metro (while Transports de Barcelona manages buses), mainly concerning the ending of the four year wage freeze and the conversion of 600 temporary work posts in the company into permanent jobs.

As a symptom of how negotiations have become bogged down, workers reported that management was not present at a number of meetings and had not made any written proposal. In this context, in January, the General Meeting of employees convened a partial strike on February 2 and 24 hour strikes for two days during the MWC. The municipality, following the advice of "people with political experience", as Ada Colau put it, had not been involved in the conflict. However, the company works council and the metro unions had appealed publicly on several occasions to the government team to intervene.

Intervention of the municipality

Colau intervened in the public debate on the conflict in an unfortunate manner, as she herself recognized and subsequently rectified, asking the workers to withdraw the strike plan so as to negotiate. Since then both Colau and TMB president Mercedes Vidal have defended the right to strike in their public statements, but stressing that this in

particular case it was "disproportionate". However, the proposal made by management with the mediation of the municipality in the week before the MWC was unanimously rejected by assemblies of workers who decided to maintain the strike.

There are, at least from my point of view, three criticisms of how the governing team has addressed the conflict:

First: to transmit a conception of the strike which is extremely restricted. "I understand that the strike is an extreme measure to be used before loss of rights and when the other party does not offer dialog, when there is no other way", Colau stated on her Facebook page. However, it is not too novel to say that the strike is one of the few effective means of pressure which workers have and that of course is not limited to defensive struggles. The model of trade unionism based on social pacts and dialogue that avoids conflict is precisely the one that has demonstrated its ineffectiveness to defend the living conditions of the working class.

Second: The use of demobilizing tactics reminiscent of the "old politics". For example, appeals to the responsibility of all parties; the constant criticism of the strike in the media by Mercedes Vidal, an activist in Comunistes de Catalunya and EUiA; the publication of the wages of workers, who claim that the data was not correct, pointing to them as "privileged" in relation to more impoverished sectors; or the meeting with the Catalan heads of the CCOO and UGT, which the CGT refused to attend, arguing that only the strike committee was entitled to negotiate.

Third: a logic of confrontation between the interests of the workers and the public or even the city in the abstract. The main example of this: saying

that granting the workers' demands would mean raising the price of tickets or taxes, instead of putting the focus on the restrictions of the Court of Auditors or the inadequate funding of public transport by the Generalitat and the state or the need to streamline and democratize the structure of TMB. It also appeared that the main motivation to try to resolve the conflict was "so that the MWC is a success", strengthening the consensus on the importance of protecting the Barcelona brand and the quasi-miraculous effects of mega-events on the metropolitan economy for any inhabitant of the city regardless of their social class.

In short, a logic of demobilization that breaks with the discourse of BenComú so far, which has always placed emphasis on the need for self-organization and popular pressure to make significant changes possible. It is not that the city had to accept the strike demands, but it has appeared aligned with the TMB management and economic powers and media against the strikers. The focus has been put on the wages of the workers and on their responsibility for the conflict, instead of drawing attention to the need to restructure the oversized TMB management, ending opacity and the use of the company as an elephants' graveyard for the Catalan elites, and legitimizing both the demands of the workers and their strike, even if they are incompatible with the budget.

It should be borne in mind that the public statements of the main faces of the municipality and especially of Ada Colau have a huge audience and considerable capacity to influence. On this occasion they have strengthened the brand of *La Vanguardia* or Grupo Prisa in which strikes, especially in transport, are a nuisance to be avoided in order to maintain the credibility of the city. She has positioned herself as a mediator between two parties and guarantor of the interests of the city but we have already said that anyone who tries to be "the mayor of all" and to reach a consensus between conflicting interests is more likely to end up being the mayor of "all the same."

Why?

As in Greece after the signing of the third memorandum, moralistic criticisms ("they have sold out") proliferate, focused on Ada Colau. Colau countered these criticisms stating that the councillors of BenComú work every day with honesty and with humility. However, the theories of betrayal do not explain anything and what we must try to understand are the correlation of forces and the strategic scenarios.

An idea that has been repeated in countless occasions but that is key to understanding the situation is that being in government is not the same as holding power. The municipalities of change have been subject since last May to a constant tension from the oligarchy towards cooptation or towards collapse. That is to say, the mainstream mass media continue to set the agenda on what is important or what you can or cannot do, employers try to avoid any measure that encroaches on their privileges while the regime blocks the action of the municipal candidates.

In addition, municipalities have few powers to resolve the majority of situations. In this case, restructuring the TMB management is in the hands of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona where the PSC holds the majority. The question is to be able to communicate the blackmail and the limits of institutional action instead of justifying political decisions which are little understood.

As if it was not enough to have such limited power, we must not forget that BenComú is a minority government and needs support to approve budgets and prevent an extension of those previously approved by the right. How do you publicly confront a TMB management packed with former and current leaders of the PSC if you need its support to push through budgets?

So BenComú has a poor correlation of forces to face this kind of conflict at the institutional level but how can it be improved? Precisely by stimulating struggles and promoting the autonomy of the

movement with regard to the institutions and to perspectives of action. If there is a constant pressure from the powerful to neutralize the transformations, it is imperative to have an impulse from the have-nots to make them effective.

Sometimes this represents a huge balancing act because, as Ada Colau said in the interview on TV3, "everyone has to play their role". Ultimately this means elucidating how that the role of municipal government is understood: as a good left manager of the existing situation or as a precipitator of a constituent process.

Relationship with trade unions

Another factor to take into account is the lack of centrality of trade union struggles in the recent cycle of mobilization. This means, on the one hand, that few of those with responsibilities in the municipalities come from the trade union world and have experience in dealing with situations such as that of the metro strike and, on the other hand, that trade unionism has been less affected by the transformations caused by the 15M and is quite disconnected from the political processes underway.

"Resolving these situations will be key to not generating mistrust among the most active and politicized sectors or a sense of failure and disappointment in the sectors immersed in their first political experience" as I already noted in May. [1] The risk of confrontations like this one is a decoupling between the social activism capable of radicalizing the processes underway and the municipal candidacies.

It is obvious that there are some sectors of the radical left with a central position in the articulation of social movements in the city that have a hostile position toward BenComú, such as the CUP of Barcelona in its war of continuous attrition, or libertarians delighted to confirm that "power corrupts".

However, the management of the municipality has also caused discomfort among left trades unionists such as the Co.Bas (a trade union of rank and file commissions), or some among the CCOO or CGT,

who have in recent months seen the new municipality as an ally and who can progressively become disenchanted if these situations are repeated. More distance between these sectors and the "municipalism of change" means more risk of falling into a managerialist dynamic.

The role of struggles in the public sector

A question that arises is: what can struggles like the metro strike contribute to pushing the situation towards rupture? A document distributed on demonstrations entitled "Letter to the citizens from a metro worker" stated that "on the contrary, unfortunately, for other groups, we have the power to try to solve the problem, and who in their right mind would not do something to change their situation if they could?" This phrase notes at the same time one of the main potentialities and one of the main limits of trade union struggles like the metro strike.

The potential is that we are talking about a sector with a tradition of association and of struggle, where casualization and neoliberal atomization have not much penetrated and with a strategic position (the possibility of paralysing the city) to exert pressure. It is a great success that the metro unions of the metro want to fight temporary jobs of new incorporation in the company, because it has been customary to give the green light to this type of measure so staff with more experience maintain good conditions, generating a rupture, sometimes insurmountable, inside the workforce. However, the risk is to fall into corporate struggles. In the long run this is an impasse because if the other sectors are precarious and fragmented an offensive to criminalize these workers and isolate them for destroying decent conditions of work is much more possible.

To avoid this risk, the trade unions in sectors such as the Metro also can raise demands focused not only on wage increases but also concerning the division of labour and wealth and the democratization of public services, both in terms of access and management. It is also important that there is a policy of broad alliances and resources are placed

at the service of the most precarious and difficult to organize sectors. For example, developing a platform of companies outsourced and subcontracted by the municipality to pursue re-municipalisation and decent working conditions for all workers that depend on this.

In short, this is an open conflict in which the positions of the municipality and the trade unions have become polarized, but that still can be corrected. Just like water management or the problems with the Guardia Urbana, TMB is an endemic source of conflict and a trench for the clientelist networks of the PSC and CiU that has to be faced sooner or later in order to transform Barcelona and socialize political power. In addition, this struggle is also a warning that the "bloc of change" must dispute "political economy" and not reduce its actions to symbolic radicalism. Tensions between sectors of the workers and governments are something almost inevitable while we continue disputing the hegemony and institutions of the dominant class.

The challenge is to take advantage of these tensions creatively, pushing the "municipalities of change" beyond the constrictions which they are anchored. For this purpose there is a need to stimulate new alliances and agreements that are capable of generating counterbalancing forces that push and overspill the limits of the existing frameworks. Each impulse of this type should be linked to pedagogy and a double task: on the one hand, convincing the social majority that each specific struggle is part of a collective process, of a whole class that represents the interests of society as a whole, and on the other, generating a social force capable of countering the firepower of the elites. That is to say, making visible an alternative project of city and society at the service of the popular classes and advancing in the constitution of the material force that makes this possible.

Barcelona

1 mars 2016

Source Viento Sur Municipalismo del cambio, huelgas y conflicto.

SPANISH STATE

Anticapitalistas on the current political scenario

ANTICAPITALISTAS ·

AFTER TWO failed attempts to form a parliamentary government by PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez, we in Anticapitalistas believe that a new political and social dynamic is taking shape.

Both votes demonstrate that there are only two mathematically viable parliamentary majorities: either a coalition government between the elite and pro-austerity forces, or a turn by the PSOE toward a new type of government that seeks a broad coalition with Podemos and secures the neutrality of the Catalan and Basque nationalist parties.

However, after the regressive agreement reached between the PSOE and Ciudadanos, and based on the current correlation of forces, we believe it would be politically bankrupt to continue proposing to the PSOE that it form a "strong government for change."

The insistence of PSOE's leadership on taking its agreement with Ciudadanos as a starting point for any negotiations with other forces can only invalidate the possibility of forming a transformative government that aims to conquer rights for the working-class majority. Anticapitalistas believes that it is no longer realistic, after this agreement has been struck, to assume that any sort of alternative government to the Grand Coalition of all the mainstream parties (including the PSOE, Ciudadanos and the conservative Popular Party) is possible.

PSOE has remained frozen in place in the last few weeks: it cannot serve as a reliable ally in the necessary process that we need today for profoundly changing social and political structures. Its loyalty is to the Troika, to neoliberal and business-as-usual

economic policies, to the restoration of an exhausted political regime.

The process of change that began on 15M (May 15, 2011) with the mass Indignados protests and occupations is still alive, even as it confronts difficulties and retreats. But this process cannot advance without struggle, and it can never subordinate itself to the logic of "lowered expectations." We have not come so far to simply get in line behind a "lesser evil" that, after all, will end up supporting the "greater evil"—that is, we cannot allow the social bloc seeking radical change to be assimilated into the governing logic of "no, it cannot be done."

Continuing to advocate the idea of a "government of change" led by the PSOE can only generate unfounded hopes and could even sow illusions. Thus, faced with the PSOE-Ciudadanos agreement (one which may expand to include the Popular Party), there are only two solutions: the Grand Coalition or new elections.

In either case, Podemos should prepare itself to organize its own response and put itself in the best position to confront whichever scenario plays out. Above all, the discourse of "change" must be more sharply defined and clarified if we are to unmask the fake "change" underway, and in order to stand up against any new government that may arise from the current attempt to form a Grand Coalition.

POSSIBLE NEW elections must be approached with one objective strictly in mind: Accumulate the social and electoral forces needed in order to disrupt the so-called reform projects being carried out by the current regime and, in this manner, place the questions of a constituent process directed at

reorganizing the Spanish state and the democratization of the economy in the middle of the national political debate.

Component parts of these two problems include: overturning neoliberal labor reforms, nationalizing and socializing strategic sectors such as banking and utilities, introduction of forms of workers control in workplaces, rent control, etc. These radical reforms can culminate in a new federal agreement between the peoples across the territory of the Spanish state while moving toward a new institutional configuration where power is exercised more and more from below.

In Anticapitalistas, we believe that the challenge looming before the bloc for change is enormous. On one side, we must deal with a political dynamic where many people feel resigned to the eventual consolidation of a Grand Coalition. On the other side, we must do all we can to prevent the closing of the political cycle that has remained open since 15M.

This means broadening the social and political scope of the forces for change. Specifically, we must prepare and better situate ourselves in a climate filled with risks, but also one ripe with possibilities for those promoting a rupture with the post-Franco Regime of 1978 and its brand of totalitarian austerity.

In this sense, the elites, the oligarchs and the European institutions hope their Grand Coalition will unfold against a backdrop of social passivity and thereby facilitate a restorationist dynamic.

Faced with this danger, we believe that only a new round of mobilization can change the current political context, a context intended to generate a sense of stability in an economy that, despite frequent boasts about recovery, continues producing only unemployment, poverty and precarity. The forces of change must put forward a Grand Social Coalition with the goal of upending the political and social scenario.

Without doubt, we in Anticapitalistas believe we are living through a change from one phase to another. This means, first, cutting off discussions with the PSOE, as it has proven itself incapable of breaking with the elites and with neoliberalism. Second, we must put into motion an alternative dynamic that breaks with the elites, one which expands the social base of the bloc for change by organizing the popular classes.

While the parties of the Regime of '78 go about constructing their Grand Coalition, the forces for change, based in all our diversity, must advance toward the building of a social bloc capable of taking over the leadership of the country so that capital never again governs.

Statement: Preparing for new elections in Spain

Elections in the Spanish state last December saw a surge of support for new parties—Podemos (meaning "We Can" in Spanish) on the left and Ciudadanos ("Citizens") on the right. Two mainstream parties, the center-right Popular Party and the center-left Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), have rotated in and out of power in a relatively stable bipartisan system since the return of electoral democracy in 1978 after the death of fascist dictator Francisco Franco. This so-called "Regime of '78" has also sought to incorporate nationalist parties in the Basque and Catalan areas, some of which advocate national independence and separation from the central Spanish state.

With no party winning sufficient votes to elect a prime minister in December, there have been several attempts by the PSOE to cobble together a governing coalition—following the model of the multi-party "Grand Coalitions"—that could win a majority in parliament. The options have been either uniting with its bipartisan rivals in the Popular Party or by taking a turn to the left and entering into a partnership with Podemos, as the center-left Socialist Party has done in Portugal with the support of the Communist Party and the Left Bloc.

Since the rise of the Indignados movement in 2011, Spanish politics have been disrupted by working-class discontent and increasingly assertive demands for national independence in the Basque and Catalan countries. The activists in Anticapitalistas are members of Podemos and were instrumental to its founding. In this statement published at the Anticapitalistas website in early March and translated here by Todd Chretien, they argue that the time has come to break off negotiations with the PSOE. Instead, they argue, Podemos must turn toward reenergizing social movements in preparation for a new round of elections—in which it should stand as a radical alternative to the mainstream parties, neoliberalism and capitalism.

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mainstream parties (including the PSOE, Ciudadanos and the conservative Popular Party) is possible.

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The process of change that began on 15M (May 15, 2011) with the mass Indignados protests and occupations is still alive, even as it confronts difficulties and retreats. But this process cannot advance without struggle, and it can never subordinate itself to the logic of "lowered expectations." We have not come so far to simply get in line behind a "lesser evil" that, after all, will end up supporting the "greater evil"—that is, we cannot allow the social bloc seeking radical change to be assimilated into the governing logic of "no, it cannot be done."

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TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Bargaining, but for what?

SANEM ÖZTÜRK ·

We can only imagine the optimistic ideas European Union leaders have in their minds. They may be thinking that they can contain all refugees in Turkey and they can choose the most "acceptable ones" among the Syrian population. But it is not very difficult to foresee that illegal refugee flow from Turkey to European countries will continue. Turkey's closed door policy at the Syrian border since May 2015 has not stopped Syrians from moving. And since they know that they have no future in Turkey, where they do not even have a refugee status (yes, their legal status in Turkey is "temporary asylum seekers", in other words, we call Syrians "guests" as if they have a home to go back) they all want to go to Europe, where they think they can have jobs, houses, at least a legal status. Closing the borders, increasing the border security controls or appointing Turkey as the border police will not prevent the people from coming, this will only make their route more expensive, more dangerous - often deadly - and more vulnerable to human traffickers.

As for the Turkish side of the bargaining, since long before the Brussels meetings, not only the Turkish prime minister Davutoğlu and the cabinet, but also the proponent media (which include almost all the newspapers and TV channels in Turkey except for a couple of independent ones who are struggling to survive) have been making an enormous effort to convince the public opinion: That they're doing what's best for the refugees, that they're doing what's best for the Turkish society, and that things are going really great with the European Union.

First of all, it's more than fair to accept that this summit was not about improving the living standards of more than 2,5 million refugees in Turkey and almost 1 million refugees who have crossed to Europe so far; it was about solving the refugee crisis of Europe in return for some "compromises" that might be given to Turkey. Secondly, yes, Turkey pursued an open door policy for a long time and accepted a huge part of Syrian population. But despite the new migration law which was passed in 2014, it's crystal clear that Turkey does not have any permanent migration policy whatsoever. Neither Syrians nor other migrant groups feel secure, most of them work unregistered under terrible conditions and with unimaginably low salaries, there's an enormous housing problem (only 10 % of the refugees live in the camps), school enrollment is very low among children and youth, there's no gender perspective in the existing "mechanism", so on and so forth. And about the expectations on the Turkish side; travelling Europe without visa, improving the relations with the European Union, taking steps in the EU membership negotiations? Please...

What the rulers do best is to create an atmosphere of fear and give us false hopes about a brighter future. So, why don't we, as people, start touching each other, start having a meaningful dialogue instead? Why don't we start with the human rights violations in Turkey, the situation of minorities, women, LGBTI population, migrants, the attacks against Kurdish cities, corruptions, lack of justice? How about the 3rd bomb explosion in the very capital of Turkey only 2 days ago? How about rising xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe, how about rising nationalism and conservatism in Turkey? How about creating the channels of soli-

clarity and putting pressure over the ones who are responsible for this mess in the first place?

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

In support of the Kurdish people's struggle to live free and in dignity

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

1. After two years of negotiations with the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, Erdogan's Sunnite authoritarian-neoliberal-Islamist regime decided to resume its bloody war on the Kurdish people, from summer 2015. And yet this summer had begun with an immense popular hope, following the outcome of the 7 June legislative elections. The exceptional 13% result won by HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party – the unitary left reformist party of the Kurdish movement) that, by doubling its votes, obliged AKP to form a coalition government, liable to break its domination in the spheres of the State apparatus. Moreover, this result prevented AKP from reaching the number of seats necessary to make a change in the constitution and bring in the autocratic presidential regime sought by R.T. Erdogan, and of which he would be the sultan.

2. As early as March 2015, Erdogan had already launched signals of his turn towards a hardline nationalism up against the loss in votes AKP seemed to undergo, moving towards the far right, hostile to negotiations but above all terrified by the October 2014 riots in support of the Kobanê resistance under siege by DAESH/Islamic state. This explosion of the rage of the Kurdish masses was based on an accumulation of disappointments caused by AKP refusal to take concrete measures in the frame of the "peace talks". This is compounded by the indignation growing out of the broadly shared conviction that AKP supported DAESH. This was based on the

fact that Islamic State jihadist have long been able to pass through the Turkish-Syrian border in both directions without being controlled, and had the benefits of health care in hospitals near the border. And we know that the Turkish regime has always preferred and still explicitly prefers DAESH as a neighbour, to the Kurds. Finally, Erdogan declared that "the Kurdish question does not exist", forbidding any visits to Öcalan and thus suspending de facto the course of the negotiations declared in March 2013.

3. Dissatisfied with the legislative election outcome, AKP, under Erdogan's auspices, called for early elections. However the weakening of HDP was the sine qua non condition for AKP to come out a winner of the upcoming elections. This, in a most suspicious manner, the Suruc attack blamed on DAESH and the immediate reprisals by PKK "local units" causing the death of two police officers provided an opportunity to relaunch the war on the Kurds and by so doing, criminalise HDP considered as the legal branch of the "terrorist organisation". The climate of civil war accompanied by violent repression against all social and political protest, a criminalisation of the opposition press and a strengthening of nationalism leading to attempted pogroms against the Kurds finally produced results. AKP easily won the early elections on 1 November 2015.

4. From then on, a terror regime was in force. Erdogan's party-State mobilised openly fascist and Islamist "antiterrorist" brigades linked to the police and the gendarmerie to crush all protest and resistance in Turkish Kurdistan. The different neighbourhoods of the cities of Diyarbakir, Mardin, ??

rnak, Hakkari where young Kurdish urban militias linked to PKK (but not under its direct control) declared "democratic autonomy" – parallel to the Rojava model – under curfew for several months by then, facing famine, under siege and destroyed by the military tanks and armoured vehicles. Hundreds of bodies, some completely burnt and unrecognizable, lay beneath the rubble, more than one hundred thousand residents had to flee their homes. According to Human Rights Foundation of Turkey figures, 224 civilians (including 42 children), 414 activists and 198 members of the police and military apparatus have died between mid-August 2015 and the beginning of February 2016.

5. The choice of the PKK and the YDG-H (Movement of Patriotic Revolutionary Youth) urban militias to shift the conflicts from the mountains to the towns – contrary moreover to Öcalan's earlier recommendations – can of course provoke some discussions on tactics. This conflict atmosphere has clearly weakened the possibility of a hearing for the HDP's democratic, militant and pro-peace message, while they had succeeded in imposing themselves as a hegemonic pole for broad sectors of the population – going beyond the Kurdish people – opposed to Erdogan's dictatorial temptations and the state manoeuvres to Islamize society.

But the responsibility for this tragedy lies clearly with the Erdogan regime and its instrumentalisation of its different policies with respect to the Kurdish people with an aim of consolidating its power, moreover this fuels nationalist feelings on both sides and deeply undermines the possibilities of a common life for both peoples.

We condemn the Erdogan regime's and AKP's belligerent policies. We demand that the Turkish state put a stop to the massacres and that it raise the curfews and blockades underway in Kurdish towns. We also demand that those responsible for violations of the rights of man and woman be identified and sentenced.

We call upon the Turkish state to put an end to Öcalan's isolation and resume negotiations with the

different components of the Kurdish movement in order to establish the conditions of a lasting peace, which can only be achieved by meeting the Kurdish people's democratic and social demands.

We also denounce the complicity of Western imperialisms and notably of the European Union which, terrified of the migration wave – for which it is also partly responsible – seems willing to live with a regime of repression and massacre, on the condition that Turkey accepts to become an enormous holding camp for migrants, far from its sight. We demand an end to the persecution and legal charges against the Kurdish movement in Europe. The PKK must be removed from the list of terrorist organisations in Europe and everywhere else.

We express our support to the Kurdish people in their struggle to live in dignity, to the HDP that faces unparalleled criminalisation by the State apparatus, to the radical left activists, to activists for peace and the defence of human rights, to academics and journalists persecuted by Erdogan's nationalist and confessional authoritarian regime.

6. The war waged by the Turkish state against the Kurdish movement, like the PKK's strategy, are now mainly determined by the developments occurring in Syria. The consolidation and broadening of the administrations under its control through its brother party PYD (Party of Democratic Union) in northern Syria (Rojava) is far more important for the PKK than the gains it can make through negotiations with the Turkish state, notably from the standpoint of its historical competition with Barzani's feudal and pro-US line to instaurer his hegemony over the Kurdish people divided among four countries (Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria).

As for Turkey, in its aim of becoming the hegemonic regional power in the Middle East, since the beginning of the Syrian popular uprising, in the first months the Erdogan regime first sought a sort of negotiation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, then centred its foreign policy on an active involvement in the Syrian question, counting on a rapid overthrow of al-Assad.

In this aim, Turkey firstly supported the Syrian National Council dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and the liberal opposition and with the militarisation of the uprising, against the regime's violent pressure, it did not hesitate to support on different levels (political, financial, logistic, military, medical) different armed jihadist groups including DAESH, either directly or indirectly.

7. One of the main reasons for the Erdogan regime's engagement in the fight for the overthrow of al-Assad was the presence of a strong Kurdish population on the Turkey-Syria border. The formation of a Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq after the imperialist intervention in 2003 was doubtless one of the most significant political traumas experienced by the Turkish state.

Thus, it is obvious that the fear of seeing the same scenario reoccur following a regime change in Syria was what pushed the Turkish government to attempt to intervene in the Syrian crisis. However, the situation became all the more critical that following the retreat of the regime's armed forces from part of Syrian Kurdistan in July 2012, the PYD succeeded in taking control over this region on the Turkish border, later to proclaim autonomy there.

Today, the Turkish government is implementing a blockade on the Turkish/ Syria border obstructing the solidarity efforts with Rojava organized in Turkey and abroad. We condemn the employment of border control by governments to frustrate civil initiatives against oppression and support the campaigns against this blockade.

8. Emerging from the PKK decentralisation trend in 2003, PYD still recognises Abdullah Öcalan's ideological and political leadership. Following the "Rojava Revolution" the administration of the three districts of Jazira, Afrin and Kobanê represents an attempt to implement Öcalan's strategy of "democratic autonomism" (or "democratic federalism"), which was supposed to replace the PKK's former adherence to Marxism-Leninism (which it had renounced in the early 1990s). The Rojava Charter

proclaimed in January 2013 is based on democratic, secular, multiculturalist principles and is marked by a deep ecological sensibility. The emphasis on the rights of women, of ethnic and religious minorities is impressive, especially in the midst of the Syrian chaos. And despite the prevailing instability in the region, all these commitments do not remain totally in abeyance, although of course they deserve to be taken further. However, in this original and progressive self-administration experience, political pluralism is practically absent. The PYD, without a strong historic presence in Rojava, succeeded in instauring its hegemony after its return from exile, from Iraqi Kurdistan, in large part thanks to its military power (YPG: Peoples' Protection Units). Which it did not hesitate to use either to repress the various local currents of Kurdish nationalism, as well as the democratic networks of young Kurdish activists profoundly committed to the revolutionary uprising. We also add that in certain towns such as Hassake and Qamichli, even after the autonomy declaration, the Assad regime continued to retain a presence.

9. Today, the PYD and YPG, thanks to their heroic resistance in Kobanê (in which Turkish revolutionary organisations, the Free Syrian Army and Peshmergas of Iraqi Kurdistan groups have also taken part) against DAESH barbarism, benefit from a largely-deserved international prestige. The PYD position on the terrain and its effectiveness in combat have paradoxically made it a privileged ally, on the one hand of Washington, which is intent on not getting mired in the Syrian chaos, in which the former bears a major responsibility and on the other hand Moscow, which since 30 September 2015 is involved in a military intervention in the conflict at the sides of al-Assad's bloody regime, of Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah in order to increase its domination in the region. However, Erdogan is attempting at any price to prevent the region extending from Azas to Jarablus – in large part under DAESH control – from falling into the hands of PYD-PKK, because it is the only part of its borders

with Syria not currently controlled by Kurdish forces.

Thus, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) whose main component are the YPG, with the support of Russian air raids are very effectively fighting the different Jihadist groups; DAESH, El Nusra or Ahrar El Sham and other, so-called moderate Salafist groups, armed and backed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. However, these advances and victories of SDF troops face contradictions because of the pragmatic alliance policies on the ground. The latter can find themselves side by side with regime forces or in competition with them to occupy "adversary" territory first.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the domination of Salafist-Jihadist groups in zones liberated from the regime and in cases of the formers' interpenetration with the Free Syrian Army, the SDF and thus the YPG often come into conflict with FSA and the very heterogenic local rebel militias, which increases the risks of the local population seeing them as on the regime's side.

Moreover, accusations of displacements of Arab populations in certain regions launched against the YPG, based on several reports and testimonies, also reinforce the feeling of suspicion of the PYD, on a background of ethnic tensions in northern Syrian regions, which have gone on for decades between Arabs and Kurds. Finally, adding the fact that the leading forces (liberal and linked to the Muslim Brotherhood) within the Syrian National Coalition backed by Turkey and the Gulf monarchies, support the Turkish regime's repression against the PKK, take Arab chauvinist lines and provide no

guarantee of Kurdish national rights explains PYD's suspicion of this opposition.

10. The Fourth International reaffirms its opposition to any form of military intervention in Syria and any imperialist plan for dividing up Syria. These imperialist and sub-imperialist interventions only goal is to strengthen the self interests of these world or regional powers and amount to a further catastrophe for the Syrian peoples. We demand an immediate stop to Russian bombings and all other bombings and the withdrawal of all foreign beligerent forces.

We think on the other hand that faced with jihadist barbarism, or that of the regime and against any form of oppression the Syrian populations have the right to defend themselves by the different means that they can find.

Despite the criticisms we may make with respect to certain PYD and FDS practices, we salute their combat against the reactionary and jihadist forces that are one of the poles of counter-revolution in Syria and express our full solidarity with the Kurdish people's struggle for their self-determination. And we resolutely souligner that the destiny of the Kurdish people's self-determination and that of the Syrian revolution are profoundly linked. The emancipation of the region's peoples can only be achieved by the overthrow of the authoritarian regimes and freedom from the hold of the great powers and multinationals, through an alliance of the popular classes of these peoples.

Paris

9 March 2016

Portugal's political impasse

CHARLES-ANDRÉ UDRY ·

First, we have a Socialist Party (SP) government—serving alongside the newly elected president—presided over by the party's general secretary Antonio Costa. Costa's government is based on conditional parliamentary support he received from the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda, in Portuguese) and the Portuguese Communist Party (CPC).

However, the Left Bloc's conditions differ significantly from those of the PCP. The PCP is, in turn, very different from the Left Bloc; for instance, it maintains close ties to the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) government of Angola, which controls that country's wealth almost as if it were a family business. The daughter of Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, Isabel dos Santos, is among the key investors in the old colonial metropole where she enjoys the title of the "richest woman in Africa."

Furthermore, the PCP keeps up relations with the celestial bureaucracy of China, still referred to as "communist" by hack journalists. These ties to the MPLA and the Chinese Communist Party flow not only from ideological affinity, but also through some material veins.

For anyone who is following events in Portugal, it is therefore wrong to speak of a "bloc" between the Left Bloc and the PCP. It may well be that the PCP will utilize pressure from sections of the CGTP (General Confederation of Portuguese Workers) in order to negotiate with the government. But the CGTP is extremely weak—especially since a layer of young people who mobilized last year to protest austerity has been forced to migrate to search for work.

During the last few years, the population of Portugal has fallen by 5 percent. This constitutes a socioeconomic hemorrhaging and a kind of reverse debt. That is, foreign capitalist economies actively seek out this young workforce—hard hit by unemployment and the crisis in agriculture, and whose education and training have already been financed, mainly by taxes on Portuguese workers themselves—for the super-exploited construction and cleaning sectors in France, Switzerland and Germany.

The casualization of this forced emigration of the young, starting in 2010 and continuing in subsequent years, is perpetuated by classifying them as "guest workers," according to the German formula.

Many of these graduates are "employees" performing tasks for which they are overqualified, but whose language skills make them "flexible." They are, therefore, used as an underpaid workforce and as a useful lever for pumping out absolute surplus value (longer working hours) and relative surplus value (higher productivity and lower wages).

Second, the European Union (EU) continues to insist, as it did at the February 11 meeting of EU finance ministers known as the Eurogroup, on the need to apply the rules of a stability and growth pact, previously signed by the Portuguese government, to the terms of the state budget for Portugal in 2016.

The Eurogroup announced that it is waiting for verification of the 2015 state deficit from Eurostat (the official organ of the EU) in order to specify its demands. This took place while the budget was being debated line by line in parliament.

With SP leader Antonio Costa at his side, Portuguese Finance Minister Mario Centeno stated

that revenue and assets were the most important concerns for the governing team. And he declared that he was ready to take any necessary action after Jeroen Dijsselbloem, currently president of the Eurogroup, thanks to German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, warned that stability and growth pact "rules might require, if needed, Portugal be ready to do more to consolidate the state budget." (Informação, February 12, 2016)

This constraint imposed by the EU will be permanent, and it will increase. None other than Antonio Costa himself emphasized the fact that Portugal must remain in the eurozone, and that the final version of the 2016 and 2017 budgets must take this into account.

And this is at a time when forecasts for economic growth rates are falling. Revisions for GDP growth have already dropped from 2.1 percent to 1.8 percent, which is clearly having an effect on state revenue, indirect taxes (VAT and excise duties on alcohol, tobacco, gasoline and diesel) chief among them. In fact, these sorts of taxes hit the poor and working classes the hardest because they are forced to spend most of their wages on necessities.

Moreover, according to a recent survey published in the *Diário de Notícias* on February 10, 83.4 percent of employees are currently earning less than 1,500 euros per month. However, their median gross income—calculated by dividing this 83.4 percent into two equal parts, 50 percent above and 50 percent below—is just 785 euros.

So it is easy to imagine a budget that, along with a very important debate about the allocation of resources, will also have to address differentiated taxation on income. The current budget under debate would require workers with a declared income of 800 euros a month to actually pay more than workers earning 1,500 euros or more. The Left Bloc's national deputies spoke out strongly in order to correct this unequal tax.

Third, President Rebelo de Sousa, as shown in an article by Manuel Loff in *Público*, is a descendent of the fascist political regime created by António de

Oliveira Salazar, who ruled Portugal from 1932 to his death in 1968. The regime itself remained in power until it was overthrown during the 1974 Carnation Revolution.

Rebelo de Sousa intervenes sharply on social questions—ironically labeled "divisive" issues in Portugal—such as euthanasia or the right to abortion, while his policies are endlessly reinforced in the television and print mainstream media. Parliamentary battles are also reproduced in newscasts and in televised confrontations, creating a brutal and deafening media encirclement.

What's New in the Political-Institutional Organization?

It is impossible to think about the present political dynamic without taking into account three additional elements.

First, the formation of a new government, after a long debate and various attempts by the right to stop it, thanks to the PS-Left Bloc agreement and the support of the PCP, came into being, as journalist and Left Bloc leader Jorge Costa puts it, as if by magic. Among those who could remember back to the 2005-11 government of SP Prime Minister José Sócrates, relatively few could be expected to put their faith in a new SP-led government, especially since Sócrates himself is currently under investigation on corruption charges.

Yet the government of Antonio Costa, which arose out of a public debate sparked between his faction of the SP and Left Bloc spokeswoman Catarina Martins on the one hand, and the achievement of a left-wing parliamentary majority owing to the PCP's votes on the other, appeared unexpectedly and sparked hope among a layer of the popular classes.

An apparently paradoxical attitude emerged from this context, one marked by a profound social crisis: First, there were hopes that the government might take steps, even very limited ones, towards ameliorating social conditions; and second, left-

wing supporters of the government feared failure and worried it might not even survive 100 days, leading to a worsening of the situation.

Second, at least for now, the political landscape lacks social movements of a certain size and power. However, ongoing austerity, and measures that may bite more sharply in the future, could give rise to anger whose political-institutional repercussions are unpredictable.

Likewise, discontent among intermediate social sectors, such as the truck drivers who are suffering through a veritable economic guillotine—3,000 small transportation businesses failed since 2012—could touch off destabilizing actions. The debate over public health has certainly demonstrated such opposition among caregivers and has brought many problems to the surface, including on-the-job conditions for health care workers, nurses and doctors—65 percent of whom work in public hospitals.

Added to all this are huge bank scandals breaking in the wake of the collapse of Banco di Santo Spirito, whose luxurious headquarters in Lausanne was recently shuttered. The banking crisis required massive state budget expenditures to bail out investors, including Chinese and other foreign investors—and there is a similar maneuver underway in the energy sector. This could lead to pent-up anger exploding and unleashing a popular response.

In this context, it is important to address the numeric weakness of the CGTP as well as critique its political and social orientation in the context of early 2016. Clearly, it has suffered from a decline in membership; but it is also hampered by a sort of detached, Pavlovian perspective based on past expectations, leaving it ill-prepared to face the unexpected rise of a PCP-backed government. This has opened up a public debate in advance of the union's national congress about its links to the PCP.

But even if we recognize the inadequacy of the traditional labor movement in the face of anticipated austerity measures soon to be adopted by the government—either little by little or more precipitously

starting in May 2016—the unions, even if in a reduced state, still embody an important organizational experience.

This potential can be glimpsed among dockworkers, bank and insurance employees, the hospital sector and call-center workers. On the other side, the defeat of the TAP state airline union is also rich in "lessons" to be carefully studied, especially in the context of the international aviation sector.

Third. Portugal's constitutional arrangement makes life complicated for the big parties, both the SP and the CDS-PSD centrist-conservative coalition (People's Party and the Social Democratic Party). Even Assunção Cristas, the only figure running for leadership of the CDS in the party's upcoming March 12-13 convention, had to recognize this fact.

Soon after the attempt to form a government by then-sitting conservative Prime Minister Passos Coelho collapsed in the fall, political journalist Manuel Agostinho Malgalhaes picked up on a statement by Left Bloc leader Pedro Filipe Soares, who argued that "the arc of government has been overcome by the arc of the constitution. Casting a so-called 'useful vote' today is an obsolete electoral argument." (Sol, February 13, 2016)

The term "arc of the constitution" may be unclear, but it must be set in the context of the governmental crisis facing then-president Aníbal Cavaco Silva (CDS-PSD) who was trying to accentuate the crisis in the media as a way to whip up opposition to the attempt by SP leader António Costa Pinto to form a left-wing government. As we have seen, Costa's SP government could only take office by attaining a parliamentary majority with support from the PCP and the Left Bloc, but this maneuver required the parties to agree to a minimum program according to the rules of the constitution.

Once this agreement was reached, Costa, who is a professor of European Politics at the University of Lisbon, stated, "There are few ideological points contained in this accord. But the real problem is

that the next government is in a very difficult position. What happens if growth does not meet expectations or interest rates change?" (Le Monde, November 9, 2015).

However, in addition to the lack of growth, the multiform crises hitting the European Union and the spreading war in the Middle East are going to assert themselves in parliament and in the lives of the country's popular majority, raising concrete difficulties between the Left Bloc and the Costa government.

For instance, the tight relationship between NATO and the Portuguese military was on display during the Trident Juncture naval exercises in 2015 (the biggest NATO exercises since the end of the Cold War), which were designed to "demonstrate" NATO's renewed ability to defend maritime facilities. The SP supports remaining in NATO while the Left Bloc has pledged to leave it.

Managing this conditional agreement will be a complicated task. The left parties' connections with popular sectors, whose desires can sometimes be interpreted all too easily in such a way as to conform with the leadership's momentary political tactics, can see the tables turned by sudden acts of defiance.

This is especially true as Costa's available political choices—whose correct selection and prioritization are, in their own terms, a critical element of putting class politics into practice—will be limited in the current phase, placing the government under pressure.

Moreover, the government's political choices must be audible to potentially active sections of the working classes as well as to those sections who have already been activated, albeit in a limited and fragmentary manner. The capacity to organize certain social sectors, responding at critical moments in a timely manner, must be a driving force for a government, like Costa's, with its back against the wall.

Thus, if the "useful vote" blackmail—that is, the attempt to limit the number of votes cast to the left of the PS in favor of the Left Bloc or the PCP—has failed at this time, it remains to be seen what key political issues constitute this "pragmatic" agreement between the Left Bloc and the Costa government.

In terms of this specific government's "power" to manage—and it must be kept in mind that the PS has not departed from the current options employed the "Europeanized" social democracy—it is balancing on a fulcrum that is dependent to a large part on the choice by the Left Bloc to remain in the configuration initiated by the signing of the multi-party pact on November 26, 2015.

Pursuing a concrete tactic of polarization with the PS, the Left Bloc's task is to promote a re-politicization process of what some have called the "people of the left" and of potentially emergent social movements. This tactic is, in fact, understood by an active section of the working class and is based on rank-and-file demands and political symbols. This re-politicization of legislation can be seen in increased interest taken by popular sectors in concrete proposals being debated in parliament. At least for now, that is—even if certain soccer teams still get more attention.

The political conjuncture may accelerate with the concomitant economic crisis and unforeseen explosions of anger, or it may develop out of partial labor or community struggles that gain traction in the media and which are able to insert themselves into the political agendas of the government and parliament. These dynamics will emerge despite the attempts and practices of the government to apply cutbacks under various guises, by presenting them as inevitable, given pressure from the EU and the conservative president's ruling circles. These will no doubt be presented bit by bit, as thinly sliced and easy-to-swallow bits of salami.

Several months along, the Left Bloc's political dynamic cannot be reduced to what sectarian know-

it-alls are proclaiming, among them certain Trotskyist currents with roots in Argentina who are politically exiled in Europe.

Thus, in the daily paper *Sol* on February 13, there appeared an article titled, "Bloco is already more like SYRIZA than expected." It emphasized that "the praise once paid to SYRIZA has been erased from their speeches." Yet the same daily confirmed the distance the Left Bloc placed between itself and SYRIZA, despite the efforts of Yanis Varoufakis to curry political favor with Marisa Matias, the Left Bloc's presidential candidate.

At the moment, the crisis taking shape in the PCP is more important. For the second time in a few short years, the PCP has finished behind the Left Bloc in national election results: both legislative and now presidential.

In 2001, António Abreu of the PCP—"a candidate with values and practical plans," as he likes to present himself—beat Fernando Rosas, candidate of the newly formed Left Bloc, by 100,000 votes. In 2006, Jérónimo de Sousa, standing for the PCP, beat the Left Bloc's Francisco Louça by some 180,000 votes, but Louça emerged as a popular spokesperson, placing the Left Bloc on the national political map. And the splash Marisa Matias made in this year's election—despite early biased polls that gave her only 4 percent of the vote—affirmed the Left Bloc in its dominant position as the "left of the left."

The results of January's presidential election confirms this dynamic: Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (CDS-PSD) won 2,403,879 votes or 51.99 percent; Antonio Sampaio de Nova (a liberal academic backed by a small Maoist party running as an independent) won 1,058,705 votes or 22.90 percent;

Marisa Matias (Left Bloc) won 468,414 or 10.13 percent; Maria de Belém (Green) won 196,105 or 4.24 percent; and Edgar Silva (PCP) won 182,462 or 3.95 percent.

This goes to show how important the Left Bloc's choices are going to be in the coming phase. This includes strategic and tactical decisions that reflect debates that are emerging in Greece and Spain, despite clear differences with those forces.

These questions constitute the elements of a "European" political puzzle. It would be misleading to draw a simple line that merely attempts to concentrate an assemblage of mixed-up generalities. This sort of method simply exposes one's ignorance of the concrete dialectics at play, including multiple and unequal developments in Europe—and in the EU, which is not quite the same thing. These specificities are burrowing their way through concurrent economic and institutional crises, while their common traits, in what is only an apparent paradox, express themselves in a more or less subterranean manner.

This dialectic operates through and among global inter-imperialist confrontations, where German capital, with the support of its vast hinterland and its allies (from Austria to Switzerland, and down through the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France, even if the latter comes with all the complexities of their "intimate" relationship), attempts to (re)position the EU in order to consolidate its place in the imperialist chaos of the 21st century.

March 2, 2016

Socialist Workers

Translated by Todd Chretien from the A l'encontre website

Internationalism from below against Fortress Europe

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

A million people have arrived at European borders in the past year, especially through the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, fleeing hunger and bombs. This is the largest influx of refugees to Europe since World War II, and the largest number of displaced people and asylum seekers worldwide in decades. About half come from Syria, where five years of conflict have caused 250,000 deaths, five million refugees, and about half the population internally displaced. Others come from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other African and Asian countries. Within them, many women who suffer specific oppression and violences.

The political authorities and hegemonic media depict the current refugee crisis as a flood of people appearing suddenly out of nowhere. It's as though it were a meteorological phenomenon without apparent cause, where the people seeking asylum are characterized as a threat or as victims, and to which there are only two possible responses: violent containment or emergency aid. In both cases, the refugees lose their status as subjects with rights, aspirations, and demands, becoming mere objects to be managed. This approach is not only reductionist, but also serves the interests of some of the political actors involved in the situation.

1. A global crisis of rights. Contrary to the official story, the actual migratory flows constitute not only or essentially a humanitarian crisis, but also and above all a crisis of rights and, therefore, a political crisis. A crisis with concrete causes and responsibilities, which is part of other, broader crises which make up a world and a global capitalist system in crisis. A crisis of rights that is also threefold,

as 1) it involves the systematic violations of fundamental rights in countries of origin that motivate emigration; 2) it is a crisis in the international asylum system, lost in successive cuts and minimalist approaches; and 3) it is a crisis in the politics of migration in general, both in transit and in destination.

2. Local terror and imperialist intervention.

Beyond the endogenous factors of the armed conflicts that motivate the displacements (in the Syrian case, the genocidal repression of the Assad regime and the totalitarianism of Daesh), the imperialist interventions and the military and economic interests of foreign governments, international institutions, and transnational corporations also have responsibility for the instability of these countries of origin. The plundering of resources and the geostrategic interests of the free trade agreements generate hunger, poverty, war, and exodus. In the case of the EU and its member states, the consequences of their interventions are now knocking at their door in the form of asylum seekers. Erdogan in Turkey and Assad in Syria utilize the refugees as currency and a form of pressure to negotiate their best interests with other powers. Meanwhile, the people are trapped by geopolitical disputes between local and regional elites.

3. The unbearable irresponsibility of Europe.

The same European Union that displays nimbly ambitious plans to rescue the private banks, or to punish the governments that try to walk away from neoliberal austerity, responds to this challenge with empty declarations, institutional passivity, and a reinforcement of Fortress Europe. Meanwhile, the European states pass along the problem as if it were a hot potato and legislate against migrants and refugees. Barely 400 people

have been relocated in the different EU member states of the 160,000 that were committed to be placed by the end of 2017. Even if this latter figure is reached, it remains derisory to the real needs (one million arrivals in 2015 and a projected increase in 2016) and a stark contrast to the 4.5 million Syrians welcomed by Libya, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey, countries with lower populations and fewer economic resources than the EU.

4. Down with Fortress Europe and all forms of xenophobia. The European response is focused on building walls, increasing police repression, and practicing systematic deportations and internment in concentration camps for refugees, who are deprived of their most basic rights. These measures also generate huge profits for private companies which have found a new niche in border management. Cutting basic rights, increasing the stigmatization of migrants (sometimes using feminist discourses to this means), and the attempt to create a divide between "refugees with some rights" and "illegal immigrants" constitute a strategy of institutional xenophobia that legitimizes and encourages the growing expressions of racial hatred. Racism, nationalist identity, and closing the borders are old fantasies that are again today knocking at the doors of Europe. In their intent to halt the rise of the radical right and steal the monopoly of fear and hatred, parties and institutions are applying similar repressive policies for all of Europe. And as with so-called counter-terrorist policies, this refugee crisis serves as an excuse to attack rights and liberties for the whole working class.

5. Refugee or migrant, no human is illegal. The protection of law and international conventions that permit some migrants to solicit and obtain political asylum cannot be the principal argument wielded to defend their arrival and respect for their rights. The liberal standards of international norms provide limited causes for demanding shelter—excluding social, economic, or climate related reasons—at the same time they restrict the list of "officially recognized" political conflicts. The hunger, the misery, and the shortage of resources

kill as many or more than the bombs. The economic wars of transnational capital displace millions of people each year. Economic and climate refugees ought to be considered categories eligible for asylum and, in any case, to migrate is a right independent of any political or economic reasons that motivate it.

6. An international response. There is no binding international convention nor shared responsibility that can substitute for the international duty of solidarity between peoples, and the loyalty between the popular classes toward those fleeing the consequences of terror, the changing climate, and the effects of global capitalism. The dignity and the life of humankind are worth more than any private benefit, than any electoral calculation, than any legislation.

For this reasons, the IC decides at its meeting of 27 February-2 March 2016, to undertake actions and mobilisations, supporting the struggle and self-organisation of refugees and migrants to break the borders, and a social mobilisation in solidarity with them, proposing the following political aims:

- a) Denounce the causes of forced and massive displacement of populations by promoting mobilisations and street actions against imperialism and war;
- b) Promote and participate in all demonstrations of solidarity and for the development of political alternatives against restrictive immigration policies;
- c) Demand more funding for the reception of migrants instead of for repression, especially the militarisation of border controls;
- d) Demand an end to all mechanisms for persecuting immigrants, in particular systems like SIS, CRATE, Rabit, FAST TRACK, ICONet, VIS, EURODAC and EUROSUR;
- e) Demand the repeal of Dublin III and a review of the Geneva Convention to make it more suitable to the present times and circumstances;

f) Argue for the end of Frontex and the creation of a rescue and humanitarian aid force;

g) Argue for the opening of special corridors and the granting of special entry visas for refugees who are stuck in hotspots on the borders and in transit countries;

h) Advocate the creation of mechanisms of bilateral cooperation between member states to overcome the EU's institutional blocks in the management of migratory flows;

i) Demand the regularisation of all the undocumented and repeal the Family Reunification Directive;

j) Integrate the fight against racism and fascism into all political actions;

k) Make the political, ideological and cultural struggle against the extreme right a central priority. Confront the rise of the extreme right through an agenda of counter-cultural hegemony against conservatism and through intercultural interventions that seek to retake the public space through combined initiatives and mobilisations with the victims of racism;

l) Fighting for voting rights of immigrants in all elections to make citizenship a reality, because democracy will only be complete when all men and women participate in it and are represented;

m) Fight for nationality to be based solely on place of birth, abolishing the right of blood as a means of acquiring nationality;

n) Demand an end to the deportations and the closure of detention centres in Europe and its periphery, in the name of respect for the human rights and human dignity of those who are detained only because of their immigration status;

o) Fight for repeal of the Directives on Return and Family Reunification, and for changes to the Labour and "race" directives;

p) Contribute through debate and critical thinking to challenge society in general, and academia in particular, to "decolonize" the production of knowledge and expertise, in particular through post-colonial "decolonial" studies, and above all, to further study and reflection on the semantic forms of racism, especially Roma-phobia, Afrophobia and Islamophobia;

q) Demand reforms to the school curricula and textbooks, so as to reflect and value cultural diversity, and promote interculturalism and its various contributions in school and academic subjects;

r) Finally, mobilise in favour of the teaching of the languages of origin, as one of the instruments, not only of linguistic and cultural preservation, but also as a tool for interaction and the socialisation of differences within school communities.

These mobilization must give a central role to the self organization of migrant and refugee people, to reclaim rights, and must be supported by a social mobilization in solidarity with them, as we have already seen in several European countries.

The borders are lowered for goods and capital while ever higher walls are built for people. Market fundamentalism and nationalist xenophobia are allied to reinforce a Fortress Europe full of borders, the true weapon of mass destruction of rights and breeding ground of racial hatred. But in front of her, resistance and solidarity with those below continues, demonstrating once again that only the people can save the people and that another Europe is possible.

OUR HISTORY

Rosa Luxemburg for Our Time

NANCY HOLMSTROM ·

Certainly Rosa Luxemburg is a model for feminists of all times in her passionate commitment both to understanding the nature of our oppressive system — and most important, to changing it — and for pursuing her own political and personal life without concern for what women were and were not supposed to do.

But what if anything would she have to say about theoretical debates among socialist feminists today? Was she even a feminist in this sense? Was her position on women's oppression similar to her position on national oppression [opposing Lenin's embrace of the right of nations to self-determination, which she saw as a diversion from class struggle — ed.]?

And on the practical political questions facing feminists today, does Luxemburg's work give us any guidance? These are the kinds of questions our panel will address.

Luxemburg and Zetkin

Luxemburg wrote next to nothing specifically regarding women, and was not active in the women's movement. Some have inferred from this that she was not a feminist, or in any case that she was not interested in women's issues.

Obviously these were not her primary area of interest, but why should they have to be — can't there be a division of labor?

Clara Zetkin, Luxemburg's close comrade and friend, is well-known for her work with working-class women, including forming groups similar to the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, which made Lenin distinctly uneasy. I know of no evidence that Luxemburg disagreed with her work.

On the contrary, in some of her last letters of November 1918, Rosa asks Zetkin for an article on women — "which is so important now, and none of us here understand anything about it" — and then to edit a women's section of the Spartacus paper, saying "... it is such an urgent matter! Every day lost is a sin...."

Based on this correspondence and on her short writings on women's issues, it should be abundantly clear that Luxemburg was a Marxist or socialist feminist in the sense we use these terms today.

First I will say very briefly how I characterize a socialist feminist, some of whom are Marxists and some are not, and then try to say where Luxemburg would stand on the debates among us.

Among Socialist-Feminists

All socialist-feminists see class as central to women's lives, yet at the same time none would reduce sex or race oppression to economic exploitation. And all of us see these aspects of our lives as inseparably and systematically related; in other words, class is always gendered and raced.

The term "intersectionality" has come to be used for this position. Luxemburg certainly held to this kind of perspective, in that she recognized some kinds of oppression as common to all women and others varying by class and by nation.

While the special needs of working women were Luxemburg's priority, she also supported positions some might see as merely "bourgeois demands," the end to all laws that discriminated against women and women's suffrage, which she advocated both as a matter of principle and for pragmatic political reasons.

Bringing women into politics would help combat what she called "the suffocating air of the philistine family" that affected even socialist men, and would also build the ranks of the social democratic forces. These positions were actually in advance of the bourgeois women's organizations of the time.

On one occasion, she criticized social democrats willing to compromise on women's suffrage to make an electoral alliance with liberals. The most radical of socialists were often also the best feminists.

Within the broad definition of intersectionality, however, there are differences regarding how to understand these kinds of oppression and how they are related.

Some socialist feminists see capitalism and sexism (usually called "patriarchy") as two distinct, though intersecting, systems with equal explanatory importance. (Other systems to account for race/ethnic oppression are usually part of the picture too.)

Just as capitalism is constituted by relations of oppression and exploitation between capitalists and workers, patriarchy is a system in which men oppress women. Some also say men exploit women, which they explain in different ways. This is known as a "dual systems" position.

Marxist Feminism

On the other hand, other Marxist/socialist feminists believe there is only one kind of oppression and exploitation that, in the current period, really constitutes a system with full explanatory powers — and that is capitalism. However, other distinct kinds of oppression, like sexism, play more or less important roles within the framework of that system at different times and places.

One system or two — or more — is a highly abstract theoretical question, but often connected to a practical political one: what kind of political organizing should take priority? Should it always be class issues, labor struggles and other economic issues not differentiated along gender lines? Or is it legitimate

from a socialist point of view to give equal importance to distinctly women's issues?

Dual systems theorists will invariably give equal political importance to organizing around class or sex (or race) issues. Why would they not? But what political implications should be drawn from the one-system theoretical position, which I accept?

In my opinion — and I want to stress this — it does not follow that struggles around sex (or race) oppression should necessarily have a lower political priority. Socialist feminists try to integrate the two, whatever their views on the abstract question of one or two systems.

For example, contemporary socialist feminists support the legal right to abortion, like liberal feminists, but we combine that with the right to birth control, medical care, childcare, better and equal pay (certainly more than \$15/hour) — all the things necessary to give working-class women a genuine choice over their reproduction.

Luxemburg, I am pretty sure, assumed the one-system position, giving theoretical primacy to capitalism as a framework in which other kinds of oppression operate. On the practical political question, I can't say for sure, but I would like to think she would have the flexible position regarding political priorities (perhaps because that is my view).

Oppression and Exploitation

In "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle" of 1912, Luxemburg makes an important theoretical argument relevant to current debates. She writes the following:

"Only that work is productive which produces surplus value and yields capitalist profit — as long as the rule of capital and the wage system still exists. From this standpoint the dancer in a café, who makes a profit for her employer with her legs, is a productive working woman, while all the toil of the woman and mothers of the proletariat within the four walls of the home is considered unproductive work. This sounds crude and crazy, but it is an ac-

curate expression of the crudeness and craziness of today's capitalist economic order...."

I have used this quote more than once to clarify the meaning of (un)productive labor in capitalism and to distinguish oppression from capitalist exploitation.

Some feminists are very offended by the Marxist position that housework is unproductive labor, and some argue for "wages for housework." But as the quote from Luxemburg makes clear, designating housework as unproductive is hardly an insult, nor is it sexist. A carpenter who works for the government, or for that matter a public school teacher, are also "unproductive" in capitalist terms, though both — obviously, and very importantly — are productive in a general sense.

It's crucial to understand what "productive" means in capitalist terms, i.e. the production of surplus value, because it is this that makes the capitalist system tick.

There is more to be said about the domestic labor debate, but one important point is that even in 1912, as Luxemburg wrote, "millions of proletarian women ... produce capitalist profit just like men — in factories, workshops, agriculture, homework industries, offices and stores. They are productive therefore in the strictest economic sense of society today."

Luxemburg used this fact as an argument for suffrage; it showed that patriarchal conceptions of women's "proper role" had become simply ridiculous.

I agree with Luxemburg on this theoretical point and on its importance. However, I think we must be careful not to overstate its political importance.

Even if housework were productive of surplus value, it wouldn't follow that organizing housewives

should be a priority for socialists. Compare guards in private prisons who do produce surplus value. Though exploited by capital, they certainly would not be promising candidates for socialist organizing.

On the other hand, while public sector workers are not productive in this sense, they are a key sector for labor organizing today and should be, given the attacks on the public sector. Where socialists should put their best energies depends on many factors and we need to be alert to changing conditions.

Luxemburg's stress on the meaning of "productive" labor in this crazy capitalist system also helps to explain why capitalism is leading to the destruction of our planet and why we need to build a society based on production for human needs, not profit. Organizing around this issue has to be central to everyone today.

Luxemburg argued for a working-women's organization independent of the bourgeois women's movement, so that they could better fight for their specific needs, while at the same time supporting universal women's interests.

More controversially, she also supported independent self-organization within the working class and even among socialists, encouraging Zetkin to found a women's section of the Spartacus League. This position, I would point out, is ahead of many Marxists today.

So in conclusion, there is much that Luxemburg's life and work can offer to contemporary socialist feminists. We need not look to her for all the answers, and we might find some areas of disagreement, but no more than we would likely find in this room.

Against the Current

GREECE

From September 20 to February 4

ANTONIS DAVANELLOS ·

At that time, many analysts considered Tsipras to be a "hegemon" (a sort of dominant sovereign) and SYRIZA transformed into a party of the future for the long term. There were only a few of us who insisted—including, first and foremost, and to its credit, the leadership of PU—on several elements of instability in the overall situation:

1. That the elections of September 20 were a usurpation, made possible by one key element: The concrete measures of the third Memorandum had not been defined at the time of the elections, so their impact could not be evaluated by those going to the polls.
2. That the promise made by Tsipras during the campaign for a program of parallel management to be carried out by the SYRIZA-ANEL government—to counteract the effects of the Memorandum—amplified the public's disorientation, along with its illusions, especially owing to the terrible collapse in living conditions.
3. That the public's aversion toward New Democracy worked in favor of the Maximos Mansion (the official seat of the Prime Minister).

However, it was clear that this context was going to change over the coming months, and we could expect a new wave of social discontent as soon as the real measures required by the July 13 agreement, signed in Brussels by Tsipras and Euclide Tsakalotos, the current Finance Minister, took effect. Among the most important of these is the huge cuts in pensions.

Based on this, we believed that we were entering a period that would be marked by political instability.

We focused on this potential and began to plan our political intervention with an orientation toward a perspective of large-scale social and political struggles that would not be long in coming. This perspective ran counter to the majority of the political representatives to the left of SYRIZA.

Less than five months later, in February, this assessment has been confirmed to a degree and with a speed which surpassed even our expectations.

Tsipras and his general staff find themselves faced with the serious danger of an uncontrollable crisis, a veritable collapse. There is an open debate about the "expansion" of the parliamentary bloc which supports the SYRIZA government to include Leventis' Union of Centrists, To Potami (a centrist party, meaning "to the River" in Greek), and perhaps PASOK. This debate even extends to the potential to integrate the conservatives of New Democracy in some sort of national unity government formula or even the potential for new elections (the fourth in twelve months!), all demonstrating the depth of the instability.

As Zoe Konstantapoulou (the ex-president of the parliament under the first SYRIZA government) has reminded us, Tsipras himself defended measures like the Social Security cuts put forward by Giorios Katrougkalos (Minister of Labor, Social Insurance, and Social Solidarity), which could not have been imposed except under a government of national unity or a dictatorship.

A party like SYRIZA, despite its neoliberal transformation, cannot expect silence in carrying out such reactionary restrictions of democratic and social rights—especially not, speaking concretely, Social Security. These measures can only sharpen the conflicts between those who remain inside SYRIZA, in-

cluding clashes between municipal, regional and national elected officials.

At the root of the governmental crisis lies the sudden rise of a mass movement for the defense of Social Security. Recent admirers of the report on the impact of austerity by Tassos Giannitsis [3] (the head of Hellenic Petroleum from December 2009 to November 2011, and then Interior Minister in the so-called technocratic government of Lucas Papademos from November 11, 2011 to May 18, 2012) should not forget his precipitous fall, nor that of Kostas Simitis, who retired (including from his post as a national deputy for the port of Piraeus) after having been, until now, the all-powerful champion of "modernization."

Widespread participation in the demonstrations by members of the liberal professions (lawyers, researchers, scientists, doctors, etc.) and workers from the public sector, ports, airports, banks, courts and schools is expected for the February 3 mobilization—as well as massive road blocks organized by farmers, who joined the struggle at the beginning of January. This constitutes a particularly dangerous set of circumstances for the government; it is within the realm of possibility that the movement in defense of Social Security could win, and the Katrougkalos plan could be defeated.

The system's apologists are putting forward "analyses" that underestimate the importance of these mobilizations. The concept of "social automatism"—that is, a supposed disconnection between social movements and their political repercussions or effects—is reliving its glory days, this time propagated by currents of the "left."

They tell us that subcontracted or independent workers, public employees and farmers do not constitute homogenous groups and, therefore, they will fall victim to a kind of automatic fragmentation from uncontrollable centripetal forces.

Of course, we've always known that there are rich lawyers, professionals and farmers. We also know that there are political and trade union leaders who called for a "yes" vote on July 5, 2015, and who to-

day accept the terms of the third Memorandum. However, even this group feels compelled to participate in the demonstrations, if only to search for the possibility of coming to some sort of agreement with Katrougkalos in order to reduce the anger among the rank and file of their own organizations.

These conflicts give rise to new tasks for the radical left, a left which must undercut the influence of these concessionary leaderships, who have been coopted by power in many different ways. Popular Unity is working to move in this direction. But this dynamic does not change in the least our assessment that the mobilizations of the so-called independent workers and the farmers are of politically decisive importance. In any real movement of the masses, there is no such thing as chemical purity.

A second argument put forward by the system's apologists has to do with the supposed non-participation of workers, especially unionized workers. These lines are being written just before the February 4 general strike, and we do not yet know the scale of the response the workers will give to these desiccated cadavers masquerading as analysts. But the political atmosphere leading up to the strike is clear: the convergence of workers, farmers, liberal professionals, and public employees in the streets will raise the pressure to a level that bears all the signs of becoming a nightmare for the government.

Clearly, no one has the right to underestimate the importance of previous rounds of working-class resistance, even if they were of lesser magnitudes. As it happened, early efforts taken by the public employee ADEDY union, as well as unions from other sectors, opened the way, the path they forged has been transformed into a broad boulevard. We should focus all our attention on the power of the rank-and-file movement.

Under these conditions, the government is facing an additional problem. The creditors—who have their own problems stemming from a prolonged international crisis—refuse to provide any "relief." The directives coming from Europe demand only

that the austerity program be applied; in short, they demand the Greek government extends even more political support to the Europeans.

However, this time, it seems improbable that the Europeans will look kindly on any new governmental tactics (such as calling new elections) because these carry with them the risk of reversing the Memorandum's application, while they may increase destabilizing factors beyond the Greek borders.

Tsipras admits that he is seeking a "national consensus." The scenario of enlarging the government, with him keeping his post as prime minister, implies finding allies besides Leventis, To Potami and PASOK, who all may agree to play their roles, but this would hardly create an image of a significantly broadened political base.

Yet the potential for a real government of national unity, including New Democracy's participation, also poses the question of dispensing with the symbolic role that Tsipras himself has played for a whole period. And are there any forces inside SYRIZA itself who might consent to this sort of possibility, and offer themselves as at least a partial alternative to Tsipras?

This impasse brings us back, once again, to the potential for new elections. In the past, Tsipras reproached the left of his own party for trying to "es-

cape." This was in reference to debates and confrontations within SYRIZA: First, in relation to some left-wing SYRIZA MPs refusing to vote for the July 13, 2015 agreement; and, second, with respect to the date and technicalities of the September elections.

Now it turns out that he will likely need elections to escape from his shameful collapse. But this time, this tactic will not be easy: he can neither bank on a consensus among the creditors, nor count on cooperation from the state apparatus, nor rely on support from Greek elites. Moreover, a SYRIZA victory in new elections is far from guaranteed.

Conditions are changing rapidly. In this context, the radical left must intervene and participate with all its forces so that this round of struggles may win and defeat the counter reform. Therein lies the hope of overturning the third Memorandum and rendering the July 13 Brussels agreement null and void. This entails defending all social rights, those of the working class in a broad sense as well, as those of its allies (from farmers to sections of the middle classes), so that the bill for the crisis can be passed on to the rulers and the rich who caused it in the first place.

Translated by Todd Chretien

Socialist Worker

NUCLEAR POWER

Fukushima After Five Years

CHIE MATSUMOTO ·

In the five years since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, at least 100,000 people remain displaced; 80 people have committed suicide in Fukushima alone over the loss of their families, assets and hope for the future (as of December 2015, according to the Reconstruction Ministry and the Cabinet Office); radiation contamination continues to spread; and people still gather from across and outside Japan to chant anti-nuclear slogans at the Prime Minister's Residence in Tokyo every Friday.

The Japanese government seems to have forgotten about the major nuclear cleanup that is still ongoing and in need of 3000 workers every day at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) plant about 100 kilometers from Tokyo.

The government has also reactivated a dormant plant in the southern province of Kagoshima and plans to resume operation of another one in Fukui Prefecture in the north.

With a change of government leadership only six months after the disaster, Japan started marketing nuclear technology to Jordan, Vietnam, Turkey and South Africa among other countries, all of which were met with strong domestic protests. India, however, is to become the first country next year to sign a nuclear deal with Japan since the disaster. Japan ratified the UN non-proliferation treaty in 1976.

Protest Within

People joined their counterparts in speaking against Japan's nuclear export deals, seeking zero

nuclear power and a shift to renewables since the day of the disaster.

They have staged protests at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which oversees the nuclear industry. Mothers spoke up at these protests for the first time in their lives; younger people launched a hunger strike to call for the eradication of nuclear plants.

They sat in at METI, and the tent was erected in September 2011, immediately becoming the center of Japan's and the world's anti-nuclear movement. People have slept in the tent, gone to work from the tent, staged year-end anti-nuclear concerts in front of it and defended themselves against rightwing thugs who intended to destroy it.

Less known than Occupy Wall Street, the METI tent has become one of the world's longest occupations, along with the one against U.S. bases in Okinawa.

Now the tent and the occupiers are in a lawsuit against the ministry, which is claiming ownership of the land and demanding compensation for the last five years. The people have lost in the lower court, and the higher court dismissed their appeal. The tent is now subjected to eviction.

Listen to Workers' Voices

While we should push our movement forward to eradicate nuclear power, some plant workers feel their voices are not heard.

"I don't see any plant workers in the movement," Ryusuke Umeda said. The 80-year-old former plant worker calls on anti-nuke protesters to learn about the unsafe, radioactive working conditions at nuclear plants.

"I want people to question whether health and safety education is properly offered to the workers and in what kind of environment they are forced to work," Umeda said. "Knowing that will make you feel even more determined to wipe out all nuclear plants from the earth. For that, I will spend the rest of my short life convincing people how badly we need that."

Umeda has filed a lawsuit demanding workers' compensation. He claims he has contracted myocardial infarction and other ailments from working at nuclear plants for 43 days in 1979. As many plant workers end up suffering serious health deterioration, they are often deprived of further employment and faced with heavy medical costs. Umeda, too, is living off government subsidies.

Umeda's case is the first lawsuit filed by a plant worker demanding workers' compensation for his heart disorder. The same condition has been recognized by the state for A-bomb victims.

Hiroshi Masumoto is another one who ended up selling his house to compensate for his medical bills and living on government subsidies. The 82-year-old native of Kitakyushu City in southern Japan must rely on an oxygen tank to breathe. Masumoto, who managed the level of radiation exposure for his workers at several nuclear plants, is also engaged in a lawsuit to qualify for workers' compensation.

More than 6000 workers go in and out of the Daiichi plant in Fukushima every day, according to TEPCO. Some 300 additional people continue to decontaminate the no-go zones and fill black flexible container bags with radioactive soil to prepare for the victims' return home. Thousands of these black bags are piled up with no place to be taken.

The general contractors, their subsidiaries and TEPCO are running out of workers fast. A recent newspaper report said foreigners have been recruited for the cleanup in and around the Fukushima plant.

I have also interviewed a Bangladeshi man in central Kanagawa Prefecture who took a job offered by

a Brazilian recruiter to work at the plant. He jumped on the truck with several other foreigners, he said. The pay was about 30% better than the construction work he had then.

The 43-year-old man left the job, however, in a few days because he "got scared" of the effect of radiation on his health. He may take it again, though, if he needs the money, he said.

A Survivor's Account

I remember meeting Tomoya Watanabe on March 16, 2011, at a school gymnasium-turned emergency shelter in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture. I went up to the snowy countryside to get plant workers' testimonies after the disaster.

No TEPCO worker was willing to talk to us as they were afraid of reprimand. Watanabe was one of the very few outsourced workers who agreed to tell us about his experience when the quake struck.

At the shelter, he was helping the kitchen to serve hundreds of Namie residents like himself who evacuated from their town only ten kilometers from the Daiichi plant.

Watanabe started supervising workers at the Daiichi plant after he ended his assignment at Fukushima Daini plant, moved on to Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant and worked there until it underwent a regular inspection.

He recounted the day of the disaster to me. As a supervisor, he was finally able to leave the site only after he sent other workers to safety and confirmed the scale of damage inside the building next to the reactor. Realizing he was lucky to be alive, he swore never to return to that sort of work.

Half a year later, when I went up to interview him and other workers in Fukushima again, Watanabe told me he was starting a small company. I was pleased and inspired to find out that he was not discouraged by the disaster. But when I heard his company recruits and assigns people to work at nuclear plants, I could not hide the shock.

"That's life," he told me at the temporary housing he lived in with his family. "I need work." Watanabe is not the only one who finds working in nuclear power plants to be his lifelong vocation. Many men who live in the host towns of nuclear plants recognize the mutual dependency.

Last year, he found me on Facebook and told me about his company that specializes in decontamination near the Fukushima plant. At least his business is successful.

Ever since thousands began to return for work at the Daiichi plant, the labor ministry has so far approved only one case of workers' compensation. That happened only last year; the man in his 40s was diagnosed with leukemia from working at the Fukushima plant for a year and half.

Need to Unionize

While the Fukushima disaster is still ongoing and thousands of workers are required for the cleanup,

we need to demand appropriate health and safety measures, as well as raising awareness about the rights of the workers, especially casual workers.

Labor activists along with a union in Fukushima and a day laborers' union in Tokyo have been trying to organize casual workers. Unfortunately, their effort has not seen a big success, but some decontamination workers organized to negotiate for their unpaid risk allowance.

We need to continue organizing while also working together with our comrades outside of Japan for a nuclear-free society. In March this year, we are scheduled to hold a five-day "World Social Forum 2016" in Tokyo to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Fukushima disaster under the slogan, "toward another world without nukes."

The scar may be too deep to heal with time, but remembering Fukushima is what's important for our future.

Against the Current

INDIA

Defend the JNU students: Defend academic freedom.

RADICAL SOCIALIST ·

A programme titled Country Without a Post Office, was organized to remind people of how Afzal Guru had been hanged. That Afzal Guru had been hanged under deeply disturbing circumstances, despite even higher courts admitting that his so-called confession was based on tortures, and that he admittedly did not belong to any terrorist organisation and had not himself been part of the attack on the Parliament, has been repeatedly stressed. The Supreme Court of India said he must be hanged for the "collective conscience of society" – they did not simply say it was the rarest of rare cases. Not just we, or some JNU students, but many people across India, including eminent jurists, have questioned his hanging. And Universities have been historically the place where critical views have been aired, difficult conversations held, so that progress in understanding is made. The combination of neoliberal and Hindutva politics that is driving the Modi regime can tolerate neither. Hence the attack.

During the programme, some students had raised slogans about destroying India. Using this as a pretext, the organisers, and the President of the JNUSU, have been accused of sedition, not just by some hole in the corner Sanghi, but by the Home Minister, no less. The Police was sent in, with full cooperation of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor, who acted in the most cringing, bootlicking tradition of supple-spined low-grade academics, rather than that of a scholarly tradition, like the one represented by the former Deans who have issued a statement of condemnation.

What is significant is that the police went in to arrest the President of the JNU Students Union, Kanhaiya Kumar, a member of the AISF, while the BJP continues to be in alliance with the PDP in J and K. This shows that dissent over the hanging of Guru is only a part of their concern. Attacking leftists is much more central. This was followed by police moving into the campus, with lists of names, and carrying out raids in hostels, male police moving into women's hostels, police coming in without search warrants with names on them. It was argued that because the charges were sedition, this was permissible. This is a blatant lie. And this has to be challenged in every way. It is also significant that no proper inquiry was held. Instead, the Home Minister issued a statement condemning anti-nationals, and the police swung into action. Clearly, the decision to target JNU had been taken first, and pretexts found later.

But it is indeed true, that Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, or the anti-Sedition clause, has been invoked. The origin of this law goes back to colonial times. The Privy Council had ruled that acts like incitement to violence and insurrection are immaterial while deciding the culpability of a person charged with sedition. This position was upheld in *Queen Empress Vs. Bal Gangadhar Tilak* (1897).

The bourgeois democracy created in independent India was built to protect the powers and rights of the elite. Accordingly, the law on sedition was retained. And it was reiterated, though with slight restraints, in the case of Kedar Nath Singh. Kedar Nath, a member of the Forward Communist Party in Bihar, who accused the Congress of corruption, black-marketing and tyranny and targeted Vinobha Bhave's attempts to redistribute land. He talked about a revolution that would overthrow capitalists,

zamindars and Congress leaders. The Supreme Court warned against excessively broad interpretations, but accepted that acts that bring the Government into contempt and hatred are indeed seditious.

So while a small measure of protection is given, governments can start by applying S. 124A against anyone condemning the government strongly, by arguing that such condemnation brings the government into contempt or hatred. Despite the stricter construction adopted by the Supreme Court, the law enforcement agencies have always used it against artists, public men, intellectuals, et al for criticising the governments.

But what is more to the point is, the JNUSU president had rejected the slogan raised by a few others (according to one version, by ABVP provocateurs). The real reason for bringing in the sedition charge is to use ultranationalist politics to smash the left politics. Kanhaiya Kumar, as the by now widely distributed video shows, was speaking on equitable development and against fundamentalist violence and castigated the Hindutva forces for being sexist, anti-democratic and casteist, which are promoting big capital. He also questioned why Rohith Venula had to die, and why Afzal Guru had been hanged?

His questions on institutionalized violence and lapses on constitutional rights of everyone in the campus were direct slaps on the face of the new VC of JNU. He asked the JNU administration has been working for whom and in whose interest. He challenged forcefully the attempt to cover-up the shame of various scams like Vyapam and the Bank Loan scam, the communal, casteist agenda of RSS, and the blatant commercialization of education. In other words, the JNUSU was taking on too many leftist political issues and had to be attacked.

In one sense, it is true that fascists are nationalists. It is the fascist aim to unite people behind them, by using nationalism of an ultra-jingoistic brand. Their nationalism is a nationalism that asks people to give up all critical faculties and rally behind "the flag", thereby also rallying behind regimes that

fight for the elite. If "nation" means the majority of toiling people, elite nationalism never works for them. What's so 'nationalist' and 'pro-India' about the BJP and its cronies? Their wanton destruction of India's environment? Their intimidation and harassment of adivasi and dalit-bahujan citizens? Their dogged determination not to grant equal rights to LGBTQ Indians? Their desire to 'track' every pregnant Indian woman?

What is nationalistic about fighting for the profits of the Ambanis and Adanis? This is what nationalism means – catering to the privileged, the elite, looking after the interests of the wealthy, the upper castes, and the Hindutva forces.

By contrast, when one talks about the exploitation of workers, when one talks about brutal exploitation and oppression of adivasis, when one talks about rapes and murders by the army in Manipur, when one talks about Kunan Poshpora, one becomes an "anti-national". As Hermann Goring remarked, during the Nuremburg trials: "Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia nor in England nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood ... the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists (read 'anti-nationals') for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country." In other words, when there are signs of unrest, say that there is a threat from an enemy and denounce anti-nationals. There is thus a vast gulf between a formal ideology called nationalism, and looking after the real interests of the majority of the nation.

Left and Toilers' Unity for Anti-fascism:

We need to defend the rights of the JNU students. We need to understand that what has happened in JNU is a violent attack on the freedom of expression. If issues like Guru's hanging cannot be debated even in a University space, where people are supposed to be using their critical faculties, then where can they be debated? And let us be clear that

no symmetry is being applied here. When a Godse temple comes up, or when Hindutva forces declare 26th January as a Black Day, they are not denounced as anti-nationals. For after all, these so-called fringe elements are only articulating openly what the entire Hindutva brigade feels secretly.

We condemn the gross misuse of the term anti-national to attack all critical thinking, all space for dissent. It is the same fascist nationalism that had led to the punishment of the five Dalit students in Hyderabad Central University. It is not coincidental that JNUSU happened to be one of the student unions strongly supporting the countrywide student unrest since the suicide of Rohith Vemula.

Neoliberals want universities to churn out superior trained workers and nothing more. Hindutva wants dumb acquiescence to its agenda of anti-Muslim, anti-dalit, jingoistic politics. Since Universities are not rolling over and playing dead, the regime is using force to try and silence them.

It is significant that fascists now no less than in the past are clearer about their enemies than much of

the left is about fighting them. Adolf Hitler, in denouncing "Marxists", had made no distinctions between Social Democrats and Communists, between Trotskyists and Stalinists, nor indeed did he spare the most moderate trade unionist from his focus. In the same way, Ambedkarists, electoral left, radical left, Maoist, nobody is excluded from the gunpoint of the present day fascists. Under the circumstances, only a united front of all the left, all genuine anti-communal and anti-brahmanical forces, and of all the social forces fighting against capitalist exploitation, patriarchy, can resist them.

Unite to resist. Demand:

Release Kanhaiya Kumar, President JNUSU and the other arrested students

Release S.A.R. Geelani, Centre for Release of Political Prisoners

Drop all charges against them and all sec 124A charges against the "unknown persons"

February 13 2016

Radical Socialist

USA

An Extraordinary Moment

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

In the end, the one sure prediction about the 2016 election is that the power of corporate capital will not be touched. That's the nature of what's called "bourgeois democracy." But almost everything else is up for grabs.

What's happening to this society can be seen most intensely in the case of Flint, Michigan, where manic cost-cutting and eliminating democracy led to the poisoning of the city's water supply and its population. What was a local story is now, of course, a leading national and international news headline. The health costs are incalculable, and the funds needed for basic repair of pipes destroyed by corrosive river water vastly exceed the state's capacity. [1]

This is the kind of thing that's been happening to Native American communities for generations, and to many rural areas with the advent of fracking that puts poisons into the water supplies. But aside from a brief mention in a Democratic candidates' debate, the poisoning of Flint — and other tragedies resulting from cutting and privatizing essential services for working and poor people — are at most marginal to the electoral season.

At the same time, heroin addiction and its fatal consequences are sweeping large sections of small town and rural white America — a byproduct of despair and a consequence of a catastrophically failed "war on drugs" that has already devastated U.S. inner cities and much of Mexico and Central America.

Bernie Sanders is the one candidate who denounces the power of "the billionaire class" and intends to do something about it. The youth and working class energy that fuels his campaign illustrates the pro-

found appeal of his program of single-payer health care, expanded social security, tuition-free public universities, a \$15 minimum wage and "political revolution" against Wall Street and "too big to exist" banks.

America is not in the midst of a mass popular turn to the right. There's a polarization evidenced on the right by heightened white racism and nativism, and yet a willingness among millions to support an avowed democratic socialist. The Democratic party establishment, however, is 99% convinced that the socialist Sanders is not electable — and one percent utterly terrified that he just might be, in view of what might emerge from the Republican rat pack.

To what lengths the Democratic leadership might go in the effort to head Sanders off will be tested in the coming primaries. His candidacy presents itself as essential to the Democratic campaign by bringing in young and working class folks who are notably tepid in their enthusiasm for Clinton. Those prospects for "unity" might be damaged if the party goes deep into its bag of dirty tricks to sideline Sanders — by race-baiting, redbaiting or relying on unelected super-delegates to seal the Clinton nomination.

Whatever the sound and fury emanating from the nomination process, corporate America, the banks, Wall Street and the hedge funds can be sure that the Democratic Party remains in safe hands. They prospered under Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, as they did under George W. Bush in between, and the heated rhetoric of a political campaign won't change the reality that, as Sanders has pithily put it, "it's Wall Street that regulates Congress."

Republican Agendas

The Republican Party presents a weird picture. It remains the preferential option for most of corporate America. For at least the short and medium term, its control of the U.S. House of Representatives remains ensured by the combined effects of district gerrymandering and state voter suppression laws. The Senate, tilted as it is toward small, rural and conservative states, is likely also to retain a Republican edge. But to maintain its usefulness to the U.S. ruling class as a national governing party, the GOP needs a leadership to maintain the tenuous cohesion of a party pulling in three partly disparate directions.

First of course there's the "mainstream" traditional agenda of big business: cut corporate taxes and social services, smash what's left of union power, protect the insurance and pharmaceutical industries, stuff the military with every possible weapons system, privatize social security if they can get away with it. It's represented by those candidates media-certified as "moderate."

Second is the social reactionary thrust of the religious right — seeking to restore the mythical "Christian nation" that America never was, eliminate abortion and LGBT rights, etc. — as represented by Ted Cruz and Ben Carson. These two components have been mainstays of Republican power for decades.

A third trend, after being mostly closeted, has come to the fore in the sordid spectacle that is Donald Trump. This is a thrust toward a U.S. counterpart of the National Front in France, not particularly religious but overtly anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, aggressively nationalist and white-supremacist — sentiments that have coagulated around white Americans' resentment and insecurity. Does Trump believe most of his own babble? Probably not, but that doesn't matter.

The relatively new public prominence of this kind of ugly politics has caused many well-meaning people to freak out over the "fascist Trump menace." This overlooks three essential facts: (i) Trump himself is not an organizer or political leader; (ii) in

substance, most of the other Republican candidates are even worse; and (iii) the Republican leadership cannot allow him to become the party nominee without sacrificing the party's 2016 election campaign and risking the international credibility of the United States.

The three Republican agenda components aren't inherently incompatible. Indeed they strongly overlap, especially when it comes to targeting those at the bottom of capitalist society's heap. Meld them successfully, and you can have a serious rightwing powerhouse. But the trick is that the second and third — the religious right and semi-fascist nativism — need to remain subordinated to the first, the profit-driven "establishment" corporate agenda. Otherwise, a party like the National Front has its uses (as it does in France) but can't be trusted to take real control of government.

If an actual Trump nomination seems unthinkable for the party and for U.S. imperialism — and he's not going to the convention with the numbers of committed delegates for a first-ballot majority — it's also problematic that the vicious and creepy Ted Cruz has strong appeal to the religious-right base but limited reach beyond it. After Iowa and New Hampshire, the definitive "establishment" candidate had yet to emerge.

A narrative constructed by centrist pundits, seeking to dismiss both the Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump campaigns, calls them symmetrical expressions of "populist revolt." Even leaving aside Sanders' long record of activism, governance as Burlington mayor and legislative advocacy in the U.S. Congress and Senate — compared with Trump's career as celebrity windbag — the comparison is absurd.

Bernie Sanders' response to the crisis of working-class Americans is an appeal to people's instincts of social solidarity and hopeful cooperative spirit. That's the meaning of his "democratic socialism" and his call for expanded economic rights. Trump's appeal is to the worst instincts of scapegoating "Others" — in the form of Muslims, Mexicans or

"political correctness." (With "enemies" who are powerful, like Vladimir Putin, Trump claims he can make brilliant deals.) Both sets of human instincts certainly exist, but there is no "symmetry" in seeking to tap them.

Contours of Crisis and Resistance

The story of Flint is now well known. While environmental racism and class bias are ubiquitous, there are few cases as spectacular and ruinous as the poisoning of a city that's 52% African American and hard-hit by industrial decline. In 2014, a state-appointed "Emergency Manager" ordered the city to switch its water supply from the clean and safe Detroit system to the Flint River, without the anti-corrosive chemical protection that Detroit provided.

When filthy water immediately began pouring from Flint residents' taps, citizens' complaints were arrogantly dismissed, although a local GM plant was allowed to switch back to the Detroit system when the Flint River water was fouling its car engines. Coverup, malfeasance and public lies by the state Department of Environmental Quality and Governor Rick Snyder's office prevailed until Michigan ACLU investigative reporter Curt Guyette and Virginia Tech University researchers performed tests that showed shockingly high lead levels, ten or even 100 times higher than federal standards allow. The extent of permanent health damage to children will take years to measure.

Almost unbelievably, the emergency manager who presided over the catastrophe in Flint, an administrator named Darnell Earley, has not gone underground or into a well-deserved prison cell but went on to be appointed the EM of Detroit Public Schools. Under state control many Detroit schools have been turned over to a new entity called the Educational Achievement Authority, a disastrous failure, while DPS schools themselves are mold and vermin-infested, poorly heated and horrendously overcrowded with class sizes around 45-50.

Teachers have carried out a wave of independent sick-outs, tacitly supported although not organized by their union which has only recently emerged from a period of internal turmoil. Importantly, there is massive community sympathy for the teachers and overwhelming anger toward the Emergency Manager and Governor Snyder, with demands mounting to force Snyder's resignation. [2]

Snyder, of course, is the vicious and cynical representative of a vicious and cynical system. The fact that he's so discredited gives important space to the Detroit teachers and other insurgent movements. The same can be said of the powerful upsurge in Chicago against Democratic "Mayor One Percent" Rahm Emanuel, who's up to his eyeballs in the coverup of murderous police brutality.

Across the country the activities of Black Lives Matter, protests around crushing student debts as well as institutional racism and sexual harassment on college campuses, and the growing fight for a \$15 hourly minimum wage have become sufficiently powerful that they can't be written off.

Beyond the Election

The real-life daily disasters ripping through this society are driving an unusual political campaign, with results not easily predictable.

But if 2016 eventually proves to be a "watershed" year, it will be the result of newly rising movements, beyond the election, putting the heat on the corporate powers that have put a chokehold on politics and society. Among other burning questions: Can Black Lives Matter sustain its inspirational and mobilizing power? Can the movements around climate change link that emergency to the fights for environmental justice in Flint and beyond?

And where will the youth and labor support for Bernie Sanders ultimately turn? Might it continue in a new and perhaps independent political form? Will those forces then be able to build the necessary alliances with African American, Latino and immigrant forces? Can a new social alliance develop that

can offer serious solutions for working class folks who are attracted to the demagogic and lying promises of Donald Trump?

A real breakthrough in politics depends on the answers and, to some extent, how the U.S. left responds to the challenges they present.

Readers interested in an alternative to the parties of corporate capital may look at the presidential

campaign website of Dr. Jill Stein, www.jill2016.com.

Labor for Bernie will hold a national meeting April 1, just before the opening session the Labor Notes conference in Chicago. Conference registration information is online here:

Against the Current

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



SYRIA:

Origins, dynamics and developments of the revolutionary process

JOSEPH DAHER · 1 March 2016

As you often remark in your articles the Syrian revolution was the combined result of three factors: the authoritarianism of the regime, the neoliberalism implementation and the revolutionary wave which started at Tunisia. Would you like to enlarge on that?

I would just like to remind indeed that the Syrian revolutionary process is part of the regional uprising that started in December Tunisia spreading to Egypt then in January and then the rest of the region. These uprising, although with counter revolutions attacks from ancient regime, Islamic fundamentalist forces and various imperialist and sub imperialist forces, have and continue to shaken the entire MENA region, with new popular uprisings erupting last summer in Lebanon and Iraq.

The revolutionaries in Syria are fighting like the other activists in the countries of the region for freedom and dignity in the absence of democracy and increasing social inequalities and corruption of the elites.

The mass basis of the popular movement in Syria is that of economically marginalized urban and rural workers, and urban employees and self-employed workers, who have borne the brunt of the implementation of neoliberal policies, which accelerated the crony capitalist nature of the Assad regime, in particular since the coming to power of Bashar al-Assad in 2000 succeeding his father Hafez, who was in power since 1970. The geography of the revolts in Idlib and Deraa, as well as in other rural areas, all historical strongholds of the Baath party which had not played a large role in the insurgency of the early 1980s, including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, shows the involvement of

the victims of neo-liberalism in this revolution. The initiative fell to the periphery of the large cities of Damascus and Aleppo, from villages to medium sized cities. The uprising in the city of Deraa, regarded as a bastion of the Ba'ath, from where a number of senior dignitaries of the Baath originated, like vice-chair Farouk el Shareh, embodied the bankruptcy of a state and its elites, who had for years abandoned to their own fate the rural classes and the outlying cities which they came from, to the benefit of policies promoting the bourgeois classes of Damascus and Aleppo. This tension between the centre and the peripheries of the country fully justifies a "materialistic" approach specifying the "internal" causes of the Syrian revolution.

Neo liberal policies were accelerated massively when Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000 after the death of his father Hafez Al-Assad, who was in power since 1970. These policies, accelerated by the savage repression of any popular or working class protest since the early 2000s, have had devastating effects. At the same time, the Assad regime became more dependent on the Assad Makhoul family clan, with a resulting over concentration of patronage, opportunities and corruption in its hands at the expense of the older regime clients. Rami Makhoul, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad, represented the mafia-style process of privatisation led by the regime. A process of privatization created new monopolies in the hands of relatives of Bashar al-Assad, while the quality of goods and services declined.

Assad also weakened the Baath party apparatus and workers and peasant unions (more organized as corporations) because they were viewed as obstacles to neo liberal economic reform. So the

regime starved them of funds and attacked their powers of patronage. As explained by Raymond Hinnebusch, a scholar, "this debilitated the regime's organised connection to its constituency and its penetration of neighborhoods and villages. The gap was partly filled by the security services, which however were underpaid, corrupt and lax, moreover, Assad curbing of their ability to dispense patronage and legal exemptions, such as tolerance of smuggling, reduced their ability to co-opt societal notables such as tribal elders, symptomatic of this was the mid decade outbreak of several localized sectarian / tribal conflicts (between Bedouin and Druze in Sweida, and between Alawis and Ismaelis in Masyaf), which manifested an erosion of the regime. Where citizens would once have gone to local party or union officials for redress or access, increasingly they approached tribal, sectarian and religious notables."

On the economic level, the private sector before the popular uprising was contributing to the up to 65% of the GDP (and more than 70% according to other estimates), while it is also the biggest employer as approximately 75% of the labor force in Syria work in the private sector.

On the eve of the uprising of March 2011, the unemployment rate stood at 14.9%, according to official figures — 20-25% according to other sources; it was respectively 33.7% and 39.3% among those aged 20-24 and 15-19 years. In 2007, the percentage of Syrians living below the poverty line was 33 %, which represented approximately seven million people, while 30% of them were just above this level. The proportion of poor is higher in rural areas (62 %) than in urban areas (38 %). Poverty is more widespread, more rooted and more marked (58.1 %) in the northwest and northeast (the provinces of Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh), where 45% of the population lives.

Real GDP growth and real per capita income has been decreasing since the beginning of the 90s. This has pushed the regime to continue its neo liberal policies and search for more private capitals. Meanwhile ownership of land was increasingly con-

centrated in a small number of hands. A frontline of a satirical newspaper put it well "after 43 years of socialism, feudalism returns."

In agriculture, the privatization of land at the expense of several hundreds of thousands of peasants from the northeast, because of drought between 2007 and 2009 in which one million peasants received international aid and food supplies, while 300,000 persons were driven to Damascus, Aleppo and other cities, should not be perceived as the consequence of a simple natural disaster. Even before the drought, between 2002 and 2008 Syria had lost 40% of its agricultural workforce, dropping from 1.4 million to 800,000 workers. Between 2006 and 2010, the total workers employed in agriculture dropped in the Jazira region (north east of Syria) by 20%. The growth and intensification of the exploitation of the land by big agribusiness companies – including lands previously retained for grazing, and even the illegal drilling of wells -, as well as the establishment of lines of selective water meeting the requirements of the new major owners - facilitated the corruption of the local administration which accompanied the agricultural crisis.

In 2008, 28% of farmers were exploiting 75% of irrigated land, while 49% of them had only 10% of the latter, which is evidence of the progress of inequalities within agriculture. Small farmers with land on the outskirts of cities were actually selling their smallholdings for increasingly large amounts as funds from abroad (particularly the Gulf) pour into the country.

The Assad regime policies were totally led by neo liberal dynamics, with its priority on capital accumulation and growth to the neglect of equality and distribution. The private sector became the main agent for investments and employment, which however could not fill the gap left by the public sector decline. In the same time, investments by the state in social services diminished considerably, while subsidies were progressively removed or diminished in agriculture inputs, fuel, etc.... The responsibility of social services was given increasingly

to private charities, and therefore bourgeoisie and conservative layers of the society. In the area of health notably, the regime withdrew considerably, letting an increasing space to charitable associations, and especially religious ones. In 2004, Of 584 charitable organizations, 290 were registered Islamic organizations, of which most are active in Damascus and its suburbs. They are based in local mosques and poor neighborhoods. Of the more than 100 charitable organizations in the capital, approximately 80 per cent are Sunni Islamic: these operate a network that serves about 73,000 families with a budget with a budget of around 842 millions of Syrian Pounds (SP) or 18 millions of dollars to more than 73000 families.

Neo-liberal policies have re-enforced religious associations, both Islamic and Christian, in Syria and their network of diffusion, increasing their role in society at the expense of the State. Bashar al-Assad actually continued a strategy of fostering Islamic conservative sectors as his father did.

We should not forget as well the regime's authoritarianism against any form of dissent in the country and this for decades,

In Syria, as in other Arab countries, there are organizations and parties which are self defined as "left wing" but which have supported the dictatorial regimes. What is the precise form of this phenomenon in Syria and what were its impacts on the popular and workers' movements?

Many of the left stalinist groups gathered within the National Progressive Front, a coalition of forces owing allegiance to the regime, did not have a large following so it did not have any kind of harsh consequences, while in addition example many youth members of the Qassioun faction, one of the largest communist trends coopted into the state coalition the national progressive front, left the party because they were disgusted by the behavior of their leadership supporting the Assad regime.

Regarding the worker's movement, the problem is that the leadership of the trade unions were com-

pletely controlled by the regime and Baath party. The independent popular organizations – trade unions, professional groups (such as those of doctors, lawyers, engineers or pharmacists), civic associations and so on – have been repressed, and mostly dissolved in 1980, after a decade of hard struggle at the Assad regime. They had been hitherto in the forefront of fighting for a return to democratic freedoms and the lifting of the state of emergency. In 1980, these organizations were replaced by structures placed under the direct control of the state.

The regime thus imposed its total domination on key sectors of society, such as the universities and the army. It banned all independent political activity, except of course that of the Baath Party, which was alone allowed to organize conferences and public demonstrations, from campuses to barracks, or publish and disseminate a newspaper. Even the political parties allied to it within the National Progressive Front did not have the right to organize, make propaganda or to have a small official presence in the public space. We will analyze later the specific role of the Baath party, in particular after the coming to power of Hafez al Assad. It is sufficient to note here that it controlled a wide range of corporatist, so-called popular, organizations, grouping peasants, youth, women and so on, through which many sectors of society have been placed under the tutelage of the regime. The role of the Ba'ath, thus transformed into an instrument of control of society, and thus deprived of any ideological dynamism, was therefore deeply changed with the arrival of Hafez al Assad in power. The organization of the party was changed, with the suppression of internal elections and their replacement by a system of designation from above, of co-option, decided by the regime and the security services, while the elements opposed to the policies of the regime were repressed.

The repression also struck all the political parties who refused to submit to the diktat of Hafez al Assad and participate in the National Progressive Front (NPF). At the beginning of the 1970s, several

secular parties, in particular of the left, had been the targets of the regime, including the February 23 Movement (a radical Baath tendency, close to the former president Salah Jadid), the League of Communist Action (Rabita al amal al shuyu'i), part of whose members came from the Alawite community and, to a lesser extent, the Communist Party of the political Bureau (CPPB) of Ryad Turk. The national gathering, which included various parties of the left, had also been severely repressed in the early 1980s. During this decade, the Muslim Brotherhood was also affected strongly by the repression.

What were the demands of the people who participated in the demonstrations during the spring and summer of 2011? Was there, at this first stage of mobilization, any political force that attempted to express these demands? What were the organizational forms and on what level in the mass movement?

Initially the people asked for reforms with particular demands such as the end of the emergency state (that has been ongoing since 1963), the liberation of political prisoners, etc... in the first weeks, but following the brutal and violent of the regime's repression they started demanding the overthrow of the people.

The actors in this movement came from several components. In the first place, there were activists involved in the struggles against the regime before the uprising of 2011, in particular since the "Damascus Spring" (2001), coming from middle class layers, often young graduates and users of social networks. Their activities were aimed mainly at respect for democratic rights in Syria; some of them had already mobilized against the war in Iraq and for the Palestinian cause. They were in their great majority secular democrats belonging to all communities, including minorities such as the Alawites, Christians, Druze and so on.

Examples also include various activist groups from different regions of the country, like the Youth of

Daraya, on the outskirts of Damascus, who were socially active for almost ten years, launching a campaign against corruption or organizing a demonstration after the fall of Baghdad, in April 2003, in the course of which they were arrested under the pretext of "forming an unregistered political group and spreading sectarianism". The Youth of Daraya drew on historical examples of non-violent movements. They formed a mobile library and distributed books to the people of their neighbourhood. They cleaned the streets. They showed films on Gandhi in a mosque.

We had also the example of the Syrian Revolutionary Youth, a grassroots movement offering a third alternative beyond the regime/Islamists binary, whose clear, principled stance made it the target of extreme regime persecution. Established by a group of activists from Rukneddine, the Syrian Revolutionary Youth advanced a vision of social justice where free education, free health care, gender equality, the liberation of the occupied Golan Heights, and liberation of Palestine, were central to their demands. The group has almost fully been dissolved as a collective, while some members of the Syrian Revolutionary Youth continue to languish in Syrian regime jails.

All these activists were present from the beginning of the uprising, on 16 March 2011. They have up until now played up an important role within the grassroots committees and in the development of peaceful actions against the regime. The General Commission of the Syrian Revolution, a coalition of local committees, was headed notably by Suhair Attassi, a long-term opposition activist from a prestigious political family and moderator of the Forum Jamal Attassi, prohibited by the regime in 2000. She was held for ten days following the demonstration of 16 March 2011, of which she was accused of being one of the organizers. She now lives in exile, after having spent months in hiding. The Coordination of Local Committees (CLC), another important body, is led by the lawyer and activist Razan Zaitoune, who has been kidnapped in 2013 December, most probably by Jaysh Al-Islam.

The regime specifically targeted these activists, who had initiated demonstrations, civil disobedience actions and campaigns in favour of strikes, because of their qualities as organizers and a democratic and secular position, which undermined the propaganda of the regime that denounced a conspiracy of armed extremist Islamist groups. Some of them were imprisoned, killed or forced into exile, even if they are nevertheless still present in spite of fierce repression. They play an important role in the ongoing revolutionary process by trying to articulate between the various forms of popular resistance to the regime.

The second and undoubtedly the most important component of the Syrian revolutionary movement is that of economically marginalized urban and rural workers, and urban employees and self-employed workers, who have borne the brunt of the implementation of neoliberal policies, in particular since the coming to power of President Bashar al-Assad. As we said before, the geography of the revolts in Idlib and Deraa, as well as in other rural areas, all historical strongholds of the Baath party which had not played a large role in the insurgency of the early 1980s, including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, shows the involvement of the victims of neo-liberalism in this revolution. From this component of the current protests emerged some of those who joined the armed groups of the FSA (Free Syrian Army), first developed to defend peaceful demonstrations and since then adopting more offensive policies.

Similarly, we can see groups of protesters who opposed the regime around sheikhs in certain neighbourhoods and some tribes in some regions. That is why many of them were arrested, while others have had to flee the country. Finally, elements of the more "traditional" opposition are also involved in the popular movement, among them some Kurdish parties, left-wing groups, nationalists, liberals and Islamists.

From the beginning of the revolution, the main forms of organization have been the people's coordination committees at the level of villages, neigh-

bourhoods, cities and regions. These popular committees were the real spearhead of the movement, mobilizing the people for the demonstrations. Subsequently, in the areas liberated from the yoke of the regime they have developed forms of self-organization based on the organization of the masses. Popular elected councils have emerged to manage these liberated regions, proving that it is the regime that caused the anarchy, and not the people.

In some regions liberated from the armed forces of the regime, civil administrations have also been put in place to compensate for the absence of the state and to fulfil its role in many areas, such as schools, hospitals, roads, and water, electricity and communications services. These civilian administrations are appointed through elections by popular consensus and have for their main tasks the provision of services like administration and law and order.

We would like you to speak us about Free Syrian Army: How was it formed? Was it tied to specific political forces? Did it receive any financial support from other states? And finally why was it dissolved?

Organised armed resistance only started in July 2011 with the establishment of the Free Syrian Army and Movement of Free Officers. Several elements fostered the emergence of armed groups after more than seven months of demonstrations and peaceful resistance. In the first place, the violent repression of the regime against peaceful demonstrators and against the leaders of the popular movement, killed, arrested or forced into exile. This radicalized the movement and helped to push forward activists more inclined to resist with weapons. More and more groups of citizens took up arms to defend their demonstrations and their homes against the chabihis [militiamen paid by the regime, perpetrators of countless abuses], the security services and the army.

In the second place, the increasing number of desertions from the army, in particular of ranking soldiers refusing to fire on peaceful demonstrators. The reluctance of soldiers to fire on peaceful

protests provoked many mutinies and desertions. It is also necessary to mention the willingness of the regime to militarize the revolution by leaving weapons on the fields of battle or by increasing the number of weapons on the market and/or lowering the price of weapons to justify the discourse of the regime that they were fighting against armed extremist groups.

And finally, there was the willingness of political currents and/or states, notably private donors and networks in the Gulf monarchies, with the approval of their ruling classes, to fund specific armed groups to strengthen the support they had or establish relays on the ground. The various fundings from Saudi Arabia and Qatar have actually made problems to unify the armed opposition, while various groups were competing to try to get funded by these states and adopting increasingly for some an Islamic discourse to please their sponsors.

The members of the groups of the armed opposition of the FSA originated socially from the majority component of the revolutionary movement: mainly marginalized workers of the cities and the countryside, members of the subaltern and middle classes who have suffered from the acceleration of neo-liberal economic policies since the arrival in power of Bashar al-Assad. In the groups of the armed opposition, there are also soldiers who have deserted to be found as well of the military who have defected, and civilians who have decided to take up arms, the latter being much in the majority.

The Syrian army was structured at the time of Hafez el-Assad, which explains why collective insubordination or mutiny is very difficult. The structure of the high command is based on clientelism and sectarianism. Most of the units loyal to Assad are dominated by Alawite officers, even if they also include Sunni officers. The role assigned to these units is to protect the regime by applying various forms of repression. Mostly, those who want to defect can only act individually or in small groups, leaving the ranks with or without their weapons.

These difficulties did not, however, prevent the development of desertions. The regime has thus been compelled to secure its units by the integration of new elements from the security apparatus. Thousands of soldiers and officers have been imprisoned as suspected of sympathy with the revolution. According to some testimonies, up to half of the losses suffered by the Syrian army have resulted from murders perpetrated by soldiers loyal to the regime. The regime subsequently set up armed civilian groups, called popular defence committees, to assist it in its suppression, while also receiving massive military and economic assistance from Iran and Russia, while armed Shiite groups, including Hezbollah and Iraqi groups, have continued to increase their number of combatants in Syria. Hezbollah has participated in many military operations with the Syrian army, sometimes even playing a leadership role at the military level.

In many regions of the country, revolutionary councils were formed, as well as coordinating committees of political and armed actions. A code of good conduct respecting international law and rejecting sectarianism has been signed by a large part of the armed groups that are part of the popular resistance. These measures were taken in response to acts of torture and murders committed by the armed opposition groups, often without links with the FSA, which have been condemned by the popular movement and the vast majority of the battalions of the FSA.

The FSA has never been a unified institution. It is rather the collective designation of independent armed groups, localized in various regions of the country. These groups do not have adequate arms or funding.

In 2012, the Coordination of Local Committees (CLC) analyzed the situation of the FSA in the following terms: "The fate of our Revolution has been entrusted to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), composed of deserters and civilians who bear arms to defend themselves. This group is devoid of any sustainable basis and does not have a unified command. At the same time, the FSA has remarkably

and courageously defended unarmed civilians and their living areas with light weapons and little ammunition. As could be expected, the war machine of the repressive regime has been able to concentrate its repression and anger on the residents of these areas where the FSA has taken a position. The war machine of the regime has carried out acts of reprisal that have doubled the number of victims, resulting in humanitarian crises and causing the appearance of disaster zones in many regions of the country".

In addition, the lack of organized and broad support for the FSA has led to a lack of effective leadership of the armed opposition, while the Islamist groups unrelated to the FSA and funded much more massively Gulf monarchies and some private networks have continued to expand. The opposition consists currently of more than 1000 armed groups with multiple and varied alliances according to regions and contextual dynamic. Some FSA groups have nevertheless been the target of the jihadists, particularly the Islamic State in the Levant and Iraq (ISIS) now renamed Islamic State (IS) but also Jabhat al Nusra (the official branch of Al Qaeda today in Syria) and some Islamist groups who have murdered some of its officers and attacked some of its brigades.

In addition to this, we have to note the absence or the lack of any kind of "large," organized and decisive military assistance of the USA and/or Western states to the Syrian revolutionaries, showing again the lack of will for any radical change in Syria. The Wall Street Journal published an article in January 2015 on this CIA aid saying:

"Some weapons shipments were so small that commanders had to ration ammunition. One of the U.S.'s favorite trusted commanders got the equivalent of 16 bullets a month per fighter. Rebel leaders were told they had to hand over old antitank missile launchers to get new ones—and couldn't get shells for captured tanks. When they appealed last summer for ammo to battle fighters linked to al Qaeda, the U.S. said 'no.'"

In addition, the United States has opposed since the beginning of the uprising to supply various FSA forces with anti-aircraft missiles capable of taking down warplanes.

The plan of Barack Obama's, which was approved by the U.S. Congress of \$500 million to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, but was never implemented, was not aimed at overthrowing the Assad regime, as we can read in the text of the resolution:

"The Secretary of Defence is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustenance, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.

Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.

Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria."

This program has been a total a failure. "The program is much smaller than we hoped," conceded the Pentagon's policy chief, Christine Wormuth, saying there were between 100 and 120 fighters currently being trained, while adding that they were also "getting terrific training." A top military general told Congress that the U.S. had successfully trained just "four or five" opposition soldiers.

The chief of staff of the US-trained Syrian rebel group Division 30 actually resigned from his position and withdrew from the program, on Sept. 19, 2015. Citing problems such as "the lack of sufficient numbers of trainees," and "the lack of seriousness in the implementation of the project to establish the 30th brigade." The other problem faced with the United States to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests was and is also thwart-

ed by the reality on the ground. This is because of the decision of a large majority of opposition groups to cooperate with Washington only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision-making, and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime.

In October 2015, even Senator Lindsey Graham challenged Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair General Joseph Dunford on the U.S. strategy in Syria. He asked about the possibility of overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, saying, "This is a half-assed strategy at best."

What was the political and military influence of the different Islamic organizations especially regarding the Muslim Brotherhood? Under which conditions did ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra develop and what is the social base of these organizations?

The Muslim Brotherhoods were not present at the beginning of the revolution, at least not as a party, like most of the political parties actually. In 2009, they actually ceased opposition to the regime and were seeking forms of understanding with the regime. They even were slogans in various areas of Syria saying, "We're not Salafists. We're not Muslim Brotherhood. We're just Syrians who want freedom." This was because the regime was accusing all of the demonstrators of being Salafists, Muslim Brotherhood or Islamic extremists. A month after the beginning of the uprising, they officially supported the popular movement.

Regarding, the development of other Islamic fundamentalist organisations much more extremists, we should remember that From March to October 2011, while the regime was targeting and repressing democrats and the popular movements, the Assad regime released up to 1500 of the most well connected salafist activists from its prisons. Regarding the jihadist presence in Syria, this phenomenon was increasing in the years prior of the revolution, especially after the US war on Iraq in 2003, reach-

ing up to 8,000 prior the revolution. Many of them were operating freely in Syria following the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003. The regime let them go through Syria to fight in Iraq and even collaborated with some of these groups. At the beginning of the uprising, many of those jihadists were then liberated as I said from prisons and were able to organise and expand their influence, while the regime was crushing democratic and secular activists. The rise of ISIS and other fundamentalist groups with the strategy of the Assad regime to give only one alternative to the Syrian people: me or the IS, Jabhat al Nusra and the others... The whole majority of the leadership of different Islamic fundamentalist battalions were inside prison at the beginning of the revolution

Janhat Al Nusra (the Al Qaeda branch in Syria) did their first terrorist operations in the end of summer 2011 and officially announced its creation in January 2012. Other groups such as Ahrar Sham and Jaysh Islam developed also at this moment between the summer 2011 and beginning of 2012. At the beginning they were small armed groups.

These groups were able to expand as I said because the regime was concentrating on the repression of democratic activists and the popular movement on one side and FSA groups, while in the same time the salafist jihadist groups were more organized, notably because of their past experiences in Iraq and other countries, than FSA forces, which many groups were ill organized and for some falling into misbehavior as well, and better funded (private networks of the Gulf monarchies and directly sometimes from Gulf Monarchies) abling them to recruit people that were previously in FSA forces. The subventions and delivery of certain necessary products and services to popular classes missing of everything also able them to attract some sympathies from popular classes.

In addition to all this, the regime's terrible and murderous repression, while it used of sectarianism (through medias, sectarian massacres of sunnis, etc...) and the assistance of sectarian islamic fundamentalist powers such as Iran and groups such as

Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi'a militias, radicalized many people towards extremist groups.

The transformation of the Syrian revolution into a civil war has also made Syria into a field of regional and international imperialist antagonisms which have culminated in the Russian intervention. In analyzing the situation a large part of the left considers that the USA, EU and their regional allies have supported the Syrian revolution because they want to overthrow the Assad regime which is considered as having anti-imperialist characteristics. We would like to have your opinion on the relations of Assad regime with the big imperialist powers.

I first believe that we should analyse a State on its class basis and policies as rightly put by Pierre Frank, a French Trotskyist that wrote that: "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation". On this issue I think that I have showed that the Assad regime is a capitalist and authoritarian regime repressing the popular classes. But nevertheless let's answer to the people saying it's an "anti imperialist" regime.

The Syrian regime has been presented as an anti-imperialist state through its support for the resistance in Lebanon and in Palestine for many years now, and has taken strong rhetorical positions in opposition to Israel. But this stance is not based on anti-imperialist principles, but on putative 'national interests'. These are guided by the necessity of ensuring the security and continuity of the regime as well as a balance of power in diplomatic negotiations with Israel to recover the Golan Heights area seized in 1967.

The regime has actually collaborated with western imperialist governments on many occasions. It was actually Hafez Al-Assad as Minister of Defence that refused to assist the Palestinians and progressive

Jordanian groups in overthrowing the conservative Hashemite regime in Jordan during the popular uprising in 1970, known as the Black September.

This is the same regime that crushed the Palestinians and the progressive movements in Lebanon in 1976 with the tacit agreement of the Western States by supporting the fascist groups of the Lebanese Phalange, putting an end to their uprising, and participating in the Palestinian massacre of Tell Zaatar. It then supported the Fatah al-Intifada's split from Fatah in 1983 and supported the Lebanese Shi'a movement Amal in War of the Camps between 1985 and 89 against the Palestinians.

The Assad regime was only the main actor behind the weakening of the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), commonly known by its Arab acronym as Jammul, which was established in 1982 by the Lebanese Communist Party, the Organisation of the Communist Action Lebanon, the Arab Socialist Action Party Lebanon (ASAP-L) and the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP). This new coalition had the objective of replacing the Lebanese National Movement, but above all to resist the Israeli occupation. By the spring of 1985, the LNRF had succeeded in driving the Israelis out of the western Bekaa, Rashaya and other large areas in the South. The leadership of the Front then decided to bring the fight to the Israelis by attacking targets inside the "security belt," the highly militarized strip of territory along Lebanon's southern border that the Israelis used as a buffer zone. Nevertheless, this period was the beginning of the end of the LNRF, which was the target of not only Israel, but also the Syrian regime following the refusal of the LNRF's leadership to submit to the demands of "coordination" with Syria. In addition, from 1984, economic assistance to the LNRF from the USSR and Arab countries was ceased.

In the mid 1980s the LNRF's leadership was subject to a wave of assassinations that were attributed to Islamic forces close to Hezbollah, and also to Amal. At the same time, according to Elias Atallah (then the LNRF's top commander), Amal and

Hezbollah would frequently inform the Syrians of any LNRF plans they caught wind of. The LNRF's resistance attacks became less frequent and less successful (Nash 2008).

The internal fighting between leftist groups – including remaining PLO elements and the Druze PSP – and Amal in the Lebanese capital in 1987 also weakened the LNRF, while the entry of Syrian forces into West Beirut increasingly prevented the LNRF's frame of actions.

After Amal suspended most of its resistance activities following Israel's first withdrawal in 1985, and because the Syrian regime progressively prevented with all its capacities all of the LNRF's resistance activities, Hezbollah gradually became the sole resistance movement, strongly supported by the Syrian and Iranian regimes (Traboulsi 2007:230). The Ta'if agreement then acknowledged Hezbollah as the sole resistance actor. The Islamic party with its close ties to Tehran would therefore carry the resistance torch, but only if it coordinated closely with Damascus.

The Assad regime participated in the imperialist war against Iraq in 1991 with the coalition led by the US.

They also participated in the 'war on terror' launched by President George W. Bush by collaborating on security issues. Israel has actually several times called on the US to ease the pressure on the Syrian regime, which has not shot a single bullet for the occupied Golan Heights since 1973.

Syria has not responded to direct attacks on its soil widely attributed to Israel. It also has engaged in multiple rounds of peace talks, most recently in 2008. Although these talks have not yielded an agreement, their repeated failure has led to nothing worse than a continued chill.

Syrian officials have repeatedly declared their readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel as soon as the occupation of the Golan Heights ended, while nothing was said on the Palestinian issue. Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of Bashar Al Assad,

went so far as to declare in May 2011 that if there is no stability in Syria, there will be no stability in Israel, adding that no one can guarantee what will occur if something happens to the Syrian regime. As a result, it is not hard to understand Israel's satisfaction with the status quo under the current Syrian regime.

In addition to all this, I would like to remind that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterised at the beginning of the uprising in Syria the dictator Bachar Al Assad as a "reformer" and added that "many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he's a reformer". This is without forgetting the invitation to the national palace of the Elysée by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008.

The Assad regime has also been targeting Palestinians in Syria since the beginning of the revolution. In the first week of the uprising, Buthaina Shaaban, Bashar al-Assad's adviser, held responsible Palestinians for the crisis and accused Palestinians in the Deraa and Latakia camps of responsibility for the anti-regime protests and spreading chaos in those towns...

The Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk has been suffering of strict siege imposed on it from summer 2013, with the prohibition of movement of persons and foodstuffs, to the rebel neighbourhoods south of Damascus by the Assad regime and the Palestinian organizations linked to it, especially the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), controlled by Ahmad Jibril.

The Assad regime has also killed and imprisoned thousands of Palestinians in Syria, while more than 20,000 are wanted by the security services.

So as we can see it is far from being any anti imperialist force.

What do you believe are the imperialists' goals regarding their intervention in the Syrian civil war and how have these been

modified after the intensification of the Russian imperialistic intervention?

Firstly, I would like to say that the objectives of the USA and Western powers since the beginning of the uprising in Syria have never been to overthrow the Assad regime. The USA has tried on the opposite to reach an agreement between the Assad regime (or section of it) and the opposition linked to Western, Turkey and Gulf regimes, represented today by the Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces.

This "Yemeni type solutions" maintains the structure of old regimes and guarantee the neo-liberal and imperialist order that was existing prior 2011.

We can see this through the past years policies of the USA regarding Syria, while not forgetting that at the beginning of the uprising the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterized the dictator Bashar al-Assad as a "reformer" and added that "many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he's a reformer."

In 2011, as the regime continued the crack down on protests and soldiers began to peel away from the army, U.S. intelligence officials identified officers from Mr. Assad's minority Alawite sect who potentially could lead a regime change. Washington's policy in 2011 was to get to the point of a transition in Syria by finding cracks in the regime and offering incentives for people to abandon Assad, but regime cohesiveness held, and the crackdown intensified. In August 2011, Mr. Obama publicly called for Mr. Assad to step down, but without changing the core of its policy regarding Syria as we explained above: the regime must be maintained with only superficial changes.

As we can see in the Geneva guidelines of June 30 2012, which was agreed to unanimously by the Permanent five 5 members of the UN Security Council, it would be permissible for Assad to serve on the transitional governing body. Indeed, he could preside over it. All that was required was the consent of the opposition delegation. Similarly, del-

egates representing the Syrian Arab Republic—the regime and the government—could withhold consent to persons nominated by the opposition.

"The United States and our partners are not seeking so-called regime change," Kerry told reporters mid December in the Russian capital after meeting President Vladimir Putin.

In January, the Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces cast doubt on whether it would go to Geneva 3 for the "peace negotiations," because they notably accused the United States of adopting unacceptable Iranian and Russian ideas for solving the conflict.

Regarding other Western imperialist states, they also have not been interested in regime change, and moreover following the terrorist attack of November 13, 2015 in Paris. France has now taken the lead in this "war against Daech" and increased its airstrikes since the attacks of November 13, and now mobilizes 3500 soldiers, deploying in the eastern Mediterranean the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, therefore tripling since November 23 its capacity for action. Britain and Germany have joined the campaign as well.

France also called for more collaboration with the Russian state. On November 26, 2015, the French and Russian governments announced their decision to "coordinate" their strikes against Daech in Syria, and in particular to target the transport of petroleum products.

Israeli military sources have also repeatedly declared the existence of a consensus within Tel Aviv's decision making circles over the importance of the continuation of the Assad regime. Military affairs commentator Alon Ben-David quoted a source within the Israeli Joint Chiefs of Staff as saying: "Although no one in Israel can say this publicly and explicitly, the best option for Israel would be for the Assad regime to remain and for the internal fighting to continue for as long as possible."

The French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has also declared December 5, 2015 that it no longer

planned the departure of Bashar al-Assad before a political transition in Syria, adding that "the fight against Daech is decisive but will be fully effective only if all Syrian and regional forces unite." John Kerry, Foreign Minister of the United States said they could imagine a collaboration between the army of the Assad regime and the military forces of the opposition, the FSA, to work against extremist organizations such as Daech without the departure from Assad.

The agreement of the imperialist states to fight "against the terrorism" of Daech has nevertheless not reduce disagreements and rivalries between different regional and international imperialist actors as we have seen between Turkey and Russia.

Regarding Russia, the propaganda around the campaign of the "war against terrorism" launched by the Russian state is a way to support the Assad regime politically and militarily and crush all forms of opposition to it. Putin wants the various international imperialist actors in the West to consider Assad as the ruler that can help them in their fight against "terrorism."

Russia has long supplied Assad armed forces with the vast majority of their weaponry. The Russian state has continued to ship substantial volumes of small arms, ammunition, spare parts and refurbished material to pro-regime forces. In January 2014, Russia stepped up supplies of military gear to the Syrian regime, including armored vehicles, drones and guided bombs.

In the end of summer 2015, Russia greatly expanded its military involvement on the side of the Assad regime, including providing serious training and logistical support to the Syrian army. On Sept. 17, 2015, the regime's army started using new types of air and ground weapons supplied by Russia, while satellite photos taken in mid-September showed Russian forces developing two additional military facilities close to Lattakiyya. On Sept. 30, Russian reached a new level with the beginning of its direct military intervention to save the Assad regime. A report published by the Center for Documentation

of Violations in Syria, wrote that since the beginning of the Russian military, Sept. 30, until Nov. 15, 80% to 90% of Russian strikes have not targeted areas controlled by Daech, while more than 520 civilians were killed by the Russian airstrikes. About more than 100,000 civilians have been forced to flee their regions because of Russian bombings. Russian bombings also destroyed dozens of hospitals and doctors and patients were killed in these raids.

Moscow might have targeted more jihadists after the attacks in Paris but continues to bomb massively areas not controlled by Daech, mostly Islamist fundamentalist forces, FSA groups and civilians. For example on Nov. 28, 2015, the Russian military aviation destroyed in central Idlib province an aid dispensary containing a bakery that produced over 300,000 pounds of bread per month and a well providing safe-drinking water to an estimated 50,000 people. Many popular neighborhoods in Aleppo and Idlib and their countryside have also been the targets of Russian bombing.

A report of Amnesty, published on Dec. 23, 2015, focused on six attacks in Homs, Idlib and Aleppo between September and November 2015 in which at least 200 civilians and around a dozen fighters were killed. On January 20, 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced that Russian airstrikes, which started on 30 September 2015, have killed 1,015 civilians, including more than 200 children.

The objectives of these airstrikes are clear: save and consolidate the political and military power of the Assad regime. Russian President Vladimir Putin actually said on September 28, before the beginning of the Russian airstrikes: "There is no other way to settle the Syrian conflict other than by strengthening the existing legitimate government agencies, support them in their fight against terrorism". In other words crush all forms of opposition, whether democratic or reactionary, to the Assad regime under the so called "war on terror". All authoritarian regimes have used this same kind of propaganda to repress popular movements and/ or opposition

groups to their powers: Assad against the popular movement since day 1 of the popular uprising, Sissi in Egypt to repress particularly the Muslim Brotherhoods, but also progressive left and democratic movements such as the Revolutionary Socialists, Movement of April 6, etc... Erdogan against the PKK and various leftist movements, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia against the protesters and popular movements challenging their power, etc...

International Imperialist powers have not been different, from the Russian State repressing any forms of resistance in Tchetchenia to its occupation and the USA's various military interventions across the world. Both were and are claiming to fight against terrorism.

The time for this military expansion of Assad's regime allies led by Russia is led by two main reasons: 1) the increasing political and military weakness of the Assad regime and 2) the absence or the lack of any clear policy from Western powers to assist the revolutionaries in Syria.

Despite their rivalry, imperialist and sub imperialist interventions nevertheless share a common purpose today: to liquidate the revolutionary movement initiated in March 2011, stabilize the regime in Damascus in keeping at the head its criminal dictator (for a short and medium term at least), and try to militarily defeat the IS.

We must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies of the popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution as we have shown, just as it is not the imperialist contradictions that have been the source of the

uprising in Syria or elsewhere as well in the region, but the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the popular classes.

The analysis which seems to dominate today (even in part of the left) is that the most dangerous enemy – not only in the Middle East but also in Europe – is the ISIS. It seems that the USA and the EU have accepted that Assad stays in power at least for a transitional period. How is this accepted by their regional allies, Saudi Arabia and Turkey?

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar on their sides, are the states that want the most to see the fall of the Assad family, but not of the regime and its institutions. The monarchies of the Gulf and private networks within these countries have wanted to transform this popular revolution into a sectarian civil war because they fear a democratic Syria and a propagation of the revolution in the region that would threaten their power and interests. As a reminder Saudi Arabia and Qatar enjoyed good relations with the Assad regime before the uprising in 2011. They supported politically and economically mostly Islamic fundamentalist movements such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, Ahrar Sham, Army of Islam and other similar groups that have a sectarian and reactionary ideology in total opposition to the spirit of the revolution, although Saudi Arabia also supported at some periods some Free Syrian Army groups (Syrian Revolutionary Front and Haraka Hazm both which were defeated by Jabhat Al Nusra, or also Syrian Southern Front) against Jihadist groups such as Jabhat Al Nusra and ISIS. The Islamic Fundamentalist groups also attempt to reduce the role of the popular committees, sometimes through violent ways. They also propagated a sectarian religious discourse through their various medias.

The transformation of the nature of the revolution into a sectarian war would also able them to scare their own populations in the following way: all changes in the region are susceptible to result in a sectarian war and we should therefore encourage

the status quo, in other words, the maintenance of these dictatorial powers.

But let's look more precisely to the interests of each of these states, which were all friends to the Assad regime prior to the revolution.

The Turkish state does not want to see the influence of the PKK in Syria extend all along the border with Turkey and it therefore supports the coalition of the Army of the Conquest, dominated by Jabhat Al Nusra and Ahrar Sham. The latter two groups, but especially Jabhat Al Nusra, have since 2013, launched many attacks against the forces of PYD and committed human rights violations and abuses against Kurdish civilians, in addition to other Syrian Arab groups and civilians.

The Turkish government also reiterated once more that the PKK and Daech were similar in its eyes. The Turkish Prime Minister also declared that Ankara would not hesitate to bomb the PYD (Syrian PKK) forces in Syria as it has bombed the PKK in northern Iraq.

The US and Turkey have been discussing for months to work together against Daech present in these regions close to the Turkish and Syrian border, but there has been no progress until today on this issue.

Finally, Turkey, which tried in these past years to play a role of mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia, has increasingly come closer to the Saudi kingdom, despite some still persisting differences. Since January 2015, with the change of leadership in Saudi Arabia, Erdogan visited the Saudi kingdom three times. At the end of 2015, the two countries decided to establish a "strategic cooperation council." The AKP government has largely supported the Saudi military intervention in Yemen against the Houtistes, backed by Iran, and military groups linked to former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh, which has resulted in the killing of more than 5,800 persons, including 2,800 civilians, and of more than 27,900 injured, while over 2.5 million people are displaced within the country. Ankara has also agreed to join the military alliance established by

the Saudi kingdom in December 2015 and composed of more than 30 countries against Daech.

In early 2016, Erdogan rejected criticism directed against Ryad after the execution of the Saudi opponent Sheikh Nimr Nimr, describing it as "an internal legal issue." The pro-government medias in Turkey have also followed the example of Turkish President Erdogan and openly supported Saudi Arabia in the conflict with Iran.

Early December, following a visit to Qatar, President Erdogan also announced that it has signed an agreement with Qatar for the supply of liquefied petroleum gas in addition to the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar.

The unconditional support of Iran in the Syrian revolutionary process to the criminal Assad regime has also brought Turkey closer to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies in supporting primarily Islamic fundamentalist groups and also promoting a sectarian religious discourse.

Regarding, Saudi Arabia, it is wrong to think that the Saudi kingdom funds or support Daech, it's not the case. The executions of January 2nd, which included Saudi opposition member Sheikh Nimr, were actually also directed against another group that worries the Saudi kingdom: jihadist movements such as Al-Qaeda and Daech. The executions of Riyadh of the 43 jihadists members of Al-Qaida, condemned for bombings and gun attacks in the kingdom, had indeed intended to send a clear message that any support or involvement in these movements would be repressed with the utmost firmness. The "antiterrorist coalition" composed of 34 countries, led by Saudi Arabia, announced December 14, 2015, must also be understood in this perspective of fighting against jihadist movements.

Al-Qaida and Daech, which both vowed to overthrow the regime of the Saud, promised to avenge these executions. Al-Qaeda has accused Saudi Arabia of having carried out the executions "of mudjahidins" in order to consolidate the rule of the Saud dynasty and as a gift to the "Crusaders", in

other words the Western allies Riyadh, for the new year.

The branch of Al-Qaeda in Yemen had already threatened in December 2015 to "shed the blood of the soldiers of Al-Saud" if its members were executed, while in early 2016, Daech threatened to destroy Saudi Arabian prisons holding jihadists after the executions. Both organizations are fighting against Saudi Arabia, which has declared them terrorist groups and locked up thousands of their supporters. Daech has claimed responsibility for a series of bombings and shootings in Saudi Arabia since November 2014 that have killed more than 50 people, most of them Shi'as but also more than 15 members of the security forces.

Al-Qaida has on its side began its terrorist actions within the Saudi kingdom since 2003, killing several hundred people. The organization of Al-Qaeda has "excommunicated" the Saudi kingdom, considering it as un-Islamic, especially for its collaboration and associations with "infidels" States in the war against Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban.

This war between on one side the Saudi kingdom and the other side Al-Qaeda and Daech must not however make us believe that their fundamentalist and reactionary ideologies would fundamentally be different. The Saudi kingdom has declared for years that the ideology of these organizations is foreign to its country and institutions, but is the result of the radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood's movement and of the writings of Sayyeb Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri. This explanation does not convince anyone, and have stopped for a while now. Sayyeb Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri are of course sources of inspiration for some forms of jihadisms, but ultra fundamentalists movements such as Al Qaeda and Daech find already and in a much deeper way an ideological breeding ground within the official Wahhabi discourse broadcasted by clergy and institutions of the Saudi kingdom. As a reminder, the Saudi official speech denounce secular ideologies such as Arab nationalism (considered "as an atheist" jahaliyya "(ignorance), a movement of ignorance whose main purpose is to fight Islam and

destroy its teachings and rules... All Arabs adopting it are enemies of Islam... Arab nationalism is European in origin, Jewish in motivation... Arab nationalism is a conspiracy promoted by the West and Zionism to undermine the unity of Muslims") and communism (considered as a "movement leading to the enslavement of the individual by materialism and the abandonment of moral and spiritual qualities"), while the danger of "al-taghrib" (Westernization) "leads to the loss of Islamic ideals and practices". Politically, westernisation is understood as the adoption of "Western political system, political parties and parliaments at the expense of cohesion and social consensus". Socially, Westernization undermines the Muslims conduct and leads to the mixing between men and women, the opening of bars and nightclubs, celebrating non-Muslim holidays such as Mother's Day, Christmas, or Labour Day. Many of these themes are now found in the propaganda of Daech and Al-Qaeda.

A number of Saudi jihadists takes as references the earlier texts of Wahabism, which are the sources of official Islam in the country, and other authors of Wahabi references, but with different interpretations.

More generally, the main source of recruitment of these organizations in Saudi Arabia is in political and socio economic reasons: in the authoritarian nature of the regime and the absence of democracy, the fierce repression of all forms of opposition to the ruling family, social inequality, poverty and growing unemployment, especially among the youth, alliance and collaboration with the imperialist Western powers committing crimes against other Arab and Muslim populations, etc ... Once more, we have to understand that these movements are rooted in our present and modern time, not in a distant history. These are the products of the current modernity in which these populations live.

We would like your opinion about Kobani. In your articles you say that it is an obligation for the internationalist left to support the right of autonomy for the Kurds and

more specifically the Kurdish movement in Kobani. However you have also often criticized aspects of the policy of the leadership of this movement. What are the positive elements in your opinion and what elements should be criticized?

Regarding the three cantons of Rojava, many interesting things are occurring on many aspects (women's rights, minority participation, secular institutions, etc...), especially in a war situation. These experiences of autonomy are moreover positive for a Kurdish nation oppressed for decades, especially as all revolutionary socialist must support the self determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, some contradictions exist in Rojava, which do not represent an example of self-organization from below of the popular masses, but are rather processes controlled from above. First, we must address the authoritarian practices of Syrian branch of PKK (PYD), both in their internal organizational functioning and against other citizens and political actors. The authoritarianism of the PYD was demonstrated in its repression and imprisonment of activists and the closure of organizations or institutions critical of them.

In fact, there have been several protests against the PYD forces and their practices in some cities in Rojava such as Amouda and Derabissyat. In the end of June 2013 for example, the two cities have experienced demonstrations and other protest activities to denounce the repression and arrest of Kurdish revolutionary activists by YPG (Units of protection of the people), the armed wing of the PYD. In July 2013, new events occurred in Amouda the PYD did not hesitate to fire on the crowd, killing many demonstrators. Furthermore, since October 2014, mandatory conscription was decreed and implemented by the PYD in areas under its control. This decision has caused the departure of many young people from all communities, to escape imprisonment for refusing to serve.

Some protests were organised in recent weeks by the inhabitants of Amouda to condemn both the abduction of women and their enslavement by the IS on one side and on the other side the forced military conscription of young girls in the PYD -with the special case of Hemri Aidi, a young girl of 15 enlisted by force. YPG forces have actually repeatedly enlisted children in their ranks.

We should also not forget the distrust displayed by the PKK and the PYD to popular protest movement in the past when they were not launched on their initiatives or controlled the party. The PKK for example displayed a passive attitude during the Kurdish intifada in Syria in 2004, seeking more to calm the Kurds who rose up against the oppression of the Assad regime, or at the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process in 2011. The PKK actually currently coexist in the cities of Qamishli and Hasaka with the forces of the Syrian regime and is not trying to get rid of.

Similarly in 2013 during the popular mobilizations in Turkey following the issue of the Gezi Park, the PKK carefully avoided any statement on the popular protests, while many Kurdish activists joined individually protesters in Istanbul and other large cities that had joined the protests. In Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, the number of demonstrations was relatively low. The PKK favoured at the time the consolidation and continuation of the peace process with the government of the AKP in 2012, which was severely challenged since then in view of the continued repression of the PKK and Kurdish activists in Turkey and the attitude of the Turkish government regarding Kobani.

These elements demonstrate the preference of the PKK to change from above and controlled by the party, rather than by changes from below and through mass popular movements.

Although Kurdish youth participated in large numbers in the Syrian uprising since 2011, the PKK has sought a middle path between the regime and its opposition since the beginning of the Syrian revolu-

tionary process in 2011. The PKK actually currently coexist in the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah with the forces of the Syrian regime and is not trying to get rid of them. Some relations still exist with the regime's armed forces, but also with some groups of the Free Syrian army. PYD leader, Saleh Muslim, has also welcomed Russian military intervention in Syria in October 2015, while some time PYD forces benefited of some Russian bombing to conquer new territories on FSA forces. The PYD also announced its plans to open an office in Moscow on February 10, while preparing to open another in Berlin, with Washington, Paris and Arab countries coming later.

In addition, following the complete failure to assist FSA democratic forces, the USA decided this summer to support the newly formed Kurdish-majority alliance known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) established in October 2015 officially according its statement as a response to fight the "terrorism represented by the Islamic State, its sister [organizations] and the criminal Baath regime". This new group is dominated by YPG (armed wing of the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK), while other groups (Syriac and FSA groups like the army of revolutionaries "Jaysh al-thuwar") within it play until today an auxiliary role. The SDF was established to provide a legal and political cover for American military support for the PKK affiliated group PYD in Syria. The USA considers the PYD as the most effective actor to fight Daech.

The USA is hoping that other FSA groups will join the SDF alliance, but the policies of the PYD, particularly of non-conflict with the Assad regime and expressing on different occasions its acceptance of a political transition in which Assad could remain, and also violations of Human Rights and abuses in some areas against Arab civilians, prevent any trusty relationship to be established and created tensions with local populations. This does not mean that the Assad regime and PYD are allies, not at all, but rather that PYD is tactically collaborating with various actors according to various elements (geography, particular periods, etc...)

In the same time, some pressure is also mounted on PYD and Kurdish forces to collaborate directly and on a systematic way, and not punctually, with regime forces against Daech by Russia, its other political supporter. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei actually said on December 23, 2015 that "Moscow is ready to back Kurdish forces fighting ISIS in Syria, but only in coordination with the Syrian government". PYD is facing contradictory interests by Russia and the USA, both actors supporting politically the PYD and officials from both countries visited Rojava.

Of course we should denounce the various sections of the Syrian opposition that still deny the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people. The National Coalition for the Syrian Revolution and opposition forces, supported by the Western states, Turkey, and the Gulf monarchies, had an ambiguous attitude during the attacks of the reactionary Islamic forces, including Jabhat al Nusra in the Kurdish regions in the past. The current president of the Syrian coalition Khaled Khouja even said that the victory of the AKP in the parliamentary elections of November was a ray of hope for the Arab peoples, despite the violations of democratic rights, crackdown on various sectors of the opposition and especially against the Kurdish population of the ruling party AKP, while George Sabra president of Syrian National Council declared that the PKK was a terrorist organization in January 2016 in an interview on Al-Jazeera.

These positions are all the more reprehensible, considering the decades of political, social and cultural oppression of the Kurdish people in Syria and policies of colonization or Arabisation implemented by the Assad regime in the northern regions of Syria. The northern regions of Syria were also the poorest and the least provided with social services. This is not to mention the silence of a large part of the opposition during the Kurdish intifada in Syria in 2004. Some even accused it of serving foreign "imperialist" projects in order to weaken Syria.

This is in addition to the continued repression of the PKK and Kurdish activists in Turkey and the at-

titude of the Turkish AKP government regarding Kobani and the terrorists attacks against the Kurds in general and the HDP party in particular, the PKK has adopted a more hostile attitude toward the AKP

in order to to defend itself against the war launched by the AKP government. Let us not forget the airstrikes against PKK bases and Kurdish civilians by the Turkish gov

NEWS

News from around the world



The new Free Trade Agreements (TPP, TTIP AND TISA), are not a solution: they are another problem

30 March 2016

As on previous occasions - when the treaties that gave birth to the European Union or the North American Free Trade Agreement were imposed - the dominant classes present these initiatives as magic formulas to "eliminate poverty and increase wealth and prosperity". The balance sheets of the latter leave no doubt about what awaits those who are seduced by this siren song: new rules that will allow the multinationals to violate the legality and sovereignty of each nation where they are present; "private" courts to settle conflicts between companies and states; the privatization and commodification of public services that are still in the hands of the state (education, health, transport, water and so on); telecommunications regulation to eliminate freedom of expression in social networks; dismantling of peasant and familial agriculture, expansion of monoculture and genetically modified food and insecticides; prioritizing greed over environmental protection laws; still more degradation of the living and working conditions of people in the city and the countryside; and the provocation of new migratory waves.

If the goal of these treaties was in reality the expansion of world trade, then why leave out nations that, as a whole, represent more than 3 billion people, i.e. more than one third of the world population? The real purpose of these new regulations is twofold: to limit the presence of "other" nations within the sphere of influence of the Western impe-

rialist countries and to ensure maximum benefits for their multinationals.

The crisis that capitalism is currently undergoing is not caused by the alleged limitations of the conditions for the exercise of "free trade".

The excessive concentration of wealth in the hands of a few (according to Oxfam currently 62 families possess a wealth equal to that of the remaining 99.99%), the drastic reduction in the purchasing power of the working class, the huge debt burden on a global scale (more than 200 billion dollars in 2014), and the insane growth of fictitious capital, have caused a relative surplus of productive capacity and reduced the ability of states to prevent a new recession even more serious than that of 2008.

The growth of the contradictions between the economic interests of the United States and its allies (Western Europe, Japan and its satellites) with China, which forms part of the countries known as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), has encouraged the momentum of these new treaties to strengthen the power of their respective transnational companies, privatize as much as possible and cancel all employment, human, social and ecological preservation law which is opposed to this.

The world working class of the world cannot be confined in the narrow area of national politics. We must attentively follow these contradictions and master all the secrets of the foreign policy of both sets of imperialist brigands, not allow ourselves to be dragged down by spurious interests totally alien to the interests of the world working class and of humanity. The ruling classes of China, Russia, the United States or the countries of Europe are our common enemies. This is not a struggle between

nations, it is a class struggle and we extend a hand to all peoples of the world in opposition to the multinationals and militarization.

We must declare ourselves totally opposed to the creation of these "commercial treaties" and promote an alternative policy based on improving the living and working conditions of all workers on a global scale; restoring the free exercise of trade union activity and collective bargaining; renationalizing the strategic sectors of the economy; applying a strong progressive tax to big fortunes and speculative capital; opening the borders to free emigration ("no human being is illegal"); repudiating all odious, illegitimate, illegal and/or unsustainable public debt; requiring the application of the international conventions in the area of labour and in defence of human rights; and fostering an in-

ternational trade that takes into account the existing asymmetry between various groups of nations.

The Fourth International - whose members, in all continents, are part of the movements opposed to the approval of these treaties – salutes initiatives like that approved on February 21, 2016 in the Spanish state, by various radical left political forces on the European continent, with the intention of developing an alternative program for the social integration of the peoples and of realizing the broadest mobilizations, such as that planned for the coming Saturday May 28, 2016.

Initiatives of this type should be expanded to the world level and intercontinental unitary mobilizations should be coordinated. The approval of these treaties is not inevitable; the peoples of the world have the last word.

March 1, 2016

PAKISTAN

Another Attack by Far Right on Christians and Democracy

29 March 2016

**Haryali ko aankhen tarsen bagiya laho
luhan**

**Pyar ke geet sunaon kis ko shehar hue
weeran**

Bagiya laho luhan

– Habib Jalib

Yesterday, more than 72 women, children and men were killed, and more than 200 injured, in a suicide bombing in Lahore's Gulshan-e-Bagh. In a city and a country where the rich can afford private security to protect their families – they do not have to leave the comfort of their guarded homes to have Sunday picnics – Gulshan-e-Bagh was a garden for the rest of us. It is a place for those of us who cannot afford the luxuries of private security, and a space where we could bring our working- and middle-class families – our children, our partners, our parents and our grandparents – to laugh and to love in the open. Last night, our daughters and sons died, and so many of our loved ones are marred for life. There are no words for the dark loss of those who no longer have a mother or a father, a sister or a brother, a daughter or a son. Our hearts bleed for the dead and the wounded. PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, the governing party of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif) must realize the fact that this fire will also spread to PMLN's Lahore!

The Awami Workers Party calls for the unity of all those who stand in shock and condemnation in the face of this attack. This unity is all the more important as more than 20,000 men, wedded to the poli-

tics of the Islamist far right, have descended upon the capital, with demands that threaten to change our lives and the lives of those we love forever. They want to impose shariah law; fully implement the blasphemy law; hang Asia Bibi and others committed for blasphemy; expunge Ahmadi Muslims and secular people from positions within the state; and much, much more.

We have stood by for decades as the state and military have fostered Islamist forces to serve their personal and political ends within the domestic and the foreign sphere. We have stood by as the state and the army have consistently blamed "foreign powers" – be it RAW (India's Intelligence Agency), CIA or (the Israeli) MOSSAD – and turned the guns on our own people, putting the blame for problems they have created on the shoulders of the poor and the vulnerable – be they Pashtuns, Baloch, Sindhi, Punjabi, Siraiki, or others. The state and the military will use this attack as an excuse to further feed the cycle of violence, by pretending they are separate from the Islamist forces that they born and bred over so many years. This will be a mistake. We cannot allow the military establishment, their subsidiary militants and the parties of the far right to define and drive the agenda concerning the safety of our loved ones, and of the masses at large. It is time to carve out a new narrative of radical peace and equality from the ruins of our violent past.

All the progressive, secular and democratic forces must stand together, under the banner of radical peace, justice and equality for all.

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MEXICO

We salute the triumph of the Mexican Electricians Union

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL · 23 March 2016

The conditions under which their resistance developed could not have been more challenging: they faced a furious media campaign of demonization of the alleged "privileges" enjoyed by their workers; a judiciary and legislative regime subject to the dictates of the government and, more seriously, a very weak social and associative movement to provide support. The SME has forced the neoliberal government to recognize the existence of employment liabilities that have been covered with the creation of an electricity generation company and a cooperative providing products and services for the energy sector, while obtaining liquidation, in accordance with the collective agreement, for all workers in resistance. This ensures the survival of this historic organization of Mexican trade unionism.

Its triumph is the result of one of the most heroic battles waged by the Mexican working class in recent decades. Permanent mobilization, legal battles, hunger strikes, organization of electrical ener-

gy consumers (Asamblea Nacional de Usuarios de la Energía Eléctrica - National Assembly Electrical Energy Consumers) , an initiative to unite class-conscious trades unionism (Nueva Central de Trabajadores - New Workers' Confederation) and the formation of a class-based party (Organización Política del Pueblo y los Trabajadores - Political Organization of the People and Workers), are examples of the militancy and creativity developed by electricity workers throughout this struggle. For the SME a new period has opened, full of new challenges to ensure safe and decent work for all its members in times of severe worsening of the economic and political crisis of the Mexican regime. The brutal offensive of capital against the working class has meant serious defeats for many unions at the global level, but its triumph shows that worthy and consistent struggle, although it involves many sacrifices, is the best option rather than dropping our banners. Once again it is demonstrated that only struggle pays.

Proletarians of the world unite!

International Committee

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, February 29, 2016

TUNISIA

A call for international solidarity with the marginalized people and regions in Tunisia

1 March 2016

In fact, public authorities have remained completely disconnected from the harsh reality of Tunisians, mainly the most underprivileged classes, even at the risk of leading the near collapse of country, laying the ground for a widespread social explosion on a scale that no one could predict the impact.

Facing this long-lasting deadlock and attempts to stifle the protest movements that claim legitimate rights to dignity, employment and peaceful demonstration, the undersigned associations call for an international solidarity to support the protest movements of the unemployed youth, victims of precariousness and poverty, mainly in underprivileged regions, their rights to:

- Freedom of movement, often impaired within their own country;
- Freedom of expression and peaceful demonstration subjected to continual police harassment;
- Employment and equal regional development, clearly stipulated in the constitution

The undersigned associations fully support the protesters and call for the initiation of an effective dialogue with the public authorities so as to provide viable alternatives to the current status quo.

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CRLDTH Tunisie

Réseau EUROMED

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Nomad o8 Redeyef – Tunisie

CNIJT Tunisie

OMLP (Observatoire Marocain de libertés publiques) Maroc

Collectif Démocratie et Modernité Maroc

Action Jeunesse / FMAS Maroc

Forum Associatif Safi (FAS) Maroc

RAJ Algérie

ATFD Tunisie

AFTURD Tunisie

Fédération nationale des associations Amazigh

IDD - Maroc

FTCR

LTDH Tunisie

LADDH Algérie

CLA Algérie

ACDA France

Association des familles des prisonniers et disparus saharouis (Sahara Occidentale)

CRLDHT

Plateforme Euro Marocaine MDCCD

FOBDEC (Forum Beni Zali pour le développement et la communication)

Forum vérité Justice Maroc

Syndicat Nationale de l'enseignement Maroc

Fédération démocratique de travail Maroc

CMODH (Coordination magrébine des organisations de droits Humains)

CDSM : Collectif pour le droit à la santé au Maroc
EUROMED Maroc

CDP : comité pour le développement et la patri-
moine France