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FEATURE

GREECE

Europe's Border Guards

Mania Barsefski

FEATURE

BRAZIL

The saga of "hope" defeated by "fear"

João Machado

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

GREECE	Too little, too late: an appraisal of the latest Greek deal
SYRIA	What peace process in Syria?
EUROPEAN UNION	Landgrabs and the EU
INDIA	Trupti Shah, a feminist fighter for the environment and social justice
FAR RIGHT	An ominous warning from Austria's elections
TRADE DEALS	TTIP: Local politics enters the global contest
BRITAIN	Antisemitism, Zionism and the left
SCOTLAND	The Future of the Left in Scotland
FRANCE	Strong headwinds are making France a stormy sea
SYRIA	Why are Syria's refugees going through hell?
BRITAIN	Will Britain vote to leave the EU?
KOSOVO	Spring of the great loneliness
BRAZIL	Brazil: the coup d'état
LATIN AMERICA	Argentina's left at a crossroads
SPANISH STATE	What remains of all our outrage?
BRITAIN	Corbyn confounds the plotters
MIDDLE EAST	Solidarity with the resistance of political prisoners in Syria, Iran and throughout the Middle East
PHILIPPINES	After the Philippines election
	Ten theses to explain five years of the 15M movement
BRAZIL	"If the coup succeeds, the country is heading towards a process of social collapse"

SPANISH STATE	The elections and the Podemos-IU agreement
CANADIAN STATE	Don't let the Fort Mac fire turn into feel-good boosterism for the extractive industry. They knew this was coming.
SYRIA	Solidarity with Aleppo and popular democratic resistance in Syria
PHILIPPINES	The situation as it was three days before the elections
PHILIPPINES	Brief description of the current situation before the elections - Part 2
RUSSIA	The 2016 Russian Elections: Putrefaction as the Laboratory of Life
SPANISH STATE	If there are new elections, what shall we do?
ENVIRONMENT	Paris Agreement on Climate Change
ARGENTINA	Challenging a new government in Argentina
THE NETHERLANDS AND THE EU	Unfriendly Terrain
PHILIPPINES	Brief Description of the Current Philippine Situation Before the Elections - Part 1
ENVIRONMENT	Break free from fossil fuels
FRANCE	April 28, another step towards confrontation with the government
ABORTION	Trouble Down in Texas (and elsewhere)
IRELAND	Easter Rising against colonial rule
MIDDLE EAST	Disasters in Syria and Yemen
USA	Politics of the New Abnormal

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.

CONTENTS

GREECE	Too little, too late: an appraisal of the latest Greek deal	<i>Daniel Munevar</i>
SYRIA	What peace process in Syria?	<i>Joseph Daher</i>
EUROPEAN UNION	Landgrabs and the EU	<i>Georgi Medarov</i>
INDIA	Trupti Shah, a feminist fighter for the environment and social justice	
FAR RIGHT	An ominous warning from Austria's elections	<i>Nicole Colson</i>
TRADE DEALS	TTIP: Local politics enters the global contest	<i>Sol Trumbo Vila</i>
BRITAIN	Antisemitism, Zionism and the left	<i>Roland Rance</i>
SCOTLAND	The Future of the Left in Scotland	<i>Johnathan Shafi</i>
FRANCE	Strong headwinds are making France a stormy sea	<i>Léon Crémieux</i>
SYRIA	Why are Syria's refugees going through hell?	<i>Ashley Smith</i>
BRITAIN	Will Britain vote to leave the EU?	<i>Terry Conway</i>
KOSOVO	Spring of the great loneliness	<i>Fitim Salihu</i>
GREECE	Europe's Border Guards	<i>Mania Barsefski</i>
BRAZIL	Brazil: the coup d'état	<i>Michael Löwy</i>
LATIN AMERICA	Argentina's left at a crossroads	<i>Eduardo Lucita</i>
SPANISH STATE	What remains of all our outrage?	<i>Esther Vivas</i>
BRITAIN	Corbyn confounds the plotters	<i>Veronica Fagan</i>
MIDDLE EAST	Solidarity with the resistance of political prisoners in Syria, Iran and throughout the Middle East	<i>Joseph Daher</i>
PHILIPPINES	After the Philippines election	<i>Raymund de Silva</i>
	Ten theses to explain five years of the 15M movement	<i>Brais Fernández</i>
BRAZIL	"If the coup succeeds, the country is heading towards a process of social collapse"	
SPANISH STATE	The elections and the Podemos-IU agreement	<i>Anticapitalistas</i>

CANADIAN STATE	Don't let the Fort Mac fire turn into feel-good boosterism for the extractive industry. They knew this was coming.	<i>Nora Loreto</i>
SYRIA	Solidarity with Aleppo and popular democratic resistance in Syria	<i>Joseph Daher</i>
BRAZIL	The saga of "hope" defeated by "fear"	<i>João Machado</i>
PHILIPPINES	The situation as it was three days before the elections	<i>Raymund de Silva</i>
PHILIPPINES	Brief description of the current situation before the elections - Part 2	<i>Raymund de Silva</i>
RUSSIA	The 2016 Russian Elections: Putrefaction as the Laboratory of Life	<i>Ilya Budraitskis</i>
SPANISH STATE	If there are new elections, what shall we do?	<i>Brais Fernández</i>
ENVIRONMENT	Paris Agreement on Climate Change	<i>Daniel Tanuro</i>
ARGENTINA	Challenging a new government in Argentina	<i>Claudio Katz</i>
THE NETHERLANDS AND THE EU	Unfriendly Terrain	<i>Alex de Jong</i>
PHILIPPINES	Brief Description of the Current Philippine Situation Before the Elections - Part 1	<i>Raymund de Silva</i>
ENVIRONMENT	Break free from fossil fuels	<i>Alan Thornett</i>
FRANCE	April 28, another step towards confrontation with the government	<i>Léon Crémieux</i>
ABORTION	Trouble Down in Texas (and elsewhere)	<i>Dianne Feeley</i>
IRELAND	Easter Rising against colonial rule	<i>Sean Harkin</i>
MIDDLE EAST	Disasters in Syria and Yemen	<i>David Finkel</i>
USA	Politics of the New Abnormal	<i>Against the Current</i>
FEATURES		
FRANCE	What's Next for Nuit Debout?	<i>Stathis Kouvelakis</i>
NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD		
PAKISTAN	Awami Workers Party condemns brutal attack on trans activist	<i>Farooq Tariq</i>
PAKISTAN	Struggle of Okara peasants led by women continues	
MEXICO	Defending Democracy in the Coyoacán Borough of Mexico City	
EGYPT	Arrests and censorship: no to the anti-democratic offensive in Egypt!	<i>NPA-l'Anticapitaliste (NPA-A)</i>
EGYPT	Suffocating to death – save Egyptian prisoners!	
PAKISTAN	Court allows jailed AWP leader to contest by-polls	
PUERTO RICO	Solidarity from Puerto Rico to San Francisco	<i>Rafael Bernabe</i>

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GREECE

Too little, too late: an appraisal of the latest Greek deal

DANIEL MUNEVAR ·

This was expected, as discussions from previous weeks made clear that an agreement on debt relief was going to be the result of a difficult balancing act. On the one side, Germany had made clear its opposition to any significant debt relief measures. Furthermore, if they were to be considered, it would be after the end of the program and only if needed. On the other side, the IMF made its participation conditional to guaranteeing the sustainability of Greek debt. Given the dire economic prospects of Greece, explained in detail in the Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) published by the IMF prior to the Eurogroup, the scale of measures on debt relief envisioned by the DC based organization was clearly incompatible with the German position.

The agreement reached shows this divide was too large to be bridged in a meaningful way. In concrete terms, it delays once more the adoption of significant measures that ensure debt sustainability by providing short-term relief to the country. This includes the disbursement in stages of €10.3 billion in bailout funds, subject to further minor requirements. It also involves modifications to the repayment profile of EFSF loans. In comparison to the measures proposed by the IMF in its DSA, these modifications can only be described as cosmetic changes.

From this perspective, the clash between the IMF and European authorities regarding the viability of the medium term fiscal targets for Greece remains unresolved. The agreement follows the German line in the sense that the implementation of further

debt relief measures will be subject to the completion of the programme in 2018. As part of this commitment, the country is expected to achieve and maintain in the medium term a primary fiscal surplus of 3.5% of GDP. Thus, in the unlikely event that Greece actually manages to fulfill the required conditions, any debt relief to be received by the country would be devised based on a excel sheet fantasy. As a result, it will be too little and too late to guarantee debt sustainability.

This is precisely the argument spelled out by the IMF in its DSA. The document explains in no uncertain terms the myriad of obstacles faced by Greece to achieve and maintain the primary surplus on which this agreement is based. They range from tax collection issues to political uncertainty to lack of meaningful historical examples of countries able to accomplish what is being requested of Greece. The skepticism of the IMF regarding the viability of the fiscal targets translated into a request for upfront and unconditional debt relief that include payment deferrals until 2040 and stretching debt repayments until 2060. In contrast, the debt relief measures included in the agreement are gradual and conditional, falling well below what the IMF proposed. In this regard, just because there was a deal this doesn't wave away the fact that the fiscal targets set for the country are, in the words of the IMF, "unrealistic". It just postpones the recognition of this problem past the Brexit vote, the last months of the Obama presidency and most important, the German elections of 2017.

Further evidence of this problem is exemplified in that the participation in the program of the IMF is still subject to approval by the Executive Board of the organization before the end of 2016. Thus, the Board will be presented with a program built on a

series of macro assumptions and encompassing debt relief measures based on the specifics of the agreement. The former have already been classified as unrealistic by the staff of the organization. The latter can be hardly quantified, as they would only become effective after 2018. The uncertainty of the whole exercise is compounded by the fact that those debt relief measures require another round of discussions and approval by the Eurogroup.

Given that the IMF recently changed its lending criteria for large-scale programs, and now requires that debt is considered sustainable with high probability, it's difficult to see how the staff can justify such an assessment, much less obtain the approval of the Board. As European authorities still insist on the participation of the IMF, this problem will most likely be side-stepped through one of the provisions of the agreement that refers to the use of available ESM in the context of the programme to repay outstanding IMF loans. This would allow reducing the scale of financial assistance to be provided by the IMF to Greece, and as a result, to waive the debt sustainability requirement. This way, the IMF could continue to participate in the programme and the requirement by Germany and other countries to have them on board would be met.

However, this approach is not without problems. The most obvious one is the impact on the credibility of the IMF of leaving a country member linger on in insolvency as long as the organization is not financially exposed to it. This would contradict the *raison d'être* of the organization itself. Furthermore, image considerations aside, the funds that are required to perform the buyout of the IMF

might be already compromised. In its DSA, the IMF makes it clear that the situation of the Greek financial system is far from sustainable and that on top of the €43 billion that have been used to recapitalize banks since 2010, an additional €10 billion will be needed for this same purpose.

In this context, the agreement reached has already failed in terms of establishing a credible framework to ensure the recovery of the Greek economy. One of the key arguments to provide upfront and significant debt relief to a country is to create the conditions to allow the recovery of investment by eliminating the uncertainty attached to insolvency. However, by delaying debt relief and making it conditional to unrealistic targets, this agreement does exactly the opposite. As things stand, Greece is expected to continue increasing taxes and cutting expenditures to the point of risking the viability of basic public services. At the same time debt relief is postponed, vague and subject to political outcomes. It's difficult to see how this package would be conducive to create anything resembling an attractive environment to investors.

It's troubling that 6 years into the crisis, the best the Eurogroup can do is to delay once more the provision of a definitive solution to the Greek debt problem. This is yet another piece of evidence regarding the inability of the current institutional structure of the EU to deal with the scale of economic problems caused by an incomplete monetary union. This is an ill omen for the future of the country and the EU.

May 26 2016

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SYRIA

What peace process in Syria?

JOSEPH DAHER ·

'Children not soldiers'

The Assad regime and its allies of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah continue its attacks and deadly and daily bombings against civilians and civilian infrastructure in areas outside its control throughout the country. This of course is done with the complicity of other world powers. At the same time, the Islamic fundamentalist forces excluded by the ceasefire on their side also committed crimes as in the death of over 140 people, Monday, May 23 in the explosion of seven car bombs in two coastal towns in western Syria, Tartus and Jable, the attack was claimed by Daech, or the sectarian massacre by Islamist groups led by Jabhat al-Nusra (branch of Al-Qaeda in Syria) in which at least 19 civilians were killed against the village of Zara, in the central province of Hama.

The UN mediator, Staffan de Mistura said "inter-syrians talks will be credible when the cessation of hostilities will be credible and when credible progress has been made on the humanitarian front." The peace roadmap for Syria drafted late 2015 in Vienna conference by the International Support Group for Syria (ISGS)- a group of 17 countries and 3 international organizations – including the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the European Union, has completely failed. This is despite the fact this draft peace agreement was voted in December by a resolution of the UN Security Council. The date of August 1st, 2016, for the establishment of a transitional authority, as stipulated in the UN resolution of

December 2015, is also no longer on the agenda. The only possible outcome, which has yet to be verified on the field, of the meeting in Vienna in mid May of ISGS could be airdrops of humanitarian aid by the World Food Programme from June 1st to besieged areas still inaccessible by road. But this would be only in "last resort", as acknowledged in New York by a UN spokesman, while recalling the difficulties of airdrops as being inaccurate and expensive. It also needs the agreement of Damascus and Moscow. So far, these drops have occurred in April 2016, only to support the enclave held by the regime in Deir ez-Zor in the east, surrounded by Daech.

Moscow and Washington, which co-chair the International Support Group for Syria (ISGS) run and try to monitor the cease-fire, initiated under their impulse in February 27 and partly fulfilled for some time but without stopping hostilities completely, particularly with major violations such as between April 22 and May 5 in Aleppo killing several hundred persons. That said, the partial cease-fire had allowed the revival of massive popular protests across the liberated areas of Syria for several weeks. The importance of the cease-fire and stopping military fights are essential to democratic forces in Syria to allow them to operate, demonstrate and organize their local communities, while the Islamic Fundamentalist forces benefit firstly from the continuation of the war to increase their influence in the liberated areas of the regime.

Also thanks to the partial cease-fire, 250,000 people have been sent basic supplies throughout Syria, out of a total of 410,000 persons living in besieged areas. However the regime still prevented the delivery of aid to Daraya which has been under siege for several years now. Four trucks containing surgical

kits, medicines, vaccines, but no food, and baby milk were firstly authorized but were eventually not delivered. According to a humanitarian source, the 4th Armoured Division, the elite unit deployed around Damascus, demanded that in order to let through the trucks, that they empty all their cargo, with the exception of vaccines. Following this order, the organizers decided to go back. Few minutes later, nine artillery shells fell on the spot where the people of Daraya gathered awaiting the convoy. A father and his son were killed in the explosions.

The Assad regime and its allies are actually the key players in the continuation of the war against the Syrian people by its perpetual and daily bombings, blockades and other forms of repression. These are the main reason for the failure of the peace negotiations. This of course is done with the complicity of other world powers as I will show.

A statement by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on May 23rd signed by nearly 40 rebel groups that operate across Syria actually said they would deem the cessation of hostilities deal as having "totally collapsed" if the assault by Syrian regime and allied Lebanese Hezbollah forces fighters did not cease within two days on their positions in the suburbs of Damascus. They also mentioned other areas of the country such as Aleppo and Idlib.

Russia, Iran and Hezbollah

As we have discussed previously in an earlier article, the official announcement of the so called 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. Deliveries of weapons and equipment are continuing a steady pace in Tartous. The container port is always reserved for Russian ships and shipping agencies must rely on Latakia. On Syrian soil, Putin also maintains helicopters, artillery pieces, long-range rocket batteries and most of the 5,000 Russian mil-

itary personnel. This is not to mention the recovery of city Palmyra by the "Syrian army" and its allies, and especially heavily supported by Russia in the air by its airstrikes and on the ground with the participation of Russian commandos. All this demonstrates that Putin's announcement was not serious.

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).

In addition to all of this, tens of thousands of Iranian Hezbollah and Shi'a fundamentalist militia soldiers also continue to fight on the side of the regime forces. The Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah also said in the wake of the death of the top Hezbollah military commander Mustafa Badreddine few weeks ago that the party would increase its number of soldiers in Syria to assist the Assad regime.

The United States and Western states

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Friday, May 20 that Russia proposed to the United States and the international coalition led by Washington to carry out air strikes together from May 25 against terrorist groups active in Syria and illegal armed groups who do not support the ceasefire established in Syria.

Washington rejected the offer, saying the US will not cooperate with the Russians on military operations in Syria. Communication between the United States and the Russian military in Syria is limited to contacts to avoid accidents because they lead rival bombing campaigns and a small number of US forces operates on the ground, especially in the regions controlled by the PYD. The Russian operations consist indeed to sustain and support the Assad regime and the United States focuses only on the defeat of the Islamic State group, as stated by the US Secretary of State John Kerry. It neverthe-

less stated that the US government was discussing with Russian counterparts proposals for a sustainable mechanism to better monitor and enforce the lull in the fighting in Syria.

The priority of the US and European states is indeed to end the presence and activities of Daech in Syria and Iraq. The international coalition commanded by the United States has also dropped leaflets calling for the first time the people of Raqqa to leave the town occupied by Daech on Friday, May 20. "This is not the first time that coalition aircraft been dropped leaflets over Raqqa but this is the first time they ask residents to leave," said Abu Mohammad, a founder of the group "Raqqa is Being slaughtered silently" ("Raqqa is slaughtered in silence"). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (OSDH), about 408 civilians were killed by air strikes from the coalition led by Washington in Syria since the start in 2014 of the bombing operations against jihadist positions.

It is in this framework that we have to understand the visit of Joseph Votel, a four-star US army general and head of Central Command, the highest-ranking U.S. military official to visit Syria since the uprising erupted in 2011, to the training camps of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), dominated by the military branch of the PYD and that has become the main instrument on the ground in Syria for the USA to fight Daech, as the group and its US coalition allies prepare recruits for operations against Daech in northern province of Raqqa. Aided by U.S.-led air strikes, the SDF has driven Daech from wide areas of northern Syria over the last year or more, though its advances have recently slowed.

No regime change in Syria is promoted by the USA and its European allies, quite on the opposite. Their main enemy in their perspective is Daech.

The failure of the peace process

The reasons underlying the failure of the peace process are because of the desire of the Assad regime and its allies of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah to end all forms of opposition in the country. The

United States and the Western states on their side consider the main enemies organizations as Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra. This is why they support a form of political transition without any radical change in which the structure of the regime is maintained in order to end the activities and the presence of Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria.

The departure of the dictator Assad is indeed no more a precondition as it was evident during the last rounds of negotiations, or even a change of structures of the authoritarian regime, including its security forces, is on the agenda. In March, the UN mediator, S. de Mistura, has also recalled that "the agenda of the process (of peace) is clear: first negotiations for a new government secondly a new Constitution, and thirdly, parliamentary and presidential elections within 18 months." This so called realpolitik and the failure of peace negotiations strengthen on the ground in Syria Islamic fundamentalist forces that continue to denounce these peace negotiations promoted by the "crusaders" and "infidel" forces as a way to save and maintain the regime of Assad. This is not far from the reality actually as we have seen and this discourse has some resonance on the ground in some sections of the population, particularly in the zones most affected by bombing and repression of the regime.

Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra feed on authoritarian regimes and their murderous repressions, their neo-liberal and sectarian policies, as well as from the support they get from imperialist and sub imperialist countries. The necessity is to get rid of the conditions that allow fundamentalist groups to develop and expand and this means empowering the people on the ground to overthrow authoritarian regime and face reactionary groups.

Despite their rivalry, the imperialist and sub-imperialist actors share a common goal: to liquidate the revolutionary movement initiated in March 2011, stabilize the regime in Damascus, with its dictator remaining at its head (for a short and medium term in any case) and try to militarily defeat Daech. It is also for this reason that the United States did and does not oppose vehemently the massive Russian

military intervention since September 2015, which continues until today or the continuation of offensives by the Assad regime and its allies. Besides, the Syrian opposition have repeatedly complained of the pressures exerted by the United States to force them to negotiate with representatives of the Assad regime, despite repeated violations of the ceasefire by regime forces, the continuation of the blockades on besieged cities, the refusal to release political prisoners as requested by the resolution of the United Nations voted in December 2015. This pressure was symbolized by the words of US Secretary of State John Kerry to Syrian humanitarian workers outside the London donor conference "Supporting Syria", in January 2016, saying the Syrian opposition will be decimated and had to expect 3 months of bombing. Kerry had also blamed the Syrian opposition for leaving the talks in Geneva III conference, which opened the way for a joint offensive by the Syrian regime and Russia on Aleppo.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey for their part have not offered to compromise until now, on the question of the dictator Assad and they want as quickly as possible his departure of power, but that does not mean they want a radical regime change in the direction of the popular aspirations of the Syrian people for democracy, social justice and equality, on the contrary. These states want to maintain the authoritarian structure of the regime with a sectarian character and even more conservative in alliance with the Salafist jihadist movements like Ahrar Sham and the Army of Islam, which would continue their fight against Daech; promote neoliberal policies and limit as much as possible social rights, and prevent any form of Kurdish autonomy, while maintaining the imperialist order in the region. This can be seen by the leaders of the opposition negotiation team formed in Riyadh in December 2015, supported by these states: at its head the former Prime Minister and Ba'athist Riad Hijab, the chairman of the High Committee of the Syrian negotiations, Mohamed Alloush, chief negotiator for the opposition delegation and politburo member of the Salafist jihadist group Army of Islam, and the

former Syrian army General, Assaad al-Zoabi, head of the delegation.

Another reason for the failure of the peace process is also related to the continuation of the popular resistance despite the bombing, blockades, and repression, which refuses the diktat of international powers to maintain the regime and the dictator Assad and opposes as well the authoritarian practices of Islamic fundamentalist forces.

In addition to the continuation of demonstrations and protests mentioned in the previous articles such as in Sweida against the Assad regime and in Maaret al-Numaan against Jabhat al-Nusra, new protests have occurred in different cities of the Idlib province against the authoritarian practices of Jabhat Al-Nusra. In the city of Kafr Nabl, the demonstrators during the weekend of May 19-21 demanded military factions not to interfere in civilian affairs and management of the council. They also demanded the release of several activists and members of the former local council in the prisons of Jabhat al-Nusra, while in the city of Saraqeb protesters demonstrated following the murder of an activist by Jabhat al-Nusra.

In the Idlib province, a campaign was launched called "Children Not Soldiers" by activists of the region to counter the campaign of recruitment called "Go Forth," which aimed at recruiting 3,000 child and teenage soldiers, largely across Idlib and Aleppo provinces. This campaign was launched by Salafi cleric and vocal Al-Qaeda advocate the Saudi sheikh Abdallah al-Muhaysini who serves as both chairman of the Jihad's Callers Center, a training institute for religious leaders in collaboration with Jabhat a-Nusra, and is a senior judge in the Victory Army. The anti-recruitment campaign holds meetings in secret and late at night to avoid being discovered by the ruling Victory Army, dominated by Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar Sham.

Many other examples of democratic popular resistance can be found across liberated Syria in the spirit of the objectives of the revolution, especially promoted and maintained by the local popular

councils and groups of activists that are the pulse of this movement.

The end of the war is essential and is a priority, but it can not really be possible without taking into account the popular aspirations of the Syrian people fighting for freedom and dignity. This means that any peace process must allow the establishment of a transition without Assad and his running mates at the head of the state, and for a Syria that is democratic, social, secular and without any kind of discriminations regarding gender, religion, ethnicity, etc . It also needs to take into account and support the right to self-determination of the Kurdish

people in Syria, totally ignored and even refused by the Assad regime and the National Coalition supported by the West, Turkey, and the Gulf monarchies.

We need to be in solidarity with the Syrian people in their fight against the diktats of the imperialist and sub-powers, against the Assad regime and its allies, and all the various actors of the counter-revolution trying to crush it.

We must crush all the tyrants as written recently on a placard by demonstrators in the city of Maaret al-Numaan.

Peace News

EUROPEAN UNION

Landgrabs and the EU

GEORGI MEDAROV ·

A data set produced by GRAIN, an international NGO that has done influential research on land grabs, documents over 400 cases of large-scale land grabs, covering nearly 35 million hectares of farmland in over 60 countries, that happened from 2006 to 2012 [1]. The problem with land grabs is that they do not contribute to the development of local communities, as they promise to do. Capital-intensive agricultural investment does not provide jobs and is spectacularly environmentally destructive. Additionally, as Olivier de Schutter, who served as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2008 to 2014, has asserted, land grabs are having devastating effects on food security worldwide.

It is often wrongly presupposed that land grabs are something that does not concern Europe. It does both because EU policies stimulate such type of investment and since European corporations are directly involved and because land grabs are present within Europe as well, particularly in Eastern Europe. In a recent study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development [2], we find "significant evidence that farmland grabbing is underway in the EU", especially in some Eastern European member-states. For instance, foreign direct investment in the agricultural sector in Estonia, the same study indicates, rose five times in the period from 2003 to 2008. In Romania, as a 2013 study on land grabs in Europe published by the Transnational institute (TNI), an Amsterdam-based progressive think-tank, shows about 700,000 – 800,000 hectares of

farmland is estimated to be in the hands of large multinational corporations.

Bulgaria is an excellent example of cases of extreme land grabs within the EU, with 4% of agricultural producers controlling 85% of utilised farmland, but I will come back to this in the end of the article again. It is firstly important to comprehend the role of the EU in all this.

The Role of the EU

Source UNCTAD

The EU, as research by the TNI has demonstrated [3], is a major actor in the global land grab rush. More than forty percent of the largest investors in the field are based in Europe. For example, the British Landkom was leasing over 100 000 hectares of land in Ukraine in 2008 and 2009. Furthermore, EU policies end up stimulating land-grabbing. The Renewable Energy Directive, adopted in 2009, requires that 20% of energy used within the EU, as well as 10% of transport fuel in individual member-states come from so-called "renewable" sources. This leads to entrenchment of the agrofuel industries by creating a stable and favourable environment for investments in cash crops such as corn, that are convertible to fuel: a major stimulus to the global land grab rush. The same TNI report shows that there are in fact a number of similar EU policies, such as its external investment and trade policies or its internal agricultural policies, which actively contribute to the global expansion of land grabs. There have been individual critical voices from EU officials. In 2009, for instance, Stefano Manservigi, the director-general for aid and development at the European Commission, stated that "this is another way to exploit developing coun-

tries... a perfect example of neo-colonialism". But the overall EU policy remains unchallenged.

The Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative, adopted by the EU in 2001, aims to promote EU imports from the least developed nations for everything except for arms and hence to integrate them in the global economy. In practice, however, it has contributed to the growth of land grabs. In Cambodia, for example, EBA promoted tariff abolition of Cambodian sugar imports in the EU. This measure was supposed to create jobs, but in reality it stimulated the Cambodian government to drive farmers off their land in order to lease the farmland to big international investors. This led 400 farming families to initiate a litigation against the implicated multinational corporations in London's High Court. [4]

There are similar individual cases when direct political violence is involved in land grabs in EU member-states. The Dutch banking corporation Rabobank is engaged in acquiring over 21 000 hectares of farmland in Romania. Zarand, a Romanian village inhabited by over 2,500 people, is among the regions where subsidiaries of the Dutch giant have been grabbing land. The villagers have accused those companies of taking their land without any formal consent. The mayor of the village has been convicted by the National Agency for Anti-Corruption for his participation in document forgery and the theft of local citizens' farmland. [5]

Defining Land Grabs

It is certainly easier to recognize land grabs when direct political coercion is involved, such as in the mentioned cases from Cambodia and Romania. More often, nevertheless, there are much more subtle ways to force small farmers and peasant communities off their land which are key to the understanding of the extent of land grabs, particularly within the EU.

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), representing about half of EU's budgets, for example, promotes paying subsidies to large agricultural in-

vestors. Thus it creates unequal market incentives, stimulating big agricultural investors and marginalizing small ones, contributing, along with other European land-related policies, to the processes of farmland concentration within the EU. In that sense it is important to reassess the meaning of land grabs and not to narrow its definition solely to cases where violence is present, neither to investment projects in developing nations by transnational actors.

Mainstream media usually takes the narrow perspective (focusing on political coercion and foreign-investors). Even some critical NGOs have adopted this view. The narrow perspective, however, may remain blind to the fact that national investors may be as "foreign" to local communities as transnational ones, if the investment leads to reduction of employment and dispossesses small farmers of their land, and if its profit do not benefit in any way the local communities, based where the farmland is located.

Land Grabs in Eastern Europe: The Case of Bulgaria

In Bulgaria a class of national agricultural investors has been able to effectively monopolize Bulgarian agriculture by establishing strong connections with the national political elite and by taking advantage of EU farming subsidies, favouring large investors. Furthermore, those Bulgarian investors had been very efficient in integrating their businesses in international markets for agricultural production.

A study on land concentration in Bulgaria, published last month by Za Zemiata [6], the Bulgarian member of Friends of the Earth, shows that the number of agricultural producers have been falling constantly in the last 15-20 years. In 2003 there had been over 650 000 registered producers and in 2013 the number fell to about 250 000. Cooperative farms have been in constant decline, too. Between 2003 and 2010 both their number and the land they use fell by about 50%, but, at the same time, private agricultural investors have enjoyed high growth levels.

Despite that there are still many small producers, they have very limited access to land. Only 4% of agricultural producers control 85% farmland. The case is the same with livestock breeding with 1,5% of producers in the sector utilizing 66% of the land. Small producers still dominate the market, but only in terms of sheer numbers, not in terms of access to land. Over 80% of farmers use less than 2 hectares of land. This figure puts the huge majority of farmers in Bulgaria in the same situation as most of their colleagues in the European island-nation of Malta, where also 80% of farmers have less than 2 hectares of land.

Mainstream media and politicians have praised the "impressive" growth in the Bulgarian agricultural sector. Disregarding extreme centralization of land use, practically all Bulgarian governments in the last two decades have favoured land consolidation by few big agricultural firms. The current agricul-

tural minister, who used to be the CEO in one of the most influential Bulgarian farming corporations, keeps on claiming the biggest challenge for the government is to accelerate land consolidation.

To finish on a positive note, in the midst of this bleak picture, some peasant farmers, agricultural workers, as well as food and environmentalist activists have started to organize in Eastern Europe against this utterly unjust land policies. The next European Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty, which unites the progressive organizations in the field of land and agricultural politics, will take place this autumn in Romania [7]. Perhaps it is possible to hope that this is indicative of potential politicization against the socially destructive effects of neoliberalism in the agricultural sector, so painfully visible in Eastern Europe.

LeftEast

INDIA

Trupti Shah, a feminist fighter for the environment and social justice

Trupti, an economist by training, centered her lifelong activism primarily on women's issues, constantly drawing its intersections with development, environment, communal strife, caste, labour and human rights issues.

With parents, Thakorbhai Shah, a known labour union leader and mother Suryakanta Shah, active in public life, Trupti was drawn into people's struggles very early in her life.

Trupti always attributed her initiation into activism to her parents. In her own words, "I inherited the spirit, 'not to tolerate any injustice' from my father who left his career as journalist and Gandhian ideology to fight against injustice and became a Marxist-Trotskyist and Trade unionist. Along with him and other younger comrades from the Communist League, a Trotskyist group, I witnessed or participated in most of the major movements that emerged in Gujarat in the 1970s. My involvement in the women's movement has its roots in these experiences."

Her first experience of people's movement was in 1973 when she was just 11 years old. She, with five other girls, was detained in the state home of children for three days for participating with the elders in the anti-price rise movement that started in Vadodara to protest Rs. 1 hike in milk prices. She was soon to actively participate in the

ensuing Nav Nirman

Andolan and anti-Emergency movement. A product of Maharaja Sayajirao

University's distinctive academic atmosphere from her kindergarten studies,

Trupti was to plunge into the women's movement from her student days. And that turned into her lifelong passion.

As a young 18 year old, unlike most other Gujarati youth, she became active

in the Communist League (CL), the Indian section of the Fourth International, which supported autonomous women's movement world over. Dr. Vibhuti Patel, one of the leading activists of the Communist League was to

mentor Trupti's initiation in the autonomous women's movement. Dr. Neera

Desai, a renowned sociologist and feminist, too was a major influence on

Trupti's young mind and her work for women's rights.

When the nationwide movement for reopening the Mathura Rape Case seeking amendments in legal provisions related to rape was started, Trupti was a part of the forum, "Narishoshan Virodhi Samiti" (Committee to Resist

Exploitation against Women) to be initiated in Vadodara. Disenchanted with

the apathy of women political leaders towards gender-based violence,

she participated as perhaps the youngest delegate in the first conference

of Autonomous Women's Movement organised in Bombay in 1980. The proceedings sharpened the need in her to start something afresh in Vadodara for women's rights. And so she resolved: "there is a

need to have an autonomous women's organisation in Baroda which will uphold the interest of women above all other issues and political affiliation." And the rest of her life became a persistent effort towards building such an organisation. [1]

An effort of several years and like-minded friends resulted in Sahiyar (Stree Sangathan) an initiative led by the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda students in 1984. The overriding consciousness resulted in an organisation by women and for women with the long term aim to work towards a society free from inequality, injustice and atrocity - a society where women enjoy equal status and recognition as human beings. Resisting communal forces and fundamentalists of all hues, in striving to uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination, soon became central to all Sahiyar's initiatives.

Sahiyar (Stree Sangathan) is a feminist group in Vadodara. She was one of its founder members. Sahiyar (Stree Sangathan) works for women's rights and strives to create awareness among society on women's issues. She was involved in awareness programmes like street theatre, organising workshops, training, participatory research and publication on behalf of the organisation. She was also involved in counseling of adolescent girls and women and providing legal support to them.

Her concerns were not limited to only women's issues. She brought gender perspective to other public concerns such as environment, civil liberties, human rights, anti-communalism and all just causes.

She had been involved with several social / voluntary organisations since her

student days and undertook community work and social awareness work through these organisations.

One such organization being Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti (PSS), an organisation working on the issues related to environmental rights and awareness. As also a part of PSS, Trupti brought in her impeccable research and analytical skills and her understanding of human environment in identifying and studying the rampant environmental degradation and displacement of adivasis in the name of development for land grabbing and privatization. The concerns highlighted by her have found their expression in the changing environment over time, which only goes to showcase the depth of her understanding. Her thorough approach and holistic understanding of environmental issues, helped in preparation for legal action, an important aspect of her action-oriented approach.

She was also involved with People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), as well as the *Radical Socialist*.

Trupti brought her expertise and sensitivities of women's rights to other struggles and every major social upheaval that she responded to – during the anti-Narmada dam agitation, the anti-nuclear protests at Mithivirdi area, the fight against industrial pollution in Gujarat, the 2002 Gujarat Carnage, the various government undertaken slum demolition drives, and raised environmental concerns in Gujarat from time to time including in respect of the Statue of Unity project, Garudeshwar Weir project and the recent Vishwamitri Riverfront Development project, flagging the environmental violations, livelihood issue and

damage being caused by the projects.

Her academic association with MSU continued simultaneously; in various capacities – as a researcher, teacher, and as academic coordinator with the Women's Studies Research Center and later in the faculty of commerce and faculty of social work as well.

She infused her academic expertise in her activism, translating it into action-oriented work at the grassroots level. Whether she was involved in preparing training manuals for NGOs, reviewing exercises, conducting training programmes, community programmes, she combined her academic brilliance with radical activism. She constantly flagged concerns and violations of all kinds with a rare passion.

She earned her Ph.D. for her thesis, "Economic Status of Women in Urban Informal Sector – A study of Baroda City" from MSU in 2000.

She continued to write extensively, with her unwavering faith in the

collective women's movement. She took great satisfaction in the four

part: *Nari Andolanno Itihas* (History of Women's Movement), a series of books on the history of women's movement in Gujarati, published by UNNATI and Sahiyar (Stree Sangathan) in 2011.

During her last days, she was most concerned about the violations in the Vishwamitri Riverfront Development Project case, especially related to the river's bio-diversity, environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods. Her concern to her last breath: *behno na adhikar ni vaat loko nathi sambhadta....nadi, Paryavaran ni vaat loko samjhe to saru* (People are apathetic to women's rights....it would be good if they understand the issue of river, environment).

She is survived by her fellow comrade, activist, friend and companion, Rohit Prajapati, who has been her partner in her efforts and pillar of support, and her son, Manav, amongst other family and friends.

FAR RIGHT

An ominous warning from Austria's elections

NICOLE COLSON ·

By an extremely narrow margin, Norbert Hofer, candidate of Austria's racist far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ, by its initials in German), lost the presidential election to Green Party-backed candidate Alexander Van der Bellen.

Van der Bellen won by just 0.6 percent of the vote—a margin of some 31,000 votes out of the more than 4.6 million cast. Candidates of the center-left Social Democratic Party and center-right Austrian People's Party, which have traditionally held power, were soundly rejected in the first round of voting, leading to a runoff election between the viciously anti-immigrant Hofer and Van der Bellen, who ran as an independent with the backing of the Greens.

Had he won, Hofer would have been the first far-right head of state elected in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Opponents of racism and reaction are rightly breathing a sigh of relief, but the narrowness of Hofer's defeat is unprecedented considering his party's historic ties to fascism—the FPÖ was founded in the mid-1950s by former Nazis and nationalists.

The election outcome should be a warning about the ability of the far right to grow across Europe, as figures like Hofer seek to scapegoat refugees as the cause of the economic suffering of working people—and traditional center-left and center-right parties do little or nothing to oppose the right's hate.

Hofer HAS been credited with moving the FPÖ away from its more openly anti-Semitic and bigoted rhetoric, but make no mistake—the core politics of the party remain the same, even if party officials

have become more savvy about how they package them.

Much like Marine Le Pen's attempts to camouflage the Holocaust denial and virulent racism of France's National Front in past years, Hofer has distanced the FPÖ from the more overtly hard-line rhetoric of former leader Christian Strache. His motives are likewise similar to Le Pen's—to construct an image that will appeal to a new generation of voters that might reject open fascism, but are disillusioned with mainstream parties.

The Guardian wrote that Hofer's "slick, unashamedly populist, Eurosceptic but largely uncontroversial campaign, promising to 'put Austria first' with the slogan 'Unspoiled, honest, good,' saw him collect 35 percent of the first-round vote in the presidential elections, his party's best national score since its formation in 1956."

But behind slogans like "Put Austria First" is the FPÖ's insistence that some people—especially immigrants and refugees—be put last.

During the campaign, Hofer used crude fear-mongering about the supposed threat of refugees, especially Muslim men, committing violent crimes like rape. He promised that, if he was elected, criminal penalties would be stiffened and assistance to refugees and immigrants would be cut.

Hofer likewise said that "Islam has no place in Austria," while drawing comparisons to the anti-immigrant positions of Donald Trump in the U.S.

One big difference between Trump and Hofer, however, is that the Freedom Party has a more coherent base of support on the Austrian right and actual roots in fascism, even if Hofer is trying to present a

different image. As Paul Hockenos wrote in *Foreign Policy*, Hofer:

conveys the Freedom Party's anti-immigrant message without the beer-hall ugliness of the old right or that of less-seasoned like-minded parties elsewhere in Europe. He stands behind vague slogans such as "Austria to Your Feet" and "Austria First," which sound harmless but convey the message that Austrians should do only what's best for them, not unfortunates from faraway lands. Austria, he says, should maintain and tighten the restrictive immigration regime of the current Social Democratic-Conservative government. But he says explicitly that Muslims are swamping Austria and that Islam cannot be at home in Austria, sentiments most Austrians agree with.

This last point is important to bear in mind. If many Austrians agree with racist and Islamophobic ideas, the blame must also rest with other political leaders and parties in Austria that have not just failed to challenge the far-right's scapegoating, but pandered to it.

In the presidential campaign, for example, Van der Bellen ceded political ground to Hofer on the issue of refugees. In one televised debate, Van der Bellen endorsed the idea that crimes committed by refugees—like the September rape of a 72-year-old woman by an Afghan refugee—required a particularly tough response "because that is an attempt to occupy a certain public space, and that we won't countenance."

The FPÖ can get a hearing for its anti-immigrant appeal because the two main parties in Austrian politics—the center-right People's Party and center-left Social Democratic Party, one or both of which have run every Austrian government since the end of the Second World War—engage in their own scapegoating of refugees.

Plus, the two parties are implicated in the neoliberal economic measures imposed on Austria—which has allowed the FPÖ to win support as an opponent

of European Union-sponsored austerity. As Benjamin Opratko wrote for *Jacobin* last December, commenting on regional elections held in October:

Sometimes, it's even been difficult for left-wingers to disagree with some of their positions, such as their opposition to the bank bailouts, their attacks on the "neoliberal" and "corporate" European Union, and their assertion that "rescue packages" for Greek debt servicing in fact benefited German and French financial corporations. "Unser Geld für unsere Leut"—"Our money for our people"—became one of their more popular slogans.

In an environment in which support for European crisis management has been almost unequivocal among the Austrian political establishment, this has put [the FPÖ] in a comfortable position to re-establish their populism. The operative term in their popular slogan, of course, is "our." Our money, our people—they've made it abundantly clear who is, and isn't, included in this pronoun.

Nor is the FPÖ's claimed opposition to austerity genuine—as the party's previous ascendance shows.

In 2000, riding a wave of anger at the reigning center-left government, the FPÖ, behind then-leader Jörg Haider, did well enough in elections to join in a coalition government with the People's Party. The FPÖ's fortunes declined because of a corruption scandal and disillusionment over the party's failure to deliver on economic promises—as it became a booster of the same neoliberal policies it now criticizes.

THOUGH THE refugee issue was central to this campaign, it should be noted that the rise of far-right parties like the FPÖ, both in Austria and Europe, predates the current period.

According to Opratko, prior to regional elections in Vienna last October, the FPÖ also deployed propaganda against migrants and asylum seekers. But that alone didn't explain the FPÖ's success last year, Opratko wrote:

A year ago—well before most of the current refugees arrived in Austria—polls in Upper Austria estimated the FPÖ's support at around 30 percent. Earlier this year, before the refugee situation dominated headlines, elections in the southern province of Styria saw the FPÖ skyrocket from 10.7 to 28.8 percent, finishing just 2.5 percent behind the Social Democrats...

The idea that the FPÖ is merely profiting from anxiety about migration therefore conveniently overlooks the far right's strength before the refugee crisis.

Across Europe, parties like the FPÖ, the National Front in France, Poland's Law and Justice party, Hungary's Jobbik party, and Germany's more recent Alternative for Germany have exploited anger with the consequences of the 2008 global financial crisis, disillusionment with EU policies and austerity, and the failure of centrist parties of either the left or right to provide any alternative in the interests of workers and the poor.

Now, the European far right is focused on the refugee crisis to sharpen its message, blaming immigrants and refugees for crime, a lack of jobs and more besides. But the right is playing to anti-immigrant sentiment that already exists because traditional political parties paved the way—either tacitly or explicitly—with calls for border clampdowns and restrictions on benefits for immigrants and refugees.

Commenting in the Financial Times, Heather Grabbe, director of the Open Society European Policy Institute, wrote:

In a climate of crisis around migration...the open society is threatened not only by extremist parties getting into power but also by mainstream ones reinforcing the same xenophobic logic. Recent events in Austria show that the politics of fear can quickly run out of control. After all, it was mainstream parties that agreed to bilateral deals with the country's Balkan neighbors to keep out migrants. The governing coalition has drastically restricted the right

of asylum, in contravention of the Geneva Convention, according to the European Commission and the UN.

The logic taking hold across Europe is that we must turn inwards and build higher fences, physical and virtual, to ward off external threats.

Though Hofer lost, the closeness of the vote is a sign that the far right, if it is not challenged, can grow and even win political power.

It's imperative for the left to have a response—one that not only confronts the right-wingers themselves, ideologically and practically, but also presents an alternative to the mainstream political parties by putting blame for the crisis squarely where it belongs and offering a political alternative based on solidarity and freedom, rather than scapegoating and repression.

The mass demonstrations and strikes in France, prompted by the government's attempt to strip away hard-won workers' rights, shows the potential for such an alternative. As French socialist Léon Crémieux wrote, the anti-government revolt has broken through a gloomy period dominated by the success of the National Front and the parallel rise of repression and Islamophobia in the name of "national security" following the Paris terrorist attacks last year.

In a Facebook post thanking his supporters after the election, Hofer said the work expended on his campaign was "not lost, but an investment in the future," according to an Associated Press translation.

Hofer is right—unless we can build opposition to discredit and drive back the likes of the FPÖ and the rest of the far right in Europe. That requires championing the rights of refugees, challenging austerity and standing defiant against scapegoating and hate.

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TRADE DEALS

TTIP: Local politics enters the global contest

SOL TRUMBO VILA ·

Opponents of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) see their chances of victory increasing. Local authorities are now also increasingly taking a strong position against supranational structures that negotiate opaque trade deals.

Recent declarations by the two Austrian presidential contenders ensuring they would block TTIP, Hollande's declarations claiming he would not approve TTIP at any cost and the Polish Agriculture minister rejecting the TTIP provisions about food safety rules revealed in the leaks published by Greenpeace Netherlands, have placed the EU Commission and the EU Chamber of Commerce on the defensive. They have reason to be worried, support for TTIP is plunging in the US and Germany - from more than 50% in 2014 to less than 20% now - to the extent that US Consulting firms working for Pro-TTIP groups call for coordinated actions to win the public debate and "control the news cycle".

Indeed the news now is that TTIP is falling apart. The German newspaper Der Spiegel recognises that "an unprecedented protest movement" is threatening to collapse TTIP. Both Der Spiegel and the Guardian praise the professionalism of the anti-TTIP activists, many of them applying the lessons from two decades of fighting the trade regime built around the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. This occurs in a context of organisational practices inspired by the occupation of the public space and the use of communication technologies. The latest example occurred last weekend with the success of the French movement NuitDebout calling for a self-organised #WorldDebout.

In the struggle against the global trade regime the political trenches are different than a decade ago,

and this explains how the anti-TTIP movement has expanded beyond the anti-neoliberal and anti-corporate led trade circles. The definite battle line has been drawn around the defence of sovereignty and the "right to decide". This was evident in the first gathering of Free-TTIP cities convened in Barcelona last month. The host of the meeting, Barcelona City Council representative Gerardo Pisarello, framed TTIP in terms of loss of sovereignty and democracy, "We the cities want to have a say in the politics that will affect the lives of our citizens", stating that with this treaty many social policies "will be effectively blocked". To date more than 1800 European cities and regions have declared themselves TTIP-Free zones.

The defence of democracy at the local level relates to the flourishing of a new economy, the alternatives emerging before the incapacity of both the state and the market – the key actors of the last century – to solve the daily needs of a growing number of people. This new economy takes many forms and names and by no coincidence Barcelona is one of the places where we find many examples of the commons collaborative economy practices. As rightly stated in Barcelona by Attac Austria President and key activist of the anti-TTIP European Alliance Alexandra Strickner "We are not working only against Free Trade Agreements as in the past; there is a fight for alternatives".

For the municipalities represented in Barcelona their capacity to promote Public Alternatives was an issue of major concern. Public procurement has become a key tool to expand and consolidate local alternatives to the current economic system based on global value chains dependent on fossil fuels and low labour standards. The Barcelona declaration states "We are deeply concerned that these

treaties will put our capacity to legislate and use public funds (including public procurement) at risk, severely damaging our task to aid people in basic issues such as: housing, health, environment, social services, education, local economic development or food safety." In other words, trade agreements can block and reverse global trends such as the remunicipalisation of water services or other services. The Barcelona conference confirmed that broadly accepted global governance tools like the principle of subsidiarity and useful regulations like the Directive 2014/24/UE about public procurement are being dismantled with the new generation of trade agreements.

What are the next steps? The broad coalition of social movements, civil society organisations and more combative trade unions should consolidate the alliance with the network of free-TTIP cities. Now that some EU governments are openly questioning TTIP the European coalition is already focusing on CETA. Dubbed the Canadian TTIP, CETA is due to be ratified this autumn as a "back door" for US multinationals with a base in Canada aiming to enter the so far protected European markets. An "autumn of dissent" is already being prepared with different mobilisations against the various Free Trade Agreements and the transnational corporations that promote them. This is a good opportunity

to consolidate the engagement of the cities in the mobilisations, which will require imagination and political commitment.

If CETA is defeated it would be a fatal blow to TTIP, however there are more battles on the horizon, such as the TiSA (Trade in Services Agreement). These battles against various acronym-lade trade agreements is simply evidence of a broader reality; the corporate capture of national and supranational institutions, which forces civil society to be on the defensive. However, the Barcelona meeting demonstrated that municipal governments united in the struggle to defend democracy and sovereignty is an effective strategy that can protect and promote the blossoming of post-capitalist spaces.

Local governments are becoming a strategic actor protecting citizens' rights where nation-states have failed. And commitments are being made. Grenoble, one of the first cities to remunicipalise water services in France, took up the torch and will host the next TTIP, CETA and TiSA-Free Zones gathering. These transformative cities should not become islands in a sea of neoliberal globalisation, but spaces to develop a political practice that protects and nurtures the local while ensuring international solidarity and cooperation.

TNI

BRITAIN

Antisemitism, Zionism and the left

ROLAND RANCE ·

Tory electoral strategist Lynton Crosby [3] has gained notoriety for his "dead cat" tactic: when losing an argument, "throw a dead cat on the table". However much this may disgust people, you can guarantee that the dead cat is what they will be talking about, any other issues will be forgotten. The right now seems to have found the smelliest of all dead cats, with their seemingly endless stream of largely spurious claims of antisemitism directed at Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party, and left activists in general.

This attack is a convergence of different forces and interests, each with a common target. There is the longstanding Israeli propaganda attack on supporters of Palestinian rights, which has been augmented by the growth of the solidarity movement as a result of Israel's increasing brutality, and particularly by the strength of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign in response to the call of Palestinian civil society. This is an international campaign by the Israeli state, though Britain has been a key target for some time – with London identified as "the primary hub of the delegitimization network and campaign". [4]

The election of Jeremy Corbyn, a prominent supporter of Palestinian rights, to the leadership of the Labour Party made this even more urgent and they have used to their advantage the resistance by many on the Labour right to Corbyn and to any move leftwards by the party, and the outright hostility by the Tories and their press supporters to Corbyn and to Labour as a whole. It is no coincidence that this issue burst into public during an election campaign marked by outright racism and Islamophobia.

What does "anti-semitism" mean?

Before examining the specific allegations, it's necessary to be clear about language. The term "anti-semitism" was coined by 19th century Jew-hater Willhelm Marr when he established his League of Antisemites, and means racism directed towards Jews. It is problematic for several reasons, not least its assumption that there is such a category as "semitism" which it opposes. Nor does it mean that Jews are Semites (which is really a linguistic, not an ethnological, term); and it does not usually refer to anti-Arab racism. Nevertheless, the term has been commonly accepted, and can be useful, so long as it is not used to suggest that the phenomenon is, in some manner, separate from racism.

It is clear, on the other hand, what the term "anti-Zionism" refers to. Zionism is a political ideology, and an organised movement with real bodies and membership. Although the term has sometimes been abused by people who want a cover for their Jew-hatred, anti-Zionism is not inherently anti-semitic. It is, of course, important to note that not only are not all Jews Zionists; neither are all Zionists Jews, and the antisemitic Christian right in the USA is very strongly Zionist.

However, in recent years there has been a concerted effort to redefine antisemitism to include opposition to Zionism or to a Jewish state. Proponents of this claim to have identified a "new anti-semitism" directed against "Jews as a people". They go on to argue that anti-Zionists deny to Jews uniquely the right to self-determination in the form of a nation state, and that this is clear antisemitism.

In support of this assertion, Israel's apologists frequently refer to the "European Union Monitoring

Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) Working Definition of Antisemitism", asserting that this has the force of law in EU countries. This document was never an official EU statement; it was simply a submission to a body which was wound up in 2007. Its successor, the Fundamental Rights Agency, has removed the document from its website and archive, stating that it was "never valid" and "not an official EU definition". [5]

The assertion that Jews across the world form a separate national group, and that there is such an entity as "the Jewish people", is itself a debatable, and hugely contested, political argument. Historian Shlomo Sand argues convincingly, in his best-selling book *The Invention of the Jewish People*, that this reading of Jewish history reflects a changing political imperative, and that prior to the mid-19th century historians of Jewish life did not use such an analysis.

In any case, even if we were to accept the existence of one "Jewish people", this would not in itself provide a justification for a Jewish state, and certainly not in a land already populated by others. There are scores of "stateless nations". Some, such as the Kurds and the Basques, live in a clearly identified region, where they form a majority or plurality and where they have been struggling for decades for political independence. Others, such as the Yoruba in Nigeria, or the Uyghurs in China, demand national autonomy rather than an independent state; the Jews in Tsarist Russia formed a similar community. And then there are the nations dispossessed and dispersed by European settler states, including the First Nations in North America, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, and indeed the Palestinians, whose right to national self-determination must take account of the existence in their land of other very large national communities, despite the manner in which these communities were implanted.

Nor should we accept the guilt-trip inherent in the demand to recognise "the right of Israel to exist". As Marxists and internationalists, we do not recognise the right of any state to exist, and certainly not of a particular regime. For instance, we certainly do

not accept the right of the United Kingdom to exist, opposing both elements of the state's name. We did not accept the "right to exist" of the apartheid regime and system in South Africa, which depended on the exclusion of black South Africans, and nor should we accept the right to exist of the Zionist regime and system in Israel and the Occupied Territories, which depends on the exclusion of Palestinians.

The assertion that Zionism and support for Israel are an integral part of Jewish identity, which is at the heart of this argument, is in itself a deeply anti-semitic position. It echoes the argument that Jews have a "dual loyalty", that they are liable at the drop of a hat to betray the country in which they live. It ignores the large (and rapidly growing) number of Jews who reject the Israeli state and its pretensions to speak in the name of "the Jewish people", and it obliges the much larger number who do not really have a position at all to identify as either "pro-Israel" (and thus proudly Jewish) or "anti-Israel" (and thus a treasonous self-hater).

In addition, this attempt to expand the meaning of the term antisemitism is already having the effect of discrediting the use of the term when appropriate, and of actually fostering racial antagonism towards Jews. After all, if someone watches a video of Israeli carnage in Gaza, of the destruction of entire areas and the slaughter of whole families, and is then told that any criticism of this is an attack on the Jewish people as a whole, they are likely to decide that, if this is what Judaism and Jewishness means, then maybe there really is a problem with "the Jews".

And when activists are rightly enraged at the cynical misuse of allegations of antisemitism to smear supporters of Palestinian rights, they are less likely to listen in those instances when the allegations are indeed correct. [6]

A witch hunt of Palestinian solidarity activists

In the current wave of allegations about members of the Labour Party, amid the ridiculous charge

that the party is "riddled with antisemitism", there is a melange of lies and misrepresentations, obsessive focussing on clumsy formulations or thoughtless flippant remarks, a repeated blurring of the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-semitism, and a few cases of what appears to be unequivocally anti-Jewish racism.

In many cases, these allegations arose after a trawl through activists' social media comments, and one does not have to be a conspiracy theorist to note that this information, often dating back many years, only surfaced on the eve of crucial elections, at a time when the Tories were on the back foot while the Labour right was keen for a poor Labour showing in order to destabilise Corbyn's leadership.

During the Labour leadership campaign last summer, right-wing and pro-Israel sources attempted to create the impression that Jeremy Corbyn was himself antisemitic. This lie ran into the ground pretty quickly due to the total lack of credible evidence. [7] It appears that, since his election as leader, the same groups have been conducting a systematic trawl through people's social media accounts in order to discover any posts which could be misrepresented as antisemitic. The release of these, in a daily barrage, in the weeks before local elections was designed to do maximum damage to the Labour Party and to provide ammunition for a challenge to Corbyn's leadership.

It is instructive to examine some of these charges. Vicki Kirby, vice-chair of Woking Labour Party, was suspended from the party after right-wing blogger Guido Fawkes "discovered" a 2011 tweet in which Kirby apparently claimed that Jews "have big noses and support Spurs". [8]. Even though comedian David Baddiel confirmed on twitter Kirby was simply retweeting a quote from his screenplay for the film *The Infidel*, she was pilloried for her alleged antisemitic position, and Corbyn was attacked for her membership of the party.

The witch-hunt then moved on to target Gerry Downing, a veteran trade union and socialist activist in London, who in a television interview un-

wisely referred to "the Jewish Question". Although he insisted that he was using term in the same way as Karl Marx and Abram Leon, his comments failed to recognise the significant change in context and meaning since Marx's 1843 essay and Leon's 1942 book. These comments were again taken out of context and used to present Downing as a rabid antisemite – a charge which is risible to those who know him, however strongly they may disagree with his views.

Next in line was Tony Greenstein, a very well-known anti-fascist and anti-Zionist campaigner from Brighton. [9] Greenstein was told that he had been suspended as a result of "comments"; although the Labour Party has refused to tell him the nature and content of these comments, a dossier has been shown to the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, which shows clearly that it is his trenchant views on Israel, Palestine and Zionism that are the heart of the objections. Greenstein has been prominent in the efforts to expose and oppose the influence of genuine antisemites, such as Paul Eisen and Gilad Atzmon, in the Palestine solidarity movement, making the charges against him even less supportable.

A more prominent target was Bradford MP Naz Shah, suspended for allegedly saying that Israeli Jews should be transported to the USA. In fact, she did nothing of the sort; she merely retweeted (at the height of Israel's murderous onslaught on Gaza in August 2014) a graphic meme arguing that if the USA was so supportive of Israel, they could save money by re-establishing the state in the Mid-West. The graphic appears to have come from the website of Holocaust scholar Norman Finkelstein. [10] Shah was also denounced for a Facebook post (now removed) calling on her Twitter followers to vote in an online Mirror poll, writing that "The Jews are rallying" – a charge confirmed by the Board of Deputies, which wrote that they "asked deputies to vote ... This importantly demonstrates the significance of efforts by all members of the community to support Israel". [11] Although her use of words

may have been unfortunate, Shah was not actually incorrect.

Following Shah's suspension, former London mayor Ken Livingstone was ambushed by pro-Israel Blairite MP John Mann, who barged in to an interview with Livingstone to attack him as a "Nazi sympathiser". [12] In an ill-thought out and off-the-cuff response, Livingstone pointed out that in the early years of the Nazi regime, there had actually been collaboration between the Nazi and Zionist movements. This is a highly sensitive issue for many of Israel's supporters, and those raising it need to be absolutely certain of their facts and terminology. Unfortunately, Livingstone made a number of (relatively minor) errors in his brief summary of parts of the book by US researcher Lenni Brenner in his 1983 book *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*. This allowed his detractors (some of whom have been denouncing him for years) to force his suspension from the party. However, in his clumsy comments Livingstone managed to inform many more people about the scandalous Ha'avara Agreement than anti-Zionists have managed despite decades of reasoned explanation.

The most recent (as of the time of writing) target has been Jackie Walker, the black Jewish vice chair of Momentum. In a discussion about misuse of the Holocaust to provide a justification for Israeli brutality, Walker referred to slavery and the African holocaust, and noted that her ancestors had been involved in both sides of the slave trade. An unchallenged historical statement (that some Jews were involved in the slave trade) was presented as a racist attack on Jews. Walker is a prominent anti-racist activist, who played a significant part in the mobilisation in Kent against Farage and UKIP.

There are a number of significant aspects to this witch-hunt. Many of the alleged comments have been quoted completely out of context, none is actually antisemitic, some date back several years, and they have emerged following detailed scrutiny of social media accounts. Someone seems to be investing a great deal of effort into rooting out old

comments which can be wrenched out of context and spuriously presented as antisemitic.

While the victims noted above were either themselves Jews, or were quoting the words of Jewish writers, this does not necessarily disprove the claim that they are antisemitic. It does, however, demonstrate clearly that much of this controversy is based on an internal Jewish discussion which has been hijacked by others for their own political ends. Indeed, one of the striking features of this controversy has been the almost complete absence of the voices of Palestinians, the principal victims of the Zionist project in the Middle East.

There is a long and honourable history of Jewish opposition to Zionism. The first Zionist Congress, in 1897, had to be moved to Basel, which had a minimal Jewish population, after the rabbis in Munich – where it was originally scheduled to meet – threatened to excommunicate any local Jew who assisted or supported it. The 1917 Balfour Declaration (introduced by the same man who twelve years earlier had introduced Britain's first immigration act in order to exclude Jews fleeing Tsarist pogroms) was opposed as antisemitic by the only Jewish cabinet member. In the last free elections in Poland before Nazi occupation, the anti-Zionist Bund won a clear majority of the Jewish votes in both national and municipal elections.

Following the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel this tradition was weakened, but never disappeared. Jews have always been among the harshest critics of Zionism and Israel, and have faced a systematic campaign of smears and attacks. What we see now is the intersection of the Zionist attempt to delegitimise critics of Israel, with the desperate efforts by the Labour right (dubbed the "bitterites" by John Prescott) to discredit Jeremy Corbyn and replace him with one of their own. Some key figures (such as Mann and Luke Akehurst) are members of both of these camps. [13]

Jewish activists have expressed extreme anger at this cynical misuse of the charge of antisemitism, which risks undermining opposition to real (rather

than imaginary) instances of antisemitism. The Jewish Socialists' Group has objected to the "weaponisation" of such allegations, Independent Jewish Voices has complained of "a campaign of intimidation", while Jews for Justice for Palestinians stated that the charge "would be ludicrous if it were not so serious". [14] Graham Bash, the editor of Labour Briefing (and partner of Jackie Walker) has written "As a Jew (all my life) and Labour Party member (48 years) I am outraged at the way allegations of anti-Semitism have been used to silence legitimate criticism of Israel and undermine Jeremy Corbyn as my party's leader". [15]

Meanwhile, as if to remind us all that comparisons of Israel with Nazi Germany are not inherently antisemitic, at the height of this controversy the Israeli army's deputy chief of staff Yair Golan gave a speech on Holocaust Memorial Day (commemorated in Israel in May rather than January) in which he said "If there's something that frightens me about Holocaust remembrance it's the recognition of the revolting processes that occurred in Europe in general, and particularly in Germany, back then – 70, 80 and 90 years ago – and finding signs of them here among us today in 2016". [16] Although he quickly issued a statement clarifying that he did not mean what he said, he was not pilloried and faced no calls for his dismissal. [17] Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon confirmed his "full confidence" in Golan, and accused critics of "a politically motivated campaign" to damage the Israeli army. [18] Labour Party leaders would have been well advised to respond similarly.

By now, several dozen people have been smeared and suspended from the Labour Party. Others, such as NUS President Malia Bouattia, [19] who are not Labour members, have faced vilification for their views. But the campaign appears to be backfiring since so many of the allegations are clearly risible attempts to defend the indefensible or to score sectarian points. There is a danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, and of failing to take seriously any genuine antisemitism. And such a development would suit the Zionists perfectly, as can be seen in their cynical, almost gleeful, response to last year's attacks on Jewish targets in Paris. [20]

The Labour Party has set up an independent enquiry to investigate the charges. But the vice-chair of the inquiry, Professor David Feldman (the director of Birkbeck College's Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism) has already been attacked by the *Jewish Chronicle* for his alleged membership of Independent Jewish Voices. [21] So it would appear that nothing short of a McCarthyite tribunal will satisfy those running the campaign.

All supporters of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, all supporters of Palestinian rights, and all opponents of racism should join the call for an end to this witch-hunt, for the reinstatement to the Labour Party of all of those unjustly expelled or suspended on the basis of these fake charges, and for a transparent process to investigate any serious charges – as well as for an investigation into the naked Islamophobia displayed in the Tory mayoral campaign in London.

Source ***Socialist Resistance***.

SCOTLAND

The Future of the Left in Scotland

JOHNATHAN SHAFI ·

Elections are always difficult for the far left, and particularly difficult in post-referendum Scotland where so much of the socialist inclined vote is soaked up by the SNP, and the Greens, who have deservedly returned more MSPs.

But the process involved in getting this far has led to the development of an entirely new generation of socialist activists. These people have worked against the odds, with minimal resources and with a short time scale and are focussed on moving the project forward. They are a source of inspiration, but more than that, I fully believe them and many more who will join their ranks to be the future of the Scottish left. Their skill, togetherness and talents will make an impact on Scottish politics. There is no doubt about it.

Those young activists are coupled with the re-engagement of a cross section of experienced socialists as a result of the process of renewal and alliance building. These veterans of the movement have seen many a difficult election, but now they can see real potential to develop again, with years ahead to grow and debate strategy.

In addition, the candidates were outstanding, dignified and drawn from diverse backgrounds. They are a credit, and have a big future ahead. They had the guts to stand up and promote an irreverent socialist campaign, and had the courage of their convictions in a difficult political atmosphere. Many were moved to tears by their struggle and determination to make sure the lives of ordinary people were heard in the debate.

Their time will come. When it does, this experience will be looked back on as an important learning curve.

Registering where we made mistakes

We in RISE made three major strategic miscalculations. Firstly, we imagined the organic base of a new pro-indy left organisation to be far larger than it was. By the time we had launched, the energy of the referendum had been incubated in the SNP. This may have been different if we had launched in the days after September 18th 2014, but even then, the result of the No vote was to begin a long, Cold War, as opposed to the Scottish spring that would have emerged post Yes.

Secondly, we convinced ourselves of there being political space for the far left in an election where the SNP, Labour and the Greens were all competing for the radical vote. Imagine that, underwritten by the national question, which would boost the SNP even if they did slide to the centre. In 1999 and 2003 when the SSP broke through, the space for the radical left was much more accessible.

RISE in amongst this, given we had just four months to electioneer, and tiny resources in comparison to others actually managed to compete well on the campaign phase, but on the night the results in black and white highlighted the difficulties this election brought. Even if we had run the perfect campaign, and had good luck along the way, we may have added another percentage point or so on to the vote. The objective circumstances matter, and force of will cannot turn the tide of elections.

Thirdly, we believed that the election could be fought on the basis of ideas, when in fact it was always going to be a highly tactical election. In the

early stages of RISE in late 2015 we seemed to be at the centre of a storm around tactical voting. There was a stream of derision focussed on RISE for 'vote splitting'. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts to move on to different footing after our policy conference in December, it stuck as a constant reference point. This also gripped us in a permanent war footing in relation to the SNP at a time when vast numbers of left-wingers are casting their vote for them. That said, we were right to expose the weakness of the SNP policy platform and campaign approach – that will count in the future.

These strategic problems were combined with the every day difficulties involved in competing for votes with limited time and resources.

That said our reports, videos, unique campaign platform and our high calibre candidates managed to move the politics of RISE on, and it is thanks to these efforts that many continue to join on the basis that the need for socialist ideas impacting mainstream politics is a necessity not an option. We were right to use this election to work out how much radicalised energy from the referendum would translate into votes for a far left option that involved both the social movement aspect of the radical left and the SSP.

Defeats are not easy. But we have to recognise where we are, and what has been built. The beginnings of a new unity, the recruitment of hundreds of now committed activists, the development of name recognition, a strong media presence, a strong youth and woman's movement and the battle hardening that limited resources and bad election results bring.

RISE is here for the long haul, and it will undoubtedly grow now that it has a coherent and dedicated activist base. It will host a major conference of the European left in June discussing the future of the EU, it will build on areas of policy strength, it will develop its networks and intervene intellectually, it will entrench its national organisation into localities and, as it already is doing, in the trade unions. It has years now to develop and in the long run it has a bright future, especially as it has such promis-

ing and talented youth.

But true as that is, simply stating this is simplistic and in its own way tribal. If that is where this article ended, you would correctly conclude that it does not contain enough strategic thinking, and that in essence it is just the ongoing project of the far left in Scotland with a bit of boosterism to get it through a difficult period. It is not enough. We made a big turn during the referendum away from leftists clinging on to parties, defending them as the one true voice, towards raising our ideas to a mass movement that millions of people could relate to.

In truth, the forces of the radical left in Scotland now have to think in much broader terms about where we go next, and we have to be much more ambitious about what can be achieved. We have to put our forces in to a wider framework that moves us forward strategically, not just as an organisation that can recruit people and engage the public with a policy platform.

In truth, the forces of the radical left in Scotland now have to think in much broader terms about where we go next, and we have to be much more ambitious about what can be achieved. We have to put our forces in to a wider framework that moves us forward strategically, not just as an organisation that can recruit people and engage the public with a policy platform.

And so, learning from the last year, we need to work out what is happening now, and how best we can advance the cause of socialism and the radical left at a time of capitalist decay and constitutional crisis.

We need an extra-parliamentary movement

The Scottish right is emboldened by the new batch of Tory MSPs. They will be a constant source of opposition, and as a result they will be the platform for the Union. They may be able to exert pressure on a variety of questions to win concessions. But more than that, the Scottish right as well as having a strong position inside Holyrood, can also use this to rebuild ideologically in the society as a whole.

The commentators of the right, for example, are now less abstract and by definition more in touch with the weekly mechanics of parliament. This does not mean there will be a mass revival – nothing of the sort. But it does mean there is a viable outlet for right wing Scotland to pin itself too, an outlet with some clout.

More young Tories will join and become involved, sensing monetary rewards in the form of jobs and potentially as future MSPs. To them, it may start to feel less toxic. Ruth Davidson, will continue to try and detoxify the Tory brand. Some will remember Murdo Fraser's intervention in recent years calling for the wholesale rebranding of the Scottish right, dumping the Conservative tag. These things may come to pass. Whether or not a full scale transition takes place, this is a change that the broad movement for the progressive left in Scotland should take seriously.

All of this revolves around the national question. Consider Labour's manifesto. It contained many left wing policies. While their campaign appeared at times shambolic, their rhetoric was designed to appeal to their base, as a method of rebuilding. They didn't chase the centre, knowing that was already dominated by the SNP. But they just couldn't overcome the fact that their base has a different take on independence.

And so we see in broad terms two major plates implant themselves in Holyrood in a Scotland which a superficial analysis suggests has become 'ulsterised'. The SNP on the one hand, the Tories on the other, and the dividing line: Scottish nationalism versus British continuity.

But this analysis – ulsterisation – is wrong headed in the extreme. It is deployed, interestingly enough, by the unionist right, and the unionist left. Both misunderstand that questions of class and nation are bound up with not just a split on the independence question, but of left and right as an extension of it.

George Kerevan, East Lothian SNP MP, is therefore absolutely correct to come to a different conclusion:

"There is no third way in Scottish politics any longer. It is an independent, socialist and green Scotland – or a Unionist, Tory and exploited subsidiary of the City of London."

This will define the political landscape in the coming years. As a result it requires us to develop a broad movement for independence again – because that is what is going to define the balance of forces in the coming years, and in parallel the oppositional movement to the brutal austerity being unleashed by the Tories from Westminster. That movement requires radical content to mobilise the communities that injected people power into the referendum and befuddled the British State.

In addition to this overarching movement we need to agitate for wider campaigns on big issues facing the working class and the left that we can move on in the here and now. In these campaigns the left of the SNP should be involved, alongside the Greens and RISE. We will also need to turn campaigns like Better Than Zero, into real social movements to develop radical organisation that can express the millennial discontent bred by precarious work and historic wealth inequality. Alongside this we need a militant anti-austerity street movement that can exert pressure at every level of its implementation.

The next election will likely see the clash outlined by Kerevan intensify; and it may be the 'indy ref 2' election. What will count is the political atmosphere generated in the years running up to it. The socialist left may not be in a position to break through electorally, but we can be a fighting force on the ground, and can make a massive impact in the years ahead if we apply ourselves to a strategy of building movements and developing for the future. We need to be there to keep pulling society leftwards. With the Tories now as firm opposition we have a duty to this task.

Time to think, time to build

For now, RISE will open up to discussion and debate about the way forward. That will be a lively, respectful and outward looking forum, led by mem-

bers. But I hope that we will discuss more than the prospects for RISE itself, and place ourselves in a broader context, where yes we will have to face some uncomfortable truths, but where also we can re-energise for what can be an exciting period ahead. Every successful left wing organisation in history has been as a result of an organic relationship with the outside world. Moral indignation about injustice is not enough; we need strategy, aims, a record of achievement and recognition of where we have failed. That is the test of political maturity.

In the vein, as well as developing activism, we need to invest resources into rebuilding the theoretical and ideological weight of the left, which needs enriched to guide a new generation of left wing campaigners. Popular education, reading groups, ideological forums of debate and discussion, left wing political festivals – all are needed going forward.

The great thing about politics – even in moments of trouble – is that it is evolving constantly, and there-

fore new fronts open up all the time. What you need though, is a stable and talented group of people to travel the road with. If nothing else, I believe that we now have that under development once again on the Scottish left.

The task now is to work out how we can make that hard work effective in the struggle to come. That should start with working out not only what defines RISE, but what unites us with the movement we need to develop as outlined previously. The election has not been an easy one and there are many people, not just in RISE, who would have made a huge impact as MSPs. That will come, in time. Political representation in the parliament is important, but it is nothing without an extra parliamentary movement. Let us, for now, focus on that important and necessary work. Not only will that will shape the coming years, it will also build a longterm base for the election of socialist MSPs in the future.

Bella Caledonia

FRANCE

Strong headwinds are making France a stormy sea

LÉON CRÉMIEUX ·

France has entered a new situation since the beginning of March. Previously it was dominated by the political polarization exerted by National Front and the parallel rise of the "national security" climate following the terrorist attacks in January and November 2015.

None of these elements has been cancelled out and you would have to be blind to think that all of that had been swept away by the present movement.

But the key political event of recent weeks is that despite these two elements, which weigh heavily on political and social life, there has developed a multifaceted mobilization which already deserves to be compared with the great mobilizations of workers and youth over the last fifteen years: those of 2003, 2006 and 2010.

In the months preceding March, we could sense the beginnings of a social confrontation. First of all with the broad current of sympathy expressed with the mobilization of Air France workers, with the episode of the shirt last October. [2] In the same period, the number of walk-outs and strikes in workplaces, especially small and medium-sized ones, increased significantly, especially on issues of wages during mandatory annual negotiations. Similarly, there was the strength of the mobilization on climate change at the time of COP21, even though the terrorist attacks in November and the introduction of the state of emergency allowed the state to break the momentum of the street mobilizations. Big demonstrations against the Notre Dame des Landes airport and the establishment of support networks for migrants were also the result of action by tens of thousands of young people and

activists that were coordinated by associations and social networks.

The first lesson of these reactions and these mobilizations was that the management of capitalist interests by social democracy, weak political opposition to the left of the PS and the lethargy of the union leaderships were not synonymous with an equivalent lethargy and drift of the whole of society, starting with a large section of workers and young people, hit hard by policies of austerity and unemployment. On the contrary; the situation already gave an illustration of the profound alienation from and discredit of the institutional parties, who have alternated in government over the last twenty years. It is this discredit, in the absence of social struggles, that has favoured the steady rise of abstention and the vote for the National Front among popular layers in recent years.

On the social terrain, since the beginning of Hollande's term of office, many demands of the MEDEF (employers' organization) concerning labour law have been implemented through the Macron and Rebsamen laws, continuing the work of unraveling workers' rights that was begun in particular by the Fillon laws in 2008. The adoption by the Socialist governments of the employers' credo on "labour costs" was the prelude to the National Inter-professional Agreement establishing competitiveness agreements. All this represented so many steps towards aligning France on the same level as other European countries in terms of pushing back social rights.

The El Khomri law, a social detonator

So the El Khomri law, at the heart of which is the reversal of the hierarchy of norms, has become a social detonator. Obviously, because of its content

–which abolishes the principle of favour while including many other attacks – but especially because of all the other elements of the present context, it has been a real catalyst. [3]

This is not the place to lay out immediate perspectives and it is much too early to make a balance sheet of this movement, which could lead to a major confrontation and a political crisis, but could just as well fail in the face of the many brakes on it that exist.

However several elements can already be highlighted:

- First of all, the way it started. There was a lot of preparatory work done by activist networks, including the Copernicus Foundation, the CGT and the Solidaires union federation, on the Combrexelle report and the Badinter project. But the mobilizing factor, the trigger and the call to demonstrate on March 9 were clearly and directly due to the social networks with what is known as the "Caroline De Haas petition". [4]
- What is revealing is the tone of the petition, clearly demanding the withdrawal of the law, branding it as a frontal attack, a tone which should be compared with the declaration on February 23 by the union leaderships. Not only did they not at all demand the withdrawal of the law, limiting themselves to a few measures, they complained especially about the lack of dialogue and concluded on the need for the government to meet with them... Without any call to the slightest mobilization.
- Similarly the call to the first event, which was also the occasion numerous calls to strike, came from an appeal that started from social networks and was supported very quickly by the initiators of the petition.
- We must insist on this point, because what might seem to be trivial is indicative of a general orientation of passivity by the confederal union leaderships (the position of Solidaires is not to be put in the same category). This obviously draws support from the feeling of pessimism present among many

union activists after the failure of the last great mobilization in 2010 (which was again linked to the policies of the union leaderships); but it is the result of a general orientation in relation to austerity policies that has been combined since 2012 by the refusal to create too much trouble for a left government.

So the union leaders in no way sought, before the announcement of this law, to prepare their activists for a mobilization by conducting campaigns of explanation, providing information, and raising the awareness of workers. And that is without even talking about conducting more political preparatory work, making the balance sheet of 2010 and putting forward the need for an a broad united movement, for a general strike to force the government to retreat. Two months later, the absence of this preparatory work is still being felt. It was even more necessary because over the last 30 years the working class and all the popular strata have accumulated many defeats on the social terrain, following a series of neo-liberal attacks.

The mainsprings of the mobilization

But in this country other contradictory elements are present and it is from them that the dynamics of the mobilization draw support:

- The French situation is still at odds with those experienced by other European countries, in which the capitalist juggernaut has done much more harm. There is a broad consciousness of what still remains to be preserved, of what not to lose in the fields of services, social security, employment regulations, labour laws. From this point of view, the neoliberal cultural revolution of the Socialist Party faces many obstacles, even in what is left of its electoral support and its networks of activists. The reactions of the dissident Socialists and the initiators of the petition express this reflex of self-preservation of circles close to the PS or to the Front de Gauche (Left Front). [5]
- The activists of the social movement as a whole keep in mind the memory of defeats, but also of

strong mobilizations of workers and youth. Until 2010 the country had regularly experienced full-scale confrontations, by workers against pension reforms in 1995, 2003 and 2010, in a powerful movement drawing its strength from university and school students in 2006, leading to victory against the CPE (First Employment Contract). It should also be emphasized that the victory of 2006 against the Villepin government was obtained after the government had to force through its law by using Article 49.3. This lesson should be retained because the government is following the same procedure which will take at least until the end of June (with a necessary passage through the Senate and return to the National Assembly). [6]

- In a different vein, many people, young and not so young, in the popular neighbourhoods also preserve the memory of the urban revolt led by the youth of those popular neighbourhoods for four weeks in October-November 2005, after the death of Zyed and Bouna in Clichy-sous-Bois. This revolt provoked a profound break between the youth and practically all parties and movements, apart from some of the far left (including the LCR). This break with the neighbourhoods, which were stigmatized by Sarkozy at the time [7], especially as regards young Arabs and Blacks – who were targeted by all the law and order campaigns, but who were also the first victims of unemployment and job insecurity – has persisted in recent years and has been compounded by the wave of Islamophobia that has swept the country since January 2015. This break is also visible in the present movement, whereas, paradoxically, these young people were very active in the movement of 2006, a few months later, against the CPE.

- The dismantling of social, political and trade-union structures. Until the late 1990s (the late twentieth century, therefore ...), the workers' movement, including its political wing, constituted a fabric made up of many threads, a fabric with many tears in it, but which still maintained some common references coming from its history and its "great" battles.

The 2000 decade and the return of social democracy to government transformed the earlier tears in the fabric into deep cuts. This has meant, in particular, that new generations of, often radical, activists, involved in migrant, anti-fascist, or climate struggles, active in many union branches, especially in precarious sectors, do not live their struggles as being part of a defunct "workers' movement". Contradictorily, whereas the old generations of activists, absorbed by institutional politics, have thrown away their revolutionary hopes, the new generations who do not have the same traditional baggage often have a strong awareness of the evils of capitalist barbarism and are always receptive to political arguments about the need for revolutionary transformation. This consciousness is often combined with a very strong demand for real democracy, and a rejection of delegation of decision-making – the heritage of the fiascos of Stalinism and of social democratic governments. There remains a profound heterogeneity among these younger generations (there is not a "youth", there are young people ...). There is obviously a social cleavage, which is reinforced by the cleavage of young people from the popular neighbourhoods, driven by a racist society to define themselves as Blacks, Arabs and Muslims. All young people were not Charlie... The present movement can overcome many of these divisions, but it has not happened yet.

- The restructuring of the economic fabric, in industry and services, obviously has very considerable effects on the difficulties of organizing and the atomizing of consciousness. As well as political disintegration of the workers' movement there is objective destructuring (subcontracting, undermining of job status ...) whose effects have not really been opposed by the trade union movement. The difficulties of mobilization and extension in many sectors are obviously also related to this reality, which further weakens the consciousness of belonging to the same class.

Political crisis

Recent weeks have also revealed the level of political crisis. There is obviously first of all the crisis of the institutional parties. The permanent repudiation of the government and the Socialist Party is reflected in the situation of blockage in which the government finds itself, unable to get its own MPs to vote in support of its policies (whatever the final outcome of the parliamentary debate on the El Khomri law). [8] This discredit is also reflected in the polls; the trend is undeniable and makes this government and the Hollande-Valls couple the most widely rejected in the polls, probably since the beginning of the Fifth Republic. The corollary of this crisis is obviously the internal crisis of the PS, illustrated by the grotesque debates around the idea of a primary on the left – which accentuates the crisis of the PCF – and the place that is being taken by Emmanuel Macron. [9] Even the project of Valls, to rapidly make the PS the French equivalent of Matteo Renzi's party in Italy, is losing its substance, overtaken on the right.

This crisis is finding its symmetrical counterweight in the crisis of the Republicans. [10]... In the final analysis, for the same reasons.

Today, all the mainstream parties in Europe are hit and severely attacked by the changes imposed by globalization and the neoliberal reforms brutally imposed since 2008. After Greece, Italy and the Spanish State, in its way, France is seeing a level of discredit of these parties that is sending out alarm signals. This obviously poses the need for the bourgeoisie to restructure its political apparatus, breaking down boundaries that appear obsolete.

In France, the crisis may soon be matched by a deeper crisis of the institutions and of the political system itself. The institutions of the Fifth Republic were designed for a system dominated by one party, the same party in the Senate, in the National Assembly and in the Elysée Palace, around a strong regime and a strong President. With the crisis of Gaullism and of the dominant bipartisanship, it was necessary to introduce the reform of 2001 which established a presidential regime, welding the parliamentary majority to the President. It was

a crisis solution to the vagaries of cohabitation. But once again, this meant maintaining a supremacy of the dominant parties.

Today, the rise in the level of abstention and of the National Front, the discredit of the Socialist Party and the Republicans (LR, former UMP) is rendering this edifice fragile. It also illustrates that France, despite the "values of the Republic", is – along with the United Kingdom – the country that has the most archaic electoral system, with election in single member constituencies and no proportional representation. France is even worse than the UK, since the direct election of a President holding strong political power makes it the only country effectively led by a monarch in the major countries of the European Union.

Valls and Hollande have tried in recent weeks to curb the political crisis in various ways.

First, by trying to muzzle the Socialist Party and its parliamentary group. The use of 49-3 for the adoption at first reading of the El Khomri law was obviously aimed at trying to cut short a public policy debate, that would further undermine the government. But it also sought to rein in the minority of "dissident" PS MPs, forced to choose submission or an open break through presenting and voting for a motion of censure. In fact, for a time, the internal opposition in the PS dodged the issue. Only 28 members of the PS (over 40 dissidents) supported the putting down of such a motion. The text of a motion of censure must win support of 10% of MPs to be submitted to the vote. The left motion gathered support from only 56 members instead of 58 ... In any case, the PS has sunk further into crisis.

Furthermore, while it is politically weakened, the government is seeking all the more to assert its authority through repression. Recent weeks have seen a rising crescendo of police violence, the affirmation of the power of a policestate, strengthened by the exteprolongation nsion of the state of emergency which is turned directly against the movement, strikes and demonstrations. The media, in government hands and big business, serve as direct

channel of propaganda masking police violence, orchestrating a campaign against "thugs" while seeking to criminalize the movement.

This authoritarianism tends to mask the weakness of this government and the PS.

Weakness in its ranks, weakness in the Assembly and weakness in its own social base.

So the last element characterizing this movement, seen especially in the debates of Nuit Debout [11] is the profound gap between the demands of democracy, between the choice of decisions made by those concerned and not by uncontrollable officials and the reality of the system and its institutions. It clearly appears both that the political system is profoundly undemocratic and that real power lies obviously outside the elected assemblies. The banks and the multinationals, the centres of capitalist power, not only make laws but exonerate themselves from respecting them.

The rejection of the financial system, energy choices, border closures, policies of unemployment and precarious work are the ingredients that are producing a rejection of the political system, but also of the capitalist system itself. This is latent in society and it is patently obvious in places where people express themselves, such as Nuit Debout.

So this movement contains many strengths and weaknesses. The coming weeks will tell which will dominate.

Necessity and lack of political representation of the exploited and oppressed

This only highlights the need and the absence of a political party with a discourse and action that unifies, that unites all these different elements by staying focused on what makes a common force, and it must define a common goal: the general struggle against a political system that has produced the Panama Papers, Calais and the thousands of migrants killed in the Aegean, climatic disturbances, insecurity and social misery...

The movement that is developing calls into question both the objectives and the structures of the capitalist economic and social system and denounces the reality of the places where power lies and the anti-democratic rules of political life and decision making.

It therefore poses the question of the political representation of the exploited and oppressed and of a project of society capable of meeting the demands that are emerging. The social struggles of recent months (over the climate, migrants, Notre Dame des Landes, the El Khomri law and many, many strikes) pose all the elements of resistance to the system; they pose demands, both fundamental and immediate, and they outline the paths towards a society that will be guided by fulfilling social needs and will provide the political instruments to achieve these demands, instruments of real democracy, involving choice, debate and decisions. Social struggles and political perspectives (not electoral politics) will be a permanent part of it. All these elements of struggle and resistance will come up against a class society that is brutal, determined to maintain and increase exploitation and that is forging and reforging national and European institutions to be seats of untrammelled power, entirely dedicated to maintaining the system and escaping more and more from any kind of democratic and popular control. The Greek experience, the rejection of migrants, the Panama papers and TAFTA have illustrated, in less than a year, many elements of the way that this society really functions. The debate around these issues is indispensable among those who have been activists of social movements for years. It is indispensable among the younger generation, which by different paths is raising the same strategic questions. This requires putting forward "transitional" demands that attack the heart of the system of capitalist exploitation, that attack the social oppression that structures it and also the institutions and the undemocratic rules of the political system; transitional demands that trace the path towards a society free of capitalist exploitation and able to eliminate all forms of oppression.

SYRIA

Why are Syria's refugees going through hell?

ASHLEY SMITH ·

The root cause of the dire conditions facing the refugees—whether they remain within Syria or have crossed the border to nearby countries or journeyed over the Mediterranean to Europe—is the war by the government of dictator Bashar al-Assad against the pro-democracy uprising that began during the Arab Spring in 2011. Backed by its allies Russia, Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah, Assad has tried to bomb the Syrian revolution into submission. Meanwhile, the U.S. government has its own plans for Syria, but it is intent on carrying out its war on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), even if that means cooperating with Assad. Meanwhile, the people of Syria are enduring increasingly desperate conditions.

Leila Al-Shami is co-author, with Robin Yassin-Kassab, of *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*, a contributor to *Daesh, the Left and the Unmaking of the Syrian Revolution*, and a participant in human rights and social justice struggles in Syria and elsewhere. She talked to Ashley Smith about the scope of the refugee nightmare after providing an analysis of the current situation inside Syria.

Over the last few weeks, the Syrian regime has carried out a savage siege and bombardment of Aleppo. Why is Assad's regime so intent on crushing Aleppo and its people?

Aleppo is strategically and symbolically important for the regime and its allies, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah.

First of all, Aleppo was the primary commercial center in Syria and a center of trade with Turkey.

So it's economically very important for the whole country. After the start of the revolution, it also became a key supply line of weapons passing through Turkey to Syrian revolutionaries. It's therefore of great political significance as well.

The city has been at the heart of the revolution from the beginning. Its eastern part, which is the working class district, has been liberated since the summer of 2012. Revolutionaries have held it since then, fending off not only the regime, but also other forms of authoritarianism, including reactionary fundamentalism. For example, the rebels pushed ISIS out of Aleppo in January 2014.

The regime has made Aleppo pay a heavy price for its liberation. It has targeted the liberated area with air strikes. So have the Russian forces.

Aleppo is also important for its symbolic value. It provides a vision of what a liberated Syria could look like. It's now a city that is completely self-organized through its democratically elected local councils, which are responsible for providing services to the civilian population. It also has the highest concentration of civil society groups anywhere in the country.

All of this is new. Such organizations did not exist prior to the revolution. They've set up things like the civil defense force that is rescuing civilians caught in the rubble following air strikes. They've also set up independent trade unions in Aleppo. You have the nurses and paramedics union, and the teachers' union, which has 5,000 members and is run by a woman.

So this is a living breathing and diverse city, and its people are practicing new ways of organizing as a counterpoint to Assad's authoritarianism. He is intent on crushing the city's resistance as well as this

model for a new Syria. That's why the regime and Russia have been attacking this revolutionary stronghold.

They justified their assault by claiming they're attacking ISIS. But that's a lie. ISIS doesn't have a presence in the city of Aleppo. In reality, most of the Russian bombs have targeted revolutionary militias and these self-organized democratic communities. So the regime and Russia's combined blitzkrieg and siege is an attempt to crush the revolution.

The reports describe a horrific situation. What's the likely outcome?

Honestly it's a dire situation. Some 300,000 people are trapped in the city in some of the worst conditions you can imagine. We've already seen what has happened in besieged communities in other places in Syria. In Madaya, the regime has been starving people to death. It has done the same thing in Daraya.

In reaction to the humanitarian disaster caused by the regime, the international community promised to deliver aid. But the first delivery it scheduled wasn't food, which is what people needed, but medicine. The people responded with a protest led by a banner saying "Sorry, but I can't take medication on an empty stomach because it's not good for my health."

The regime blocked even the delivery of that medical shipment. On top of that, the regime bombed the civilians that were waiting to receive the aid. So the situation in besieged communities and especially Aleppo is very desperate.

Assad's rule-or-ruin counterrevolution has caused an enormous displacement of people inside Syria and a big flight of refugees out of the country. What is the scale and nature of this crisis?

The regime's relentless bombing of liberated areas has driven over half of the prewar population of 22 million people from their homes. This is an astonishing 11 million people. The vast majority of these

people can't afford to leave the country, so they're stuck trying to survive in very desperate conditions.

You have people who are in makeshift refugee camps with minimal services inside Syria, such as the Samada camp in Idlib. The regime and Russia recently bombed that camp, killing 28 civilians. Many people are thus scared to enter the camps. So they're just living under bushes or in caves.

That's what it's like for the displaced people inside the country. Over 5 million people have fled Syria. The vast majority of those are living in host countries in the region—in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Look at Lebanon, for example. One in every five people in Lebanon right now is a Syrian refugee.

The flood of refugees has put an enormous strain on the host countries to provide resources and services. So the refugees in general are in a really bad situation. And it is going to get worse. Now the governments in the region have closed down all their borders with Syria and are only accepting people in exceptional circumstances.

So refugees, who in many cases don't possess valid legal documents, are very frightened to move around in the countries they live in. They're afraid they might hit checkpoints, where they might be detained and deported. And this is a real fear since scores of refugees have been deported back to Syria.

So they live in very precarious situations. They often can't work legally, so they're taking informal employment, which is very exploitative. I spoke to a lot of refugees that had been working for local employers and they weren't paid at all at the end of the month, and because they're working illegally they have no recourse to complain.

A lot of these refugees are living in impoverished communities. So they're competing with poor locals for jobs, and this competition is one of the key reasons causing tensions in host countries between the local communities and the refugee populations. So

that's something obviously which is worrying for the future of the region.

The conditions for women, girls and all children are especially bad. Because of their poverty, refugee families now are getting their children into early marriages, because they can't afford to keep girls at home. You also have women who are engaging in sex work because they have no other opportunities to feed themselves or their children, and many children aren't able to attend school.

Many of the refugees have really lost hope. They don't feel that they have a future in the region. So if they can't work, secure a living and educate their children, they have no other choice but to leave. That's what's driving people to take what they know is a really risky journey to go to Europe—because they want to build a future for themselves.

What has been their experience in Europe?

I haven't worked with refugees in Europe, but I have heard many stories from family and friends who have made that journey. It's incredibly risky, and at every step of the way, people are spending huge amounts of money to pay smugglers to take them across. They've walked across land in the winter months. They risked their lives on boats in the Mediterranean. Untold numbers of people have drowned.

Those who do make it to Europe have found very few services to meet their needs. And now they are the objects of scapegoating in an increasing climate of xenophobia and hostility towards refugees. So the situation has been very difficult for people.

I think most people would prefer to stay in the region if they felt that they could do so, because the culture is more familiar to them, the language is the same, and they feel more comfortable there. Many have relatives in Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, so it would be easier for them in the region, if there were opportunities available to them. But there aren't. So they find themselves compelled out of desperation to risk everything in the hope that things might be better for them and their children in Europe.

Has the Obama administration done anything to address the refugee crisis?

The U.S. government has let very few people in. Of course, the U.S. is much farther away from the Middle East, and you would need a lot of money to be able to get to the U.S. So few people have tried. On top of that, Obama has only agreed to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next couple of years. This is a pittance, really.

But even in that situation, the right wing seems to have made this paltry number of refugees a big election issue in the U.S. Ben Carson called Syrian refugees "rabid dogs." And Donald Trump has equated all refugees with terrorists and even promised to ban all Muslims from entering the U.S. This is pure bigotry and callous indifference to human suffering.

The U.S. has been involved in the region in a negative way for a long time and has a duty to help people who are fleeing conflict in Syria as well as other countries that the U.S. has had a direct hand in destabilizing with its wars and occupations. There are many refugees fleeing Iraq and Afghanistan for example. The U.S. should open its doors to those people.

Another immediate issue is the closing of the refugees' passage to Europe through Greece with the European Union's deal with the Turkish government, under which refugees who reach Greek camps would be returned to Turkey, in return for aid to the Turkish state. What's your assessment of this deal?

The EU has essentially turned its back on those who are fleeing conflict and trying to find safety. At the beginning, Germany and Sweden let in the most refugees, but then they started to clamp down as the numbers swelled. And then, especially after the Paris attacks, governments throughout the EU turned from sympathy to a full-scale clampdown on desperate people.

The EU inked this deal with Turkey that essentially said that if Turkey stopped the flow of immigrants, the EU would give them money and right of passage for Turkish citizens through the EU. And now the EU is beginning to repatriate many refugees who have come to its member countries back to Turkey, which has become the border guard for Fortress Europe.

Even worse, Turkey has closed its border with Syria and is rounding up and deporting refugees. There are also many reports of border guards shooting and beating Syrian refugees who are trying to enter Turkey. So refugees are trapped along the border in camps without proper access to water and sanitation.

All these states are violating international legal obligations to provide assistance to those who are fleeing conflict and persecution. Their behavior demonstrates the brutality and inhumanity of the border regime in general.

These deportations are very worrying, because sending people back to Syria could be a death sentence. These states have a duty that they must fulfill to provide asylum to Syrians and to ensure they have the means to rebuild their lives—find employment, get health care and have access to education.

The EU cloaked its deal with Turkey by claiming that it was humanitarian—that it prevented human smugglers from taking advantage of people. What do you think of such claims?

It's an obscene argument to cover up the fact that they are shutting down the borders. People are fleeing Syria because of mass atrocities. The regime has subjected the Syrian people to relentless bombing. And it has conducted a campaign of mass rape, mass arrests and mass torture. Shutting down the borders means trapping them in horrific conditions that they are fleeing.

The refugees are not ignorant of the risks of the dangerous journey to Europe. They're very well aware of the deaths that have occurred on the sea.

They're very well aware of the difficult situations that refugees find themselves in in a strange and alien country. They're speaking to family and friends regularly who have made that journey.

They just figure that the chance of death on the sea or persecution in the EU is a better risk to take than certain death and destruction in Syria. So people will continue to make that journey—because they want a better life.

That's why even if borders are closed to them, people will find alternative ways to escape, even if the routes they find become more and more dangerous. Now that the Turkish border is closed, people are fleeing through Libya to take boats across the Mediterranean to Italy. People have even gone up through Russia near the Arctic Circle and then crossed into the EU through Finland and Norway.

Desperate people will do whatever they can to provide a future for their families and for their children. I think any parent with children can understand that you will take enormous risks to ensure a better life for your kids. There's no future for them at the moment in Syria, and there's no future for them in the region.

What kinds of things should solidarity activists internationally be calling for?

The first demand is protection for civilians inside Syria. The bombing needs to stop, and more pressure needs to be put on those countries supporting and arming the regime.

In the meantime, Syrians need to find access to weapons to defend themselves against massive aerial bombardment. They've not had the heavy anti-aircraft weapons needed to defend themselves from the regime's barrel bombs and Russia's air strikes. Until there's some form of protection for civilians, people will continue to flee.

The other demand is for states to open their borders and provide safe haven for those who are fleeing these terrible conditions.

The UN and the wealthy states should also provide much more humanitarian assistance to refugees living in these appalling camps or urban centers across the region. They should also provide support to those countries that are hosting large numbers of refugees, so they can increase their services and infrastructures—not only for the refugees, but also for their own population, whose lives are being affected by the huge numbers of people in their country.

Also, people themselves can and are taking action. They're organizing to work together with refugees to find them living accommodations, to support them with language skills, and help them integrate with their community.

But it's a two-way street. The refugees have a lot to teach. They have lived through a revolutionary experience. Many of them have such good skills in organizing and working to defend their rights. So working together with refugees can be a really mutually beneficial experience for both the refugees and solidarity activists.

What kind of self-organization is there among the refugees?

I think it's very interesting how Syrians have taken their revolutionary experience into exile with them. They've experienced building new democratic structures from the bottom up. I have seen them drawing on this in camps and urban centers in Jordan, Lebanon and in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

There I met young people involved in really different campaigns: working on environmental hygiene; organizing campaigns against early marriage; working together to collect aid or medicines and distribute those to the most vulnerable and needy parts of the refugee population. Young people in these desperate circumstances have even set up music groups, theater groups and art groups for children to help them cope with trauma. I find these kinds of initiatives really amazing.

They have also brought a boldness usually not seen among refugees. Before, refugees used to sneak across borders at night. But now you see them

marching in huge numbers across Europe, demanding their rights.

I spoke with somebody who'd been working in the refugee camp in Calais, France, known as "The Jungle." It has really disgraceful conditions for people living there. He told me that there are Syrians, Eritreans and Sudanese all trapped there.

Because of their revolutionary background, the Syrian refugees are the ones who are organizing all the others to campaign for better conditions in the camp and fight for the right to go to the country of their choice in Europe. This is testimony to the fact that the revolutionary spirit continues to live among the refugees.

What organisations should be supported to help with the humanitarian crisis?

There are a lot of fantastic organizations often set up by expatriate Syrians. There are also many in Syria run by Syrians themselves. These organizations are very connected to the local community. They go into Syria regularly, take humanitarian supplies in, and run schools for displaced people and refugees.

They're often much closer to the local population than the international NGOs and are run by very committed activists. Some obviously are paid because they're working on this full time. Yet if you donate to them, a much larger percentage of the money goes directly to help Syrians.

In America, there are organizations like the Karam Foundation that have been doing wonderful educational work with Syrian refugees. There's also the Syrian American Medical Society, which continues to provide health services in Aleppo. These people take enormous risks to ensure that humanitarian relief is provided to the population. And they need much more support.

In many ways, it looks like a kind of despairing moment, in which the forces of counter-revolution are so strong. Where are we at in the revolutionary process in Syria?

It's such a difficult question to answer because so many states have intervened and distorted the revolutionary process. So a lot of what happens is now out of the hands of the Syrian people.

This makes me quite pessimistic, to be honest. I fear a deal will be forced on the Syrian people that will not be what the revolution has been fighting for over the last five years. This could possibly include an imperial carve-up of the country—a Sykes-Picot 2. It could include a deal to keep the regime in place in the interests of "stability."

At the same time, I am optimistic. I believe that something very fundamental has shifted among the masses of people not only in Syria, but also in the wider region since the Arab Spring. People have lived a revolutionary experience and have had access to new ideas and debates.

In Syria, people have lived freedom. They've lived the experience of self-organizing and self-managing their communities without the state, and there's been a massive explosion in culture and in artistic response coming out of the revolution.

We have a predominately young population, an entire generation of which has grown up in revolution. The hopes and dreams of that revolution are not just going to disappear. I don't think that the region's rulers will be able to re-impose the old security states across the Middle East. I don't think the population will accept the return of that old order.

But then we also have a generation that's grown up in war, that's grown up amid the horrors of torture, seeing their family members and loved ones killed, homes destroyed, and education being taken away. These experiences can drain people of hope.

I think, then, that the good and the bad aspects of the experience of revolution and counterrevolution will be competing against each other for a long time to come. But I do have a lot of hope that people will continue to struggle for the values that they've been fighting for over the past five years. It is hard to squelch the newfound spirit of revolt in the region.

May 23, 2016

Transcription by Andrea Hektor

socialistworker.org

BRITAIN

Will Britain vote to leave the EU?

TERRY CONWAY ·

The referendum campaign really took off after local and regional elections on May 5, in which Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party generally did well. Those arguing for Brexit, including former London Mayor Boris Johnson, focus on the question of migration, in a deeply xenophobic and racist way.

They made headway in the polls after a ridiculous intervention from Cameron in which he claimed "World War 3" could result from Britain leaving the EU. That sort of catastrophism, quickly followed by Christine Lagarde's comments on the economic consequences of Britain leaving, made hay for the Brexiters. An exit vote seems not impossible – what a dreadful thought.

It's not only the Conservatives who have deep divisions on this question, the left is also split.

For **Remain** there is the left-wing campaign – called Another Europe is Possible (AEIP) – which includes Left Unity and the Greens and some on the left of Labour including Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. *Socialist Resistance* supports this campaign. AEIP is about to organise a major tour of public meetings across Britain to put the case. AEIP supports staying in on a totally different basis to the Cameron campaign; for a social Europe, a Europe of the people and arguing for greater democracy. The left wing Fire Brigades Union also voted through a position of 'stay in Europe to change Europe' at its national conference in May. [1]

The position being put by Jeremy Corbyn for Labour is very similar. Corbyn spoke powerfully on Saturday evening at a Labour rally in which 3 signed up members of AEIP were on the platform

with him, in which he turned his fire on the Cameron government. [2]

The Scottish National Party supports an in vote but from an EU enthusiast position.

For **Exit** there is the Left Leave campaign – supported by the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers' Party and some other smaller groups – which is known as "Lexit" (Left+exit) [3] while the Committee for a Worker's International-Socialist Party has its own exit campaign.

It is probably the case that a majority of those that identify with the radical left are supporting exit at this point. Of course they attempt to separate themselves from the xenophobes but are drowned out by them.

It is deeply worrying that some campaigners for Lexit have brushed aside as being of little importance the position of EU nationals living in Britain if there were a vote to leave. In their arguments for Brexit, the SWP wrongly claim that "Almost two thirds of foreign nationals in Britain are from outside the EU and would be unaffected." In fact a majority of the non-UK citizens living in the UK are from EU countries. [4]

But beyond an argument about numbers, the whole argument here is suffused with complacency. EU nationals living in Britain certainly feel their position is in jeopardy and, given the racist dynamic behind the mainstream Brexit campaign, their success would make the situation worse for all migrants – and those assumed to be migrants because their appearance, name or religious practices do not conform to the reactionary myth of what it is to be "British" in the 21st century.

Another question on which some left wing campaigners for exit have focused is the question of TTIP, and particularly the impact that this reactionary treaty would have on Britain's National Health Service. Of course it is absolutely right to oppose TTIP, although the campaign in Britain has not reached anything like the scale it has in Germany for example. But the reality is that TTIP is one of a series of free trade agreements across the globe and following Brexit, a rightwing Britain would be clamouring to be part of such agreements.

These are some of the reasons Socialist Resistance thinks that it is a big mistake to support an exit vote in this referendum and that a vote for exit would have very serious consequences in Britain and beyond.

This is not because we have any brief for the EU. In fact we agree with most of what the Lexiters say about it. It is an anti-working class construct designed to help the member states more effectively exploit their workforce and drive through the neoliberal agenda. We are unambiguous about that.

The real face of the EU is the role it has played in Greece where it impoverished the population in the name of the neoliberal agenda – and it will do the same to any other member state that steps out of line.

In fact we are in principle for exit from the EU – but that does not mean that we are for exit whatever the circumstances and whatever the consequences!

This is not an exit proposition by a left-wing government in order to break free from EU imposed austerity for example, but an exit proposition as a part of a right-wing xenophobic project which can only have right-wing xenophobic outcome.

The Lexit campaign argues that exit is a way of defeating Cameron. The problem is that standing in the wings are even more strident rightwingers like Boris Johnson.

The idea that an exit vote would result in a Corbyn-Labour government beggars belief – but that is what they suggest. This is taking optimism to disastrous levels. When did a victory for the right result in an advance for the left?

The problem for the Lexit campaign is that there is not Lexit on offer. The only exit on offer will be led by the hard right and the consequences would be disastrous, pushing the political situation to the right. It would be seen as (and claimed as) an endorsement of racism and anti-immigration policies. It would boost the right not only here but across Europe.

An exit under the conditions of this referendum would set back working class struggle rather than advance it.

It is a very dangerous situation given the closeness of the polls. Those on the left who are thinking on voting for exit under these conditions should think again about going down a road which will strengthen the right and the racists both here in Britain and across Europe

Kosovo

Spring of the great loneliness

FITIM SALIHU ·

A similar kind of solitude is now being felt by the Kosovo opposition despite early hopes that the entire spring will be a season of demonstrations against the government and the newly elected president, Hashim Thaçi. But when no one expected it, the opposition bloc split and its constituent parts began to fight bitterly, coming under the mockery of the government, under the sting of analysts, under the criticism of the international community, and under the mistrust of masses of the people.

But, in retrospect, how was this opposition bloc forged? Unnatural in appearance, this bloc was born out of the necessity to oppose the governing coalition, which had received 2/3 of the Kosovo vote. Realizing that alone none of the opposition parties would succeed in shaking the foundations of this government, three of them – Albin Kurti's Self-determination! movement, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo" (AAK) led by Ramush Haradinaj (former prime minister and one of the most famous ex-commanders of KLA) and Initiative for Kosovo of Fatmir Limaj (another famous ex-KLA commander and former member of Thaçi's Democratic Party) – established a common front with these parties' student organizations and some civil society groups to confront Hashim Thaçi and Isa Mustafa's government. A *casus belli* was found in the form of the government's international agreements with Serbia over the Association of Serb-majority municipalities and the border demarcation with Montenegro. And as it was expected, these topics "turned on" the masses.

But why do we say that the merger of the three opposition parties in a single front was unnatural in

the first place? The Self-determination movement, since its founding in 2005 and especially since entering in the Parliament in 2010, is noted for civic activism, with a special concentration on topics of corruption and nationalism, accusing of national treason most other parties while at the same time claiming to champion social causes and declaring themselves a leftist party. A frequent target of their accusations were the two parties with whom The Self-determination entered into a bloc: Haradinaj's AAK and The Initiative of Fatmir Limaj (the latter being accused by Self-Determination of being the most corrupt of Kosovo politicians when he was minister in Thaçi's PDK government).

Additionally, AAK and The Initiative had emerged as parties from the war with Serbia and were led by former KLA commanders who had adopted a (neo)liberal economic orientation and who advocated sound cooperation with the international community, which the Self-Determinists called a neocolonial power in Kosovo. These two parties also accepted "The Ahtisaari Plan" against which the Self-determinists objected so fiercely that, in one of its protest against this plan, on February 2007, two protesters were killed by the international Police.

So, in a word, this union was politically and ideologically unnatural, but given the concrete situation of a seemingly omnipotent and invincible majority, the merger passed with little criticism from the public. Support for the opposition was growing with the protests in January and February 2016 bringing to the streets about 40 thousand protesters (with the opposition claiming the number to be over 100 thousand protester while police counting only 8 thousand). Whatever the number, it is important to note that at the time the opposition

was gaining support from almost the whole of civil society. The possibility of early elections began to be seriously floated, with expectations that the united opposition parties would emerge out of them as the largest political force in the country.

Just at this time, when the united opposition had its peak in public opinion and just as everybody was considering the possibility of early elections certain, the topic of distribution of seats in a potential new government emerged. So here, as we say in Albanian, "the saw faced the spike". Ramush Haradinaj, known for his obsession with returning to power as a prime minister, agreed to relinquish this position and agreed to support Albin Kurti as the united opposition's PM candidate in case of early elections.

However, Haradinaj sought guarantees from Self-determination that in case the united opposition did not receive +50% of the vote, it would succeed in recruiting a new governing partner outside of the three parties and some civil society groups, which would compete with a joint list. If Self-determination failed in this, Haradinaj asked that, during the second attempt, as is required by the law, he would become the PM candidate. Self-determination refused.

At this point, a whole avalanche of mutual recriminations ensued. Self-determination accused Haradinaj that he split the united opposition for the sake of securing the position of the prime minister for himself. It then recalled older accusations that Haradinaj had been active in the ransom business (something that, while being together in block with him, they had apparently forgotten), that he was flirting with PDK (Thaçi's Democratic Party) for a possible coalition, that Haradinaj was afraid of the tear gas in parliament, etc. For its part, Haradinaj's AAK alleged that Self-determinists operate stealthily and high-handedly, camouflaging their members as civil society figures and imposing

their talking points on the other two parties. In all this turmoil, the third and the smallest party, The Initiative took Haradinaj's side and claimed that if they go to the polls together with AAK, they would emerge as the second largest force in the country, thus plunging Self-determination in "a spring of the great loneliness."

At the end of the day, considering the situation on the ground, the likelihood of early elections has seriously diminished unless it suits Thaçi's PDK. Now that Thaçi has consummated the LDK (The Democratic League) vote to become president, PDK could consider stealing the votes of its traditional ally/rival, the LDK of the Prime Minister Mustafa and the late President, Ibrahim Rugova.

Indeed, what are the chances that the new PDK leader, Kadri Veseli (former chief of the Information Service of KLA and PDK's *éminence grise*) would still maintain and even increase PDK's vote in case of early election? Can we take into consideration the fact that in the last parliamentary elections, in 2014, of 222 thousand votes cast for PDK, he took only 54 thousands while Thaçi took 166 thousands? Is this a sign that the PDK electorate itself has doubts about Veseli, too? Would the possible arrest of a number of local party figures on corruption charges affect the PDK vote given the fact that it has had the lowest electoral swing since the elections of 2000? Does PDK consider that the time has come or not to sanctify its status as the first party of the country?

The answers to these questions within the PDK will determine whether there will be any early elections. If so, the opposition, divided as it is, is unlikely to avert yet another PDK victory.

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GREECE

Europe's Border Guards

MANIA BARSEFSKI ·

The refugee crisis has illuminated how "Fortress Europe" acts as the complementary side of a neoliberal, deeply antidemocratic, and authoritarian "European integration." It has killed the hopes of a left which believed it was possible to break from neoliberalism within the framework of the EU, as "European values" became an alibi for the display of imperialist violence and hypocrisy.

The Mediterranean's role as the graveyard of Fortress Europe — and southern Europe's role as its guards — is not new. The "externalization" of the EU border started in the early 1990s and acts as the indispensable supplement to the "free movement of capital, goods, and people" inside the EU — with the movement of "people" always posing the most problems.

Concretely, externalization means the militarization of the border, with the support of increasingly sophisticated electronic surveillance; and the transformation of the external and the internal periphery of the EU into a vast "buffer zone" which acts as a lethal barrier, a filter, and a prison for all those lives excluded from the full humanity of the white, European, Western citizenry.

According to the available figures, between 15,000 and 17,000 people died in the Mediterranean between the late 1980s and 2012, before the recent exodus from the Greater Middle Eastern area. More than 10,000 have died since, 2015 being the peak year with 3,800 deaths.

This dark side of the "European project" has been so far the least visible and debated one, except for those networks of courageous activists and researchers who have been working on the situation

of migrants. The "refugee crisis" — a term which assumes that migrants and refugees pose an inherent threat to order — has at least the merit of politicizing the European project and putting it at the center of public debate. This has been the case in Greece, which found itself, once again, at the front-line of a battle of much wider proportions.

Seen from Greece, the "refugee crisis" reveals in the most brutal way the nature of the European Union as an entity for the surveillance, the policing, and the hierarchical categorization of the population. At the same time, it uncovers another dimension of an allegedly "left government" which, following its shameful surrender to the blackmail of the EU and the IMF, has aligned itself at all levels with the dominant logic of "crisis management."

This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from Syriza's disastrous failure. The idea that it is possible to remain faithful to "left values" on the terrain of human rights while making "painful but unavoidable concessions" on economic policy is an illusion.

The 2015 battle against the troika and the austerity memoranda was lost but the war is far from over. Social resistance exists, emerging on occasions like the February 4 general strike. One of the most positive signs of the recent period has been the capacity of Greek society to react positively, in its majority, when faced with the massive arrival of refugees and migrants. What prevailed were feelings of empathy and humanity, the kind of solidarity that only the oppressed and the humiliated are capable of when they display their own ability to resist.

The refugee crisis has become a terrain for this ongoing political confrontation, one in which social organizations and the militant left have shown their

own capacity to intervene and keep in touch with broader sectors of Greek society.

To analyze the multiple dimensions of this phase we have interviewed two of the most well-known figures of the antiracist and pro-migrant movement in Greece.

Mania Barsefski has been a member of the Network for Social and Political Rights, a historical organization of the Left focused on migrant rights, human rights, and antiracism, since its creation in 1994. She is now working for the Network for Social Support of Migrants and Refugees, which was founded in 1995 and is affiliated to the Network for Social and Political Rights. She was a member of Syriza's central committee and a member of its rights commission. She left Syriza in the summer of 2015 and has joined Popular Unity, taking over its rights commission.

Thanassis Kourkoulas is the coordinator of the Deport Racism! organization and a member of the Workers Internationalist Left (DEA), a former founding component of Syriza and of its Left Platform, now part of Popular Unity. He is also a member of Popular Unity's rights commission.

They are interviewed by Stathis Kouvelakis, who formerly served on Syriza's central committee and teaches political theory at King's College in London, and Angelos Kontogiannis-Mandros who is a graduate student studying Greek social movements at King's College London.

Let's go back to January 2015 when Syriza won the elections. What was the situation in the country for refugees and the immigrants?

Mania Barsefski: In January 2015 the number of immigrant workers in Greece had already started decreasing due to the financial crisis. Many decided to return to their home countries or tried to move elsewhere to escape the high unemployment.

At the same time the flow of refugees was up as a result of the intensification of military conflicts in the broader area. The European Union obviously

bears a lot of the responsibility for this situation since it has either ignited or encouraged those wars.

As for the Samaras government, its policy was directed towards the repression of refugees and migrants. Those considered illegal were held in detention centers for more than eighteen months at a time. In the camps of Amygdaleza and Korinthos there were deaths due to lack of appropriate health care.

The same repressive strategy applied to the refugees. Samaras's close collaborator, Thanasis Plevris, called for "blood on the borders" to prevent migrant flows. Nikolaos Papagiannopoulos, the head of the Hellenic Police, demanded we "make their lives unbearable" and Varvitsiotis, then-minister of shipping, was in favor of illegal pushbacks of migrants to Turkey.

This strategy had already taken the lives of hundreds of people in the Aegean with the minister covering up the activities of the Hellenic Coast Guard. Emblematic here was the tragedy near Farmakonisi Island in January 2014 that shocked Greek society. Moreover, the fence erected at the area of the Evros river left no other way into Greece but the perilous sea route.

But the Evros fence was put in place by a Pasok government in 2011, wasn't it?

MB: Yes that's right but New Democracy continued the work. In reality there is no distinction between the two.

After the fall of Pasok's government, a coalition government between Pasok and New Democracy took over and adopted a common agenda with regard to the migration/refugee issue. Police operations were conducted throughout the country to arrest immigrants and racist violence was increasing.

In Manolada, in the Peloponnese, vigilantes at the service of employers repeatedly attacked immigrant workers asking for their pay. The neo-Nazi thugs of Golden Dawn unleashed a series of pogroms against immigrants, taking advantage of the anti-

immigration discourse of mainstream media and of the government.

Some of these attacks ended up in murders as with the case of the Pakistani worker Sahzat Luqman, in December 2013, and of the rapper Pavlos Fyssas in September 2014. After Fyssas's assassination there was at last a crackdown against Golden Dawn which led to the arrest of most of its leaders and to a significant decrease of its activities.

Thanassis Kourkoulas: Since 2010 Greece has been at the forefront of Europe's deterrence policies, beginning with the construction of the Evros fence by Pasok minister Christos Papoutsis. It is the first EU country to refuse safe routes for refugees.

In 2011-12 the Greek government in agreement with the Turkish one upgraded the surveillance of the border in the Evros area using high-tech equipment which can track human presence more than a mile across the Turkish side of the border. This was a clear manifestation of the alignment of Greece, Turkey, and the European Union on migrant deterrence strategies.

This policy became entrenched after the April 2010 speech by Pasok's George Papandreou announcing not only the troika's rule but also the dogma of zero tolerance against the migrants. Papandreou made it clear that the repressive policies against the migrants and refugees go hand-in-hand with the "austerity shock" and the impoverishment of the Greek people.

We are faced here with a unified policy emanating from Fortress Europe that wants to filter the influx of "outsiders" according to the needs of the markets for a low-paid and dispensable work force while leading the "insiders" to poverty and unemployment under a state of emergency rule.

What were Syriza's positions on migrants and refugees? How can we assess the links that Syriza had established with antiracist movements and organizations supporting migrants and refugees?

TK: Since its formation in 2004 and due to its active involvement in all the mobilizations on that terrain, Syriza developed organic relations with the movements against racism and Fortress Europe.

It adopted nearly all the demands of these movements: the termination of detention policies and the closure of detention centers for migrants and refugees, the opening of safe land corridors in Evros from which people would be able to enter freely and register in Greece, the legalization of most undocumented migrants and finally the condemnation of the collaboration between the Samaras government and Golden Dawn.

In my opinion, this policy played a determining role in the subsequent rise of Syriza into power, by expanding the electoral influence of the party and also creating the sense that a Syriza government would in reality be a government of the people, of the social movements, etc.

MB: Syriza found itself many times at the forefront of these movements. It organized regular visits to the detention centers, publicized the awful living conditions of the migrants there, and promised to dismantle these camps when in office. During the electoral campaign of January 2015 it put forward the proposal for the automatic granting of citizenship to all the children of immigrant families born in Greece, an initiative called "stop racism from the cradle." It had also committed itself to create open facilities for the refugees and to call for a fair policy of relocation of the refugees across the European Union.

Were there specific demands from Syriza for the cancellation of the Dublin treaty and the dismantling of the Evros fence?

MB: There was indeed a position against the existence of the Evros fence although it wasn't clear if it should be dismantled altogether or if safe corridors would be opened. The spirit of the argument though was pointing towards the direction of the progressive dismantling of the fence.

As for the Dublin treaties, which obliged refugees to apply for asylum in the country through which they enter the EU, and allowing their deportation to that country if they leave it illegally, Syriza was clearly opposing them.

Let's move now to the period of the first Syriza government, between January and July 2015. Tassia Christodouloupoulou, a figure with close ties to the antiracist and pro-migrant movement is appointed as minister of migration. Yet Yiannis Panousis, who espoused "law and order" and repressive policies, is appointed as minister of public order. What is your assessment of Syriza's migrant policy during this period, when confrontation with the EU over austerity policies was still on the horizon?

MB: Well, during this period some hesitant but positive steps were accomplished. First of all, deterrence policies in the Aegean Sea immediately came to an end. This resulted in a spectacular decrease in the number of migrant deaths at sea.

Detention centers, more particularly in Korinthos and Amygdaleza, were almost entirely emptied out simply by bringing migrant detention time, almost limitless before, to three months, i.e. by sticking to the existing legislation. The government also passed an antiracist law and stopped police operations targeting migrants. The term "illegal immigrant" stopped being used by state authorities.

Moreover, the law for the attribution of citizenship to the children of immigrants was voted in parliament. This law has some significant flaws. For instance, the attribution of citizenship is linked to the legal status of the parents, which means that a child born and raised in the country whose parents haven't acquired legal status cannot get Greek nationality.

Those ambiguities reflect the fact that Syriza was in office without holding real power. On this specific case for example it needed to adapt to existing rulings issued by the Council of State with regard to the provision of citizenship.

Then there was the hostility of the minister of public order, Yiannis Panousis, who was relentlessly pushing for a law-and-order agenda. Under his command police forces dispersed with tear gas and use of force the first protest organized outside of the Amygdaleza detention center after Syriza took office.

In general, we can say that there was a constant pressure to move towards more "realistic" positions. The discussion about the Evros fence was blocked as the government's internal contradictions and its inability to impose its will upon the state apparatus became evident.

TK: The first Syriza government tried to test a possible balanced position vis-à-vis the European Union and the domestic establishment, with a policy in favor of socio-political rights during times of austerity. In other words, it was an attempt to reconcile clearly contradictory strategies. In that context all the steps that Mania outlined previously remained incomplete and inconclusive.

In my opinion especially after the agreement of February 20, when Syriza started to adapt progressively to the demands of the troika, the dead end to which this approach was leading became evident.

That pressure to adjust to the framework of the memoranda created a very tight economic environment that significantly limited the room of maneuvering on many issues, including migration. To cite just one example, Tassia Christodouloupoulou had money to recruit some advisers in the ministry for migration but lacked the resources to create hosting centers.

The political contradiction of the period was also reflected in the attitude of Panousis regarding the closure of Amygdaleza and the fact that many cases of maltreatment of migrants by police and coast guard units were reported. In a nutshell, with the exception of the two laws on antiracism and citizenship, the operational and legal framework remained intact with the government just trying to enforce it in a more "humane" way.

In summer 2015, Tsipras and his government capitulated to the demands of the creditors, Syriza split, and a new Syriza government formed in alliance with the Independent Greeks (ANEL). Tellingly, Tassia Christodouloupoulou isn't part of the new cabinet. At the same time the refugee flows in the Aegean take unprecedented proportions. What is the impact of this political upheaval on refugee policy?

TK: The appointment of Yannis Mouzalas to the Ministry of Migration signals a turn in the management of migration and of the refugee crisis. Depicted as a successful and pragmatist politician during his mandate in the interim government, Mouzalas reoriented the government's policy towards NGO-based management.

At that time the first massive wave of refugees was underway and the country lacked any serious preparation for that situation. The determination of the refugees and the strong movement of solidarity forced the government to open the borders on the north of the country and let the refugees continue their journey.

Temporarily, this move allowed the Greek government to appear as having room to maneuver in the management of austerity. To put it differently, it contributed creating the image of a government that can really shape its own policies and take the initiative.

Tsipras also categorically refuses to bring down the Evros fence and thus provide a safe land passage to the refugees. He argues that to do so necessitates the prior approval of the EU and claims that it would be practically impossible due to the minefields still in place at the Turkish-Greek border. This decision means that the dangerous sea route remains the only available one. It also means that the refusal of any unilateral move vis-à-vis the EU doesn't apply only to economic decisions but extends to the entire policy framework.

MB: The border is indeed full of minefields but the government could nevertheless have created safe

corridors for the refugees. Let's not forget that minefields are a clear violation of international treaties.

If the problem was of a technical nature, it could be solved easily had Tsipras the will to do so. In reality the problem was a political one. The government was progressively aligning itself with the strategy of Fortress Europe and only used the work and positions of Syriza's rights committee as a discursive fig leaf.

It was during this phase that "hot-spots" were created throughout the country. Popular Unity rightly condemned these facilities from the very start as the first step towards closed detention facilities where refugees will be grouped separately according to class criteria, i.e. skills, educational level, etc., and between those considered as eligible for asylum and those who aren't. In other words, it was evident that Syriza's policy with regard to the refugee question was changing dramatically.

This change translated into a dramatic revision of some of the previous concessions that were previously made to the refugees, right?

TK: That's true. During this period, for the first time since Syriza was in office, the Greek authorities started the direct transfer and confinement of refugees and migrants from the islands to detention centers. Algerian migrants were also sent from Idomeni, near the northern border, to Amygdaleza and then deported to Turkey under the rules of the Papandreou-çem agreement of 2004. The term "illegal migrant" is also reintroduced in public documents.

MB: This category of "illegal migrants" also includes people that should be registered as refugees such as the Afghans that have faced war the last thirty years, Somalis, Iraqis, Iranians. In other words, the term "illegal migrants," which should be rejected in any case, is now applied to people that under the Geneva Convention are considered refugees.

Many of the criteria that define the status of the refugee have been lifted as well. For example, who can say that a homosexual that is targeted in his country for her sexual orientation is not a refugee, who can say that a women facing forced marriage or circumcision is not a refugee, who can say that a child facing forced labor without access to education and healthcare should not be considered a refugee?

The use of the term "illegal migrant" in reality is meant to restrict the refugee status only to Syrians and as we will see later with the Turkey-EU agreement not even to all of them.

TK: This is also the moment when Mouzalas clearly sent a message to North African migrants that deportations will now take place.

MB: His formulation was that that North African migrants need to know that "if Osman comes to Greece he will be sent back."

One of the dominant narratives of the refugee crisis has been the contrast between the "humanist" Merkel, keen to welcome the refugees, and the xenophobic Eastern European, who is alien to the "West European values" embodied by Germany. This despite the fact that the countries of the "Visegrad group" (Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia), followed by Slovenia, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who unilaterally decided to close their borders, were lead by Austria. This narrative has become less credible since the agreement between the EU and Turkey, however the question remains: how are we to assess Germany's attitude in that period?

MB: It is clearly an attempt to whitewash Germany and Merkel after their handling of the Greek crisis gave them a "nasty" image. It is an exercise in spin, using a lot of lofty rhetoric.

In reality they did not distance themselves from the logic of Fortress Europe. Neither Germany nor any

other EU member state condemned or reacted effectively to the decision of the Visegrad group and its followers to close the borders, erect walls and fences, and send the military to prevent border-crossing.

Germany tried to change its image abroad and particularly in Greece by presenting itself as an ally and a lenient power with a humane face. Meanwhile Greece is constantly blackmailed and put under maximum pressure to adopt even harsher austerity measures and to sell out its remaining public assets.

We should also not forget that the deal David Cameron got from the EU, under the threat of Brexit, allows Britain to seal its borders, keep at bay refugees, and even discriminate against EU citizens. Denmark's decision to seize the valuables of the refugees wasn't met with any reaction. The pro-refugee discourse should therefore be considered pure hypocrisy.

Sure, but Germany accepted nearly a million refugees last year. At the same time, the German government is also adamant about the need to externalize EU's borders and to transform the countries of the southern periphery, and particularly Greece, into Europe's border police and, if need be, into traps for those who succeed getting in. Isn't that the core of the logic of Fortress Europe?

TK : We should stress the fact that the German government has economic reasons to let refugees in. German industry, and more generally, the German economy, needs extra labor that is both skilled and ready to work for low salaries. So it's not humanism but a class policy oriented towards increased exploitation of both German workers and refugees that will inevitably create divisions and fuel competition between them.

It will be no accident if Merkel declares eventually that there should be a cap to what Germany can accept in terms of numbers. This cap is set by Schäuble and the Employers Union and it corre-

sponds to a cost/benefit calculation that is favorable to the interests of German capital.

The refugee crisis has peaked with the gradual closure of the borders and the sealing of the so-called "Balkan route." The agreement between Germany and Turkey puts NATO patrols in the Aegean Sea, blocking refugee entrance to the Greek islands. What are the responsibilities of the Greek government at this stage?

TK: The Syriza government should have confronted from the outset the policies and the decisions of the EU. It should have moved unilaterally, as it should have done with the memoranda and in matters of economic policy.

The fact that it didn't follow that line is further proof that the EU framework is a coherent package that needs to be confronted as a whole. It's not possible to separate the decisions concerning the refugees or human rights and the economic policy.

Let me be more specific: the Greek government should have unilaterally withdrawn from the Dublin II agreements and categorically opposed NATO patrolling the Aegean. NATO presence is obviously threatening for the refugees but is also related to the situation in the Middle East and more particularly to the war in Syria.

Greece should also have withdrawn from NATO, a move that a right-wing government such as the one led by Konstantinos Karamanlis did in 1974 to protest against the US's and NATO's role in Cyprus and Greece during the military dictatorship.

In terms of positive actions, the Greek government should have at the very least opened up the passages in the area of the Evros river, to allow a safe terrestrial crossing of the border and put maximum pressure on the neighboring countries and the Visegrad group to keep their borders open.

Of course it should also have created the conditions for the refugees to stay in the country in decent conditions, in open and properly equipped centers. To do that it should have taken control of public or

private buildings that are currently not occupied and use them to accommodate not only refugees but also Greek people who are faced with housing problems.

Such an initiative could have helped create an alliance with the popular classes on a pro-refugee policy.

MB: To put it very simply: the Greek government could have vetoed EU decisions and thus created effective pressure for the opening of the borders and the solution of the refugee crisis. But such an attitude is impossible for a government that has already capitulated to the troika and accepted the neoliberal framework.

But the responsibility of Tsipras and his government go even beyond that. We should emphasize that even before the signature of the shameful agreement between the EU and Turkey, Tsipras had initiated the rapprochement with Turkey on that terrain.

He traveled twice to Turkey, last November and in early March, and agreed with the Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu on the whole set of measures to pull back the refugees and block the route to Europe.

So in this case, Greece pioneered the repressive policies that were eventually put in place by the EU in its dealings with Turkey. Tsipras even declared that he considered this deal of the EU with Turkey as "an important success."

Tsipras has defended the EU-Turkey agreement, calling it a "European solution" that can prevent a "domino of unilateral actions." Meanwhile human rights agencies have denounced it as contrary to international conventions on refugee rights. What is your assessment of the agreement?

MB: First, this agreement is predicated on Turkey being recognized as a "safe country" despite the war it is waging at home against the Kurds and despite its position towards Syria, where Kurdish positions near the border have repeatedly been bombed,

strengthening ISIS. Turkey's domestic situation is clearly unacceptable from the perspective of the rule of law and of democratic rights: it is not a safe country for its own citizens.

There are also reports from the UN High Commission on the Refugees and Amnesty International denouncing deportations even of Syrian refugees. This agreement lifts the guarantees granted to the refugees by the 1951 Geneva Convention, which explicitly stipulates a case-by-case examination of every application for asylum.

For the refugees and migrants who are already in Greece, the agreement means, as has been said previously, that the existing hot-spots are turned into detention centers. Deportations of the so-called "irregular migrants" have already started. Applications for asylum now follow fast-track procedures and if rejected lead to deportation of the applicant.

The agreement also completely seals the borders, including the Greek ones, and sets a punishment for all those who cross them. Indeed for every refugee to be "relocated" in the EU, another one has to be deported from Greece to Turkey.

This perverse, inhuman logic means that those who risk their lives to cross the border are sanctioned whereas those who stay quiet waiting for a hypothetical relocation are, so to say, rewarded by benefiting from the punishment imposed to the others.

Everyone understands that only a very limited number of refugees will now be allowed to enter the EU. An increasing number of them will be punished either by being trapped in Greece, which is thus transformed into a vast detention center, or by being deported to Turkey and confined to huge camps which do not conform to international standards.

Let's remember here that Turkey hasn't signed the conventions on refugee rights. The protection granted to refugees is very limited and we have reports denouncing

that people sent back from Greece ended up in prison.

To what extent can it be effectively implemented? In the bill submitted to parliament by the Greek government, Turkey isn't recognized as a "safe country." Are mass deportations to Turkey then still feasible?

TK : The EU-Turkey agreement is a monument of racist inhumanity. Turkey has imposed visa restrictions for the Syrians who enter the country by sea or by air. The land border is also nearly closed, only people with serious health issues are allowed to enter. There are Amnesty International reports about refugees sent back to Syria by the hundreds from camps near the border and others being shot while trying to cross the border.

As far as Greece is concerned, this agreement has led to unprecedented changes in the legislation concerning asylum. The applications will be processed in the islands within two weeks, this deadline is also supposed to cover the procedure of appeal. This amounts to a complete negation of legal guarantees and appeal procedures.

The applicants are treated as prisoners, detained in places that have now become closed centers in which living conditions are rapidly deteriorating. International agencies and activists have left these places, only some selected NGOs are still present.

The applicability of the agreement will largely depend on "technical" aspects. For instance, more than 5,500 people have so far applied for asylum in Greece. It is practically impossible to process those applications within 14 days. Meeting that deadline would require hundreds more staff that are not available.

The question remains of course the possibility of the deportation of Syrian refugees. Will we see the transposition of what is happening with Afghanistan, where Kabul is considered a "safe area," presumably because Western embassies are heavily guarded? In which case Damascus and other government-controlled areas will be considered

"safe" and people originating from there will be sent back.

Or will a Syrian who has been granted asylum in Greece be sent back to Turkey if for instance he tries to cross the border illegally to enter another European country? In any case, for those considered "irregular migrants" or those rejected from asylum, deportation becomes as an imminent threat.

Refugees themselves have taken action, for instance when they tried to bring down the fence at the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on April 10 and were savagely pulled back by police . Recently we have noticed that in media discourse, but also to an extent by the Greek government, solidarity activists and the most active refugees are stigmatized as elements "fomenting disorder and acts of violence." How is this evolution analyzed by the solidarity movement?

TK: The only way to implement racist policies is by adopting authoritarian and repressive measures and by targeting activists and the refugees themselves. We hadn't seen this type of atmosphere in Greece since 2013, when, with the crackdown on Golden Dawn, things somewhat improved.

The refugees will continue to resist and oppose the policies that have been adopted as they already did in Idomeni, in Chios, or in central Athens where they were joined by thousands of activists and citizens. We issue a warning to all those who target refugees and activists, either from the far right or from government circles, that their attempt to intimidate us will have no effect whatsoever.

The networks that are active in the solidarity movement but also the militant left, Popular Unity, Antarsya, or other currents, including people who have left Syriza without joining another organization, constitute the backbone of a force that is able to reach and mobilize broad sectors of the popular classes and of Greek society in support of the refugees.

Those who will lose their credibility in this affair are those who pretend to be something different from their predecessors in government and turn out to be their faithful continuators.

MB: The most positive signal in this entire period was the tremendous reaction of Greek society when confronted with this crisis. It displayed a strong sense of solidarity, refused to discriminate between "irregular migrants" and refugees, and resisted xenophobic impulses and Islamophobia. This is what has so far prevented Golden Dawn from benefiting from the situation.

The Greek government is trying at the same time to hijack the solidarity movement and make it appear as its best ally while trying to erase its political content by bringing it within the framework of the EU and the Greek state policy as exemplified by the recent EU-Turkey agreement.

This is why the Greek authorities play some NGOs, the "good" ones, against others and against the activist networks.

We have to say here that NGOs manage huge amounts of money in a quite opaque way, even if we should not put all of them in the same bag. Actually the state policy is to subcontract the bulk of the work to those NGOs and to marginalize and even stigmatize the other actors, particularly the most politicized ones.

Activists have thus been arrested and/or subjected to police harassment. Carrying even a potato peeler makes you now a potential suspect for violent action. The media make of course a big fuss about this.

We have also seen state officials and the media covering jointly violent actions against refugees perpetrated by allegedly "angry citizens" protesting against their presence in various places of the territory. This is the type of attitude that paves the ground for a surge of Golden Dawn activity. And unfortunately we have already seen that starting with the first attack since a long time against refugees in Piraeus on April 8.

Both of you waged a fierce battle inside Syriza to prevent the capitulation and to remain faithful to Syriza's initial commitments. This battle was lost and entire Greek left and the workers' movement are now facing a very difficult situation. However, from what has been said so far in our discussion, it seems the ongoing struggle on the question of refugees and migrants is crucial as a terrain for the reconstruction of a combative, militant left.

TK: I totally agree. The refugee question is of Greek, European, and worldwide importance. For the Left, it is a question that touches the core of its identity and of its values. The Syriza-led Greek government has already started paying a political cost for its management of the situation.

What is needed now and for the forthcoming period is a decisive attitude from the anti-memorandum, radical, and anticapitalist forces of the Left. The refugee question should not be put in the balance and weighted against other agendas, for instance issues concerning foreign policy.

The outcome of the ongoing battle depends on the impact of the new package of austerity measures that the government will have to pass in parliament the next few weeks. It is not obvious that the government will be able to survive once this package is voted. The essential issue lies therefore in the convergence between the social resistance to the new

austerity package and the movement of solidarity with the refugees and the migrants.

MB: This government has so far succeeded in passing measures that would have been fiercely opposed by popular resistance under different political circumstances. Their only plan is to continue to do so and remain in office at any cost covering up their deeds with a left rhetoric devoid of any effective meaning.

The struggle against the memoranda and in support of the refugees and migrants is a common struggle. Of course different factors enter into play in each of these issues. However it is the same neoliberal and imperialist policy that created the conditions that lead to the wars and the ensuing mass exodus but also to the impoverishment and degradation that have been imposed on the Greek people.

A government that is unwilling and unable to confront the troika of the lenders cannot offer any alternative perspective. Syriza has proved unable to win over the hegemony for a genuine left project, which is a condition sine qua non not only for a solution to the refugee crisis but also for the emancipation of Greek society. This perspective will not arise spontaneously, it implies ruptures and major confrontations. This is not an easy task but without this compass nothing will be possible, at any level of political action.

May 2 2016)

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| BRAZIL

Brazil: the coup d'état

MICHAEL LÖWY ·

Parliamentarians – deputies and senators – who are massively compromised in cases of corruption (the figure of 60% has been quoted) have established a procedure for dismissal against the Brazilian president, Dilma Roussef, under the pretext of accounting irregularities, adjustments to fill the deficits in the public accounts - a routine practice of all previous Brazilian governments! Certainly, several executives of the Workers' Party (PT) are involved in the corruption scandal concerning Petrobras, the national oil company but not Dilma.

In fact, the right wing deputies who have led the campaign against the President are among the most mired in this affair, starting with the President of the Parliament, Eduardo Cunha (recently suspended), accused of corruption, money laundering, tax evasion in Panama and so on.

The practice of the legal coup seems to be the new strategy of the oligarchies in Latin America. Put to the test in Honduras and in Paraguay - countries that the press often deals with as "banana republics" - it has proved effective in eliminating presidents who are (very moderately) on the left. Now it comes to be applied to a country-continent.

One can make a lot of criticisms to Dilma: she has not kept her electoral promises and has made enormous concessions to the bankers, industrialists, and latifundistas (big landowners). The political and social left has been demanding a change in economic and social policy for the last year. But the oligarchy of divine right in Brazil - the financial, industrial, and agricultural capitalist elite – are not content with more concessions: they want full pow-

er. They no longer want to negotiate but to govern directly, through their trusted confidantes, and to abolish the few social achievements of recent years.

Citing Hegel, Marx wrote in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, that historical events repeat themselves: the first time as tragedy, and the second as farce. This applies perfectly to Brazil. The military coup of April 1964 was a tragedy, which plunged Brazil into twenty years of military dictatorship, at the price of hundreds dead and thousands tortured. The parliamentary coup of May 2016 is a farce, a tragi-comic affair, where we see a clique of reactionary and notoriously corrupt parliamentarians to overthrow a president democratically elected by 54 million Brazilians, on account of "accounting irregularities". The main component of this alliance of parties on the right is the parliamentary bloc known as "the three Bs": "Bullets" (members related to the Military Police, the death squads and other private militias) – "Beef" (large landowners raising cattle) - and "Bible" (the neo-fundamentalist Pentecostals, homophobic and misogynistic). Among the most enthusiastic supporters of the dismissal of Dilma was the deputy Jairo Bolsonaro, who dedicated his vote to the officers of the military dictatorship and specifically to Colonel Unstra, a known torturer. Among the victims of Ustra was Dilma Roussef, at the time (in the early 1970s) an activist in an armed resistance group, as well as my friend Luis Eduardo Merlino, journalist and revolutionary, who died under torture in 1971 aged 21.

The new President Michel Temer, inducted by his acolytes, is himself involved in several affairs, but has not yet been the subject of a review. During a recent survey, Brazilians were asked if they would

vote for Temer as President: 2% responded favorably.

In 1964, big demonstrations "with God and the family for freedom" prepared the ground for the coup against President João Goulart; this time new "patriotic" crowds incited by the press have been mobilized to demand the removal of Dilma, and in some cases a return of the military. Composed mainly of white people (the majority of Brazilians are black or mixed) from the middle classes, these

crowds have been convinced by the media that this is about "the fight against corruption".

What the tragedy of 1964 and the farce of 2016 have in common is hatred of democracy. The two episodes reveal the profound contempt of the dominant classes in Brazil for democracy and the popular will. Will the "legal" coup go ahead with minimal hassle, as in Honduras and Paraguay? That is not so sure - the popular classes, social movements and the rebellious youth have not said their last word yet.

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina's left at a crossroads

EDUARDO LUCITA ·

One such question is the role of the Left and Workers Front (FIT by its Spanish initials), a coalition of three far-left parties that identify with the Trotskyist tradition. The FIT won more than 3 percent of the vote in the primary elections for the presidency, a strong showing for the left, although a decline from its totals in 2013. The drop reflected an element of "lesser evil" voting for the governing Justicialist Party (also known as the Peronists) of outgoing President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, which had been considered part of the "Pink Tide" of reformist governments in Latin America.

With Macri winning office in the general election a few months later, debates about the FIT and the direction of the resistance have increased. Inside the FIT, there is an ongoing discussion over whether and how the Front should open itself up to other forces on the left or to remain as a strict electoral pact between revolutionary socialist parties. In this debate, two of the FIT's members, the Workers' Party (PO, by its initials in Spanish) and Socialist Left (IS), have shown greater willingness to broaden the front to other forces on the left than has the Socialist Workers Party (PTS).

Another organization on the Argentinian left, Socialist Democracy (Democracia Socialista, DS), which is not a member of the FIT, has a well-developed analysis of these questions, which SocialistWorker.org published last June. A group of PTS members left that party to form Democracia Socialista in 2005. PTS members who founded DS criticized the PTS (and the rest of the Argentinian far left) for its failure to open itself up to new forces mobilized by the Argentinazo.

DS has raised the question of whether the FIT, in its current form, is best organized to galvanize a fight against Macri's attacks. It argues that the FIT should take the initiative to spearhead a broad fight, transcending party divisions in the far left, and reaching out even to supporters of Peronism. While certainly partisan and critical, DS's views on the FIT and the challenges facing the Argentinian left should be of interest to readers of SocialistWorker.org. Here, we publish a contribution to that discussion from Eduardo Lucita, a DS member. Lucita's article first appeared in Spanish at the Democracia Socialista website and was translated by Lance Selfa.

At a time when the right is making major gains in Latin America, and particularly in our country, the most important demonstration commemorating the essence of the international workers movement, May Day, was divided.

There's no doubt that the left, in its many distinct currents, has won important space in society. Whether in the social movements or elections, the left has, in one way or another, become a part of the unfolding political process.

This is particularly significant in the case of the FIT, an electoral front that, although limited in its composition, has won more than 20 political offices and has become a national reference point for other groups, including the more radical and class-conscious left, drawn from the so-called New Left or from the populists, as well as many other left currents. This includes those who don't vote for the FIT, but who feel they have to acknowledge its presence.

For many observers, the current political conjuncture has reopened opportunities for the left. Capitalism has entered into a period of long-term stagnation, geopolitical conflicts are widening the range of crises, and progressive governments in Latin America have run up against their own limits. Meanwhile, a pro-business right has taken charge of the state in Argentina and is making things much clearer.

In the previous period, when state intervention and social spending were on the ascendancy, the left and socio-political and cultural movements found it difficult to correctly assess Kirchnerismo [the latest left-populist version of Peronism named after husband and wife Presidents Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner] and to position themselves in relation to it. In some ways, these difficulties could justify the dispersion of forces and factionalism. Nonetheless, the FIT was launched, and despite its internal conflicts, it has managed to hold together as an electoral alliance.

But today, the sense that "either you're with us or them" and that class polarization is much more apparent has created a yearning to bring together a social force capable of confronting the all-out employers and state offensive and staking out an anti-capitalist alternative. In other words, it's obvious now that more than a merely electoral alliance is needed, and this seems to have given rise to tendencies to dispersion and factionalism.

At this stage, capitalist globalization concentrates, centralizes and homogenizes at the top of society while it divides, fragments and creates heterogeneity below. And in addition to this general tendency, we find sterile arguments and self-promoting politics, all resulting in a sectarianism inherited from a left organized into parties. Even some movements and smaller coalitions haven't escaped this.

Remember, not long ago, an agreement between two leaders—Ruben "Pollo" Sobrero of the Rail Workers Union (UF) and Carlos "Perro" Santillan of the Jujuy Municipal Workers (SEOM)—whose

profiles go beyond their trade union base—gave birth to the Class Struggle Union Forum (Encuentro Sindical Combativo, ESC).

The Workers Party (PO) dismissed this initiative while the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) did little to build it. Nevertheless, other smaller forces joined and built the ESC until the end of last year, when the SEOM expelled a delegate belonging to the PTS. When the rest of the left parties and currents belonging to the ESC disagreed because the reasons stated explicitly for the expulsion did not justify the severity of the measures taken, the SEOM pulled out of the ESC and killed it. [1].

In the first case, it all began with the organizers' decision to prevent the Socialist Workers Movement (MST in Spanish, a significant, but smaller force compared to the PO and PTS) from joining the ESC. Once this "problem" was solved (because the other members of the ESC agreed to the MST's exclusion), debate on the composition of the steering committee and speakers for the ESC began.

Behind this discussion lay a debate over whether the steering committee would be permanent or temporary in order to only organize the initial event. When everything was already prepared and the ESC was being promoted, it drew criticisms from all sides. The PO blamed other forces for the ESC's failure. El Nuevo MAS tried to push the PO out with bureaucratic maneuvers; the PTS accused the PO, Socialist Left (IS) and Rompiendo Cadenas ("Breaking the Chains") of bureaucratic exclusions and vetoing delegates. Finally, the IS accused the PO and PTS of wanting to split the ESC. Meanwhile, the MST denounced it from outside the FIT's closed circle.

This wasn't the only example. Following the crackup of the ECS, a formation that had up to that point raised the hopes of many activists in the broad, non-party left, divisions emerged in the left's activities on May Day. These developments show the seriousness of the situation more starkly.

Fortunately part of the FIT (the PO and PTS) and the class-struggle wing of the union movement—marching in their own contingent—participated in the huge May Day demonstration called by all the mainstream union federations. At the same time, a united, anti-bureaucratic and class-struggle slate won the leadership of the tire workers' union, SUTNA, following the overwhelming victory of a united left-wing slate in the Buenos Aires journalists' union, SIPREBA.

These developments show that some working-class common sense survives despite all the division. Without a doubt, these are not insignificant pockets of support.

But the tendency to disunity was unmistakable on May Day. This time, the impeachment crisis in Brazil prompted a split.

The PTS argued that what it calls an "institutional coup" in Brazil will affect the entire Latin American left. And for this reason, it argued, the Brazilian crisis should have been the key rallying point for May Day rallies and demonstrations. Thus, it called for a May Day demonstration outside the Brazilian embassy in Buenos Aires.

The PO generally shared the PTS's assessment of the Brazilian events, but didn't think the Brazilian question should dominate May Day in Argentina. While it wanted to maintain unity among the forces on the left, the PO opposed moving the site of the main demonstration away from the traditional rallying site, the Plaza de Mayo.

The IS, on the other hand, sees the Brazilian impeachment crisis as a fight inside the Brazilian ruling class, reflecting popular discontent rather than a "coup." Nevertheless, it supported a united May Day action.

In the end, the PTS demonstrated in front of the Brazilian embassy on April 30, while the PO and IS along with Rompiendo Cadenas and other smaller groups rallied in the Plaza de Mayo on May 1. For its part, the MST gathered in the Parque Centenario. Clearly, ongoing debates are important

and should continue, but they are not the sort of debates that ought to continuously recreate these unproductive splits. Yet again, the narrow interests of the different parties took precedence over the class unity that's needed.

Once again, political disagreements were raised above the interests of the working class and popular sectors. The united May Day action announced in the middle of April came apart over petty arguments. This is clear because nothing required any of the groups to "give up their line," though they could have worked together as they had done in the past.

It's true that at numerous times in the past, the left held multiple and even simultaneous demonstrations, but those were times when a united action didn't have the same national significance and didn't impose the same political responsibility as is required today. In reality, what's at stake is the discussion inside the FIT itself—a touchy subject for sure, but one that's being brought to the surface following internal FIT elections.

Surely, not all responsibility on the left falls to the FIT, but there is a common thread here: party patriotism pure and simple. Given this situation, and granting that we're facing an increase in internal and sectarian conflict, we have to pose a new question.

The debate is no longer about whether the FIT should be broadened or not (or how or with whom this should be done), but rather where is the FIT going? We have a quandary. Despite its internal contradictions and sectarian squabbles, the FIT represented a step forward, and its dissolution would clearly be a setback. But at the same time, its current form doesn't serve a broader goal. It's hardly more than an electoral mechanism for collecting votes. Its elected deputies don't act as a coherent bloc, while in the social movements, each group does its own thing.

Thus, we're faced with a certain reality: the FIT was extremely useful in the previous period, but in a new period characterized by an employers' and

state offensive and open class struggle, it doesn't fit the bill as it is currently constructed.

We can't predict the future, but perhaps it's a good time to consider whether we've arrived at a point where we should consider different options, includ-

ing restructuring the FIT or creating something new. Otherwise, the future will be out of our hands.

May 17, 2016

Translation by Lance Selfa.

socialistworker.org

SPANISH STATE

What remains of all our outrage?

ESTHER VIVAS ·

15M has changed the way we read and interpret the crisis we are facing. We were all told in 2008 that "we live beyond our means", and blamed for the present situation, but the movement of los indignados has enabled us to change the story. One of its principle slogans, "no somos mercancías en manos de políticos ni banqueros" (we are not mere things to be manipulated by politicians and bankers), pointed in this direction. 15M said that the banks were the authors of economic collapse, and that most of the political class was also complicit. Los indignados imposed a counter-narrative that challenged the official lie: neither guilty nor responsible, it said, we are victims of an age of corruption.

What began as an economic crisis, soon led to a social crisis and finally, under the impact of 15M and the independence movement in Catalonia, to a crisis of the political system per se, which led people to question the founding principles of the (post-Franco) Spanish Constitution of 1978 and each of its pillars, monarchy, two-party system and our state model. This would have been unthinkable not long ago.

15M connected with the seething social discontent and helped to propel it into the form of collective mobilisation, legitimising protest and nonviolent direct actions, such as camping in public places, or occupations of empty houses owned by banks, like the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (or PAH – literally: Platform of People Affected by the Mortgage). Potentially illegal actions were now considered legitimate by a significant portion of

public opinion. According to several polls, up to 80% of the public considered that los indignados were right and supported us, despite criminalisation and stigmatisation by those in power.

Two years after Mareas ciudadanas (the citizens' Tide), the spirit of 15M finally made the jump to policymaking: moving from "no nos representan" to "Podemos" and the claims of "los comunes" [1], having overcome the difficulty of gaining political traction. Even after pundits had accused the movement of being unable to present a serious political alternative and said that the management of our political institutions must be left to professionals.

The emergence of Podemos came with the victory of five MEPs in the European Parliament in May 2014, which marked the beginning of a new political/electoral cycle; one that has not yet been closed, and that was further crystallized in municipal elections of May 2015 with victories against all odds, of alternative candidates in local government capitals of Barcelona, Madrid, Zaragoza, Santiago de Compostela, Cádiz... followed by the breakdown of two-party politics (in the General election) on December 20th.

This political translation of outraged social unrest simply needed two things: time and strategic boldness. These successes had not been anticipated, and without the 15M movement would not have been possible.

Those stuck in "old politics" have been forced to rethink their modes of communication. Some have abandoned ties and put on more fashionable shirts, as step-by-step all kinds of shifts became imperative and the word "change" became ubiquitous in the electoral scene. As if that was not enough, a new party, Ciudadanos (Citizens) was launched,

with the aim that social unrest might be railroaded into more harmless channels.

Maybe on today's upset political chessboard the weakest side is the social mobilisation necessary to any process of change. The bid for institutional participation, the setting up of new political instruments and the sudden and unexpected victories in various city councils took place in a climate of social passivity. However, real change does not come about only through conquering institutions, but through gaining support from a mobilised society.

If society does not exert pressure on governments for change, it is the powers-that-be that will, and we know whose interests they serve.

What remains of all our outrage? A regime in crisis, not ready yet to fall but ready to be reconfigured. As the French philosopher Daniel Bensaïd said: "Indignation is a start. A way of standing up and beginning to walk. One becomes indignant, rebels, and then thinks what next." This is where we are now.

Translation by James Boswell

Wall of controversy

BRITAIN

Corbyn confounds the plotters

VERONICA FAGAN ·

These elections took place in a context of strong attacks on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn over supposed antisemitism in the Labour Party from a combination of Zionists and Labour righthingers which peaked less than a week before the polls opened. These were the latest of many attempts to undermine Corbyn's leadership. Against this background the results are a remarkable testament to his leadership. They are also a strong indictment of a massive media campaign around some ill-advised remarks by former London Mayor Ken Livingstone and Facebook comments by other Labour Party members [1] about Israel whilst largely ignoring an extremely Islamophobic mayoral campaign in London publicly endorsed by Prime Minister David Cameron and former Conservative London Mayor Boris Johnson. [2]

Labour's Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell was absolutely right to point out that the bench mark against which these elections need to be measured were last year's disastrous results which saw a majority Tory government come to office. [3] Corbyn has had only eight short months to turn the party round.

Prominent Corbyn critic and witch hunter, John Mann MP, was forced to concede on Radio 4 that there would be no leadership challenge for now, although the argument is still being pushed by the right that Corbyn did not do well enough. The debate is not whether Labour needs to win those not currently convinced – but how to do that. The right want to return to the failed strategy of former

Labour leader Ed Miliband of adapting to Tory policies and ideas. In fact, it is by arguing unstintingly for radical policies that Labour can build on Corbyn's unexpected and striking victory in the leadership race. [4]

The plotters on the right and centre of the Labour Party, who were clearly prepared to sacrifice Labour victories in their cause, have not drawn the blood they wanted. There will be no contest until at least the summer. Those Corbyn supporters who have begun to challenge their divisiveness are absolutely right to do so. And Labour's new London Mayor, Sadiq Khan's statement that "Labour only wins when we face outwards and focus on the issues that people care about" is a sign that he's telling the plotters to shut up. Of course, he's also positioning himself for a potential leadership bid in the next few years. His appointment of arch-Blairite Andrew Adonis and his comments about the direction Labour needs to take to win in 2020 illustrate the problems with his approach. [5]

The majority of those standing on May 5 for Labour were most probably selected before Corbyn's election. In many parts of the country Labour still organises in the apolitical ways introduced under Blair where traditional canvassing which attempted to engage those who weren't sure how (or whether) they would vote in political discussion are replaced by 'voter identification' in which people are just asked how they will vote and then ignored. The London Labour Party went further and told supporters not to bother turning up to identify voters at polling stations – something that was fortunately ignored in some constituencies, notably Corbyn's own Islington North. [6]

As leader, Jeremy Corbyn has had to contest a constant stream of vitriol not only from the right wing

inside Labour but an incredibly biased media. Gary Younge put it "When it comes to assessing Labour's electoral fortunes, Corbyn is treated with all the due process of a 17th-century woman accused of witchcraft and dunked in a river. If she drowns she's innocent; if she floats she's guilty and condemned as a witch. Either way the verdict is never in her favour." [7]

Labour holds ground

Labour's Sadiq Khan decisively defeated Conservative Zac Goldsmith in the high profile race for London Mayor after a blatantly Islamophobic campaign by the Tories in which they strongly suggested that electing a Muslim to public office was a security threat. [8] Khan won 57% against Goldsmith's 43% to end eight years of Tory rule at City Hall. Voters in London showed their contempt for the Tory divide and rule politics that Cameron himself employed in the House of Commons in the run up to the vote. The Green's Sian Berry came third with 5.8%. Turnout at 45.6% was up by 7% on 2012 and above the previous high of 45.3% in 2008. Tory racism as well as support for Corbyn drove many to work harder for Khan than they might otherwise have done. This electoral victory in London by Labour was strongly welcomed by Left Unity.

In England and Wales Labour held ground – holding a number of English councils that they had been predicted to lose – including by those in the Parliamentary Labour Party who were hoping to use election defeats as a springboard to launch a parliamentary coup against Corbyn. Labour also held their seats in the two parliamentary by elections in Sheffield and in Ogmire and continued to hold the mayoralities in Liverpool and Salford.

Later there was the excellent result in the mayoral election in Bristol, where Labour's Marvin Rees, a strong supporter of Corbyn, roundly beat the incumbent independent, George Ferguson. A black mayor in Bristol, a city built on the slave trade, is worthy of more column inches than most of the British media have given it.

In the London Assembly elections, Labour held their ground with twelve seats despite putting all their energies into the Mayoral campaign. They won the constituency seat of Merton and Wandsworth from the Tories but then took one fewer of the London wide seats. UKIP returned to the Assembly with two of the London wide seats with the Tories and Lib Dems each losing one and the Greens holding their two.

In Wales, Labour remains the biggest party and held most of its existing seats – with the exception of the Rhondda [9] which it lost spectacularly to Plaid Cymru leader Leanne Wood. Leanne Wood's victory shows against the prevailing establishment mood that it is possible for a left wing politician who gains a significant public profile to win strong electoral support.

There were also significant swings to Plaid in two other constituencies (Blaenau Gwent and Cardiff West). Turnout was up by nearly four percentage points – making this the second largest turnout in an Assembly election. With 29 seats, Labour are two short of the number they need for a majority.

UKIP have done well in Wales, as was predicted; taking seven list seats. The Conservatives lost three seats and Liberal Democrats four. UKIP have been showing strongly in Wales since the 2015 general election where their share of the vote leapt from 2% to 14% – not very different from the shares that they gained in the Assembly elections.

In England too, despite the council elections not falling in their strongest areas, UKIP have had some significant successes – with an increase of 25 councillors, coming second in both Westminster by elections and winning over 17% in the election for the Mayor of Salford. UKIP won seats from Labour in working class council areas like Thurrock, Bolton and Dudley and overtook Labour in Great Yarmouth. UKIP has probably taken as many votes from Labour as from the Tories. But in the situation where the referendum means that UKIP is scarcely out of the media attention this is no surprise – though it does certainly mean we need to

step up campaigning for a 'Remain' vote against racism in the referendum. [10]

Scotland – problems for Corbyn

The news from Scotland is of course much more problematic for Corbyn and Labour with the Tories pushing them into third place in the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish National Party (SNP) did well to win their third consecutive term as Scottish Government. Their vote overall went up though the vagaries of the mixed electoral system [11] for the Parliament meant that they failed to repeat the absolute majority they won in the Scottish Parliament in 2011 or their constituency landslide in the UK General Election last year. But given an electoral system devised to prevent majority governments it is still an impressive result, especially their complete wipe out of Labour in most of its heartlands, including a clean sweep in Glasgow.

As *Socialist Resistance* has consistently argued, Labour will not succeed in Scotland while it continues to promote a Unionist agenda. The anger that was generated by Labour cosying up to the Tories during Project Fear [12] and the lack of delivery over Devo Max [13] will not recede for a long time. These results show that amongst those who want to vote Unionist many think they might as well support the Conservative and Unionist Party (as the party is officially known), though Ruth Davidson's leadership and the distance she put between her direction and that of Cameron and the Westminster Tories probably also played a role in her party's success.

The Scottish Greens did well with six list seats—pushing the Liberal Democrats into fifth place and meaning their support may well be critical for the SNP administration getting its proposals agreed by Holyrood. The Scottish Greens have won many of the more radical voters from the 'Yes' side of the Independence referendum. Both Solidarity and the RISE grouping, in which the SSP participates, had very poor showings – with their best results in Glasgow where they only scraped above 1% .

Scottish Labour and Corbyn should be looking at what the Scottish Greens have done – showing that it is possible to successfully criticize the SNP from the left if you also support them where they are putting forward progressive policies. And this is a lesson not only for Holyrood but for Westminster – where an anti-austerity alliance against the Tories involving the SNP, Plaid and the Greens would strengthen opposition to the Tories.

Apart from their strong showing in London, the Greens in the England and Wales council election had only modest results given the undemocratic first past the post system, though many of their existing councillors increased their majorities and they were key to toppling the Tories in Worcester by winning an extra seat.

In the Six Counties of the north of Ireland, where 46% of potential voters stayed at home, a general picture of "business as usual" was upset by the election of two People before Profit candidates to the Assembly, with Gerry Carroll topping the poll in the Sinn Féin heartland of West Belfast and then veteran SWP member Eamonn McCann (with Bernadette McAliskey as his election director) taking a seat in Foyle. Having two left wing socialist voices in the Assembly puts pressure on Sinn Féin to break with their role of implementing austerity.

So of course there remains much work to be done if Corbyn is going to lead Labour to victory in the 2020 general elections. No one could argue anything different.

Plotters under pressure

Corbyn needs to build on the successes he has had at the polls as in the London Mayoral elections and all the by elections since he took office – which some of his opponents in the party seem to have done their best to prevent happening.

At the same time both he and his other supporters need to loudly echo John McDonnell's demand of the plotters to "put up or shut up" i.e stand a candidate against Corbyn now or stop trying to undermine him . The left within the Labour Party needs

to seriously consider the next steps in wresting control of the machinery which is repeatedly used against it.

And the increasing voices raised against the bias of the mainstream media against the Corbyn leadership need strong support. Serious allegations over electoral fraud by the Tories during the 2015 election in relation to their battle bus campaign have received little exposure for example. The BBC's political editor Laura Kuenssberg's commentary has become little more than a constant stream of abuse against Jeremy Corbyn and the general perception is that she is the voice of the Tory HQ on the TV and radio.

In the referendum campaign which will move centre stage now these elections are over, Corbyn has rightly explained that it is absolutely possible to be deeply critical of many of the policies and much of the direction of the European Union and fight for an internationalist, anti-racist "remain" [stay in] vote

Like John McDonnell, who signed a declaration calling on Labour to back proportional representation [14], Socialist Resistance also believes that Labour needs to go on the offensive about the undemocratic nature of the election of the Tory Government, which will be further worsened by the forthcoming Westminster boundary changes. Labour needs to embrace and campaign for PR to stop the Tories winning another term so undemocratically.

Going into the 2020 General election campaign with a manifesto committed to proportional representation would greatly strengthen Labour's prospects. This would be big tent politics but of a radical kind – reaching out to supporters of other parties who are rightly critical of the first past the post system, as well as many who may traditionally not vote at all. To achieve this will require those on the Labour left who defend the existing Westminster system to break with that position – but with the existing patchwork on electoral systems in these islands and the influx of younger

members into the party as well as McDonnell's stance this seems more possible than it has done in the past.

United action

A critical task in going forward to a Labour government is in successfully fighting Tory policies which are devastating people's lives.

The latest government U turn over forced academies [15] is a sign of how unpopular measures can be thrown out – through united action from trade unionists and communities with support from political parties. Of course the campaign against forced academisation is not over despite this victory – education activists know that the notion of 'failing schools' is used against those working in communities with greatest need – who could still be at risk And the Education White Paper contains many other objectionable proposals – not least the 8% cut in education funding.

After refusing to talk for months, Jeremy Hunt has been forced back into discussions with the BMA after the most determined action by the junior doctors in the history of the NHS continues to sustain massive public support. [16] The publication of the Oxford University study of the so-called weekend effect showing how data was miscoded has further strengthened the argument made by NHS staff and campaigners from the beginning that Hunt is talking nonsense. And Corbyn delighted housing campaigners on May 3 when he unexpectedly attended a meeting in the House of Commons organized by the Kill the Bill campaign and reiterated his absolute commitment to defeating the bill. [17]

The Queen's speech to parliament on Wednesday May 18 will set out the next phase in the Conservatives' onslaught on the welfare state and the working class. As a result of these elections, Corbyn and Labour are in a stronger position to oppose these measures inside Parliament and support resistance outside.

Labour's right has been praying that Khan would lose to Goldsmith and that the party would take a

knock in the local government elections. Neither of these things happened. The task now is to consolidate the people who have joined, or rejoined the party and to act on what Sadiq Khan also says about issues such as the lack of affordable housing, transport infrastructure and fares, the NHS while

developing an economic programme that explains how a Corbyn / McDonnell government will deliver improvements in the lives of the vast majority of the population in a socially just and ecologically sustainable way.

MIDDLE EAST

Solidarity with the resistance of political prisoners in Syria, Iran and throughout the Middle East

JOSEPH DAHER ·

Syria

In Syria, an insurrection began in early May in the Hama prison and prisoners took control of the prison. The revolt began after an attempt by the police to transfer five prisoners sentenced to death by a extra judiciary military court from Hama's prison to Sadnaya's prison, which is known for its extreme violence against detainees. The prisoners in the "terrorism" wing refused to hand the five detainees, and took in hostage nine police officers who had come to take them. The revolt started from there. The rest of the prison joined the insurrection and the prisoners removed the doors of the quarters and opened them for each other, taking control of the whole prison. The prison has about 1,200 prisoners, including 850 political prisoners arrested for their opposition to the regime. The regime tried to storm the prison Friday, May 6, using tear gas and rubber bullets to try to end the rebellion, but without success. Negotiations then resumed with the prisoners who are demanding the release of political prisoners. Thirty have already been released by the regime last week. The latest news (Monday May 9), a tentative deal has been reached to end the strike in the Hama that would eventually lead to the pardon and release of those held without charges, in other words the political prisoners.

This resistance is particularly impressive as regime's prisons are well known for their violent and repressive actions. We don't forget as well the hunger strike in 2013 launched by a group of female detainees in the prison of Adra, located in the outskirts of Damascus,, Syria, in response to the negligence of their cases and the absence of approval of their respective trials. In their open letter they demanded "a solution to their situation, six months after their cases were neglected, against the regime's own counterterrorism tribunal rules. Detainees are denied the right to see their families. They are now being punished and forced to eat. As Syrian citizens, we hold the regime and its judicial and security institutions accountable for the life of the female prisoners of Adra and all prisoners of conscience in Assad's jails and demand their immediate release".

Security forces actually systematically tortured and otherwise ill-treated detainees with impunity; thousands of detainees died as a result of torture and other ill-treatment since 2011. Regime forces held thousands of detainees without trial, often in conditions that amounted to enforced disappearance. Tens of thousands of people remained subjected to enforced disappearance, some since the outbreak of the popular uprising in 2011. They included activists of the regime as well as family members detained in place of relatives wanted by the regime.

At the same time, we also demand of course the release of all political prisoners in the jails of religious fundamentalist forces and others, such as figures of the democratic revolution in Syria Samira al-Khalil, Razan Zaitounah, Wael Hamadeh and Nazem Hammadi who were abducted in Douma, Eastern

Ghouta by most probably the Army of Islam or Father Paolo and Firas al-Haj Saleh abducted by Daech.

It has been estimated that 65,000 people were forcibly disappeared in Syria between March 2011 and August 2015, many either killed or detained in appalling conditions, mainly security prisons established by the Assad regime in Damascus.

The release of all the political prisoners in Syria is a key demand of the popular movement for any possible political transition.

Iran

On April 29, 2016, Jafar Azimzadeh, a leader of the Free Union of Iranian Workers, and Esmail Abdi, a leader of the Iranian Teachers Trade Association, started a hunger strike to protest their imprisonment and long sentences on the charge of sedition, and to call attention to the plight of workers and school teachers. In June 2015 Abdi was held while attempting to travel to attend the World Congress of Education International, a body that links together education unions in 171 countries. Subsequently he started serving a six-year sentence on the charges of "organising and participating in illegal gatherings" and "propaganda against the system." Azimzadeh was arrested in the course of his trade union activity and sentenced to six years' imprisonment — with a further two-year ban on all political and media activity. They concluded in an open letter: "The exploiters are putting us in prison by pretending that their security is the same as the country's national security. Therefore, we declare that, in protest against below poverty line wages and salaries, prohibition of right to strike, the lack of transparency by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) regarding the infringement of our rights by the Iranian regime and the absence of legitimate reasons for incarcerating protesters, we are beginning an unlimited hunger strike on April 29". On May 14, Abdi was released on a \$100,000 bail.

Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi, the imprisoned spokesman of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association, who had also started a hunger strike on April 20, was hospitalized on May 8, 2016 after falling seriously ill. He was released on May 12. Beheshti Langroudi was sentenced to five years in prison in June 2013 for "colluding against national security" and "propaganda against the state".

The Iranian regime and the bosses have been attacking and imprisoning workers who have been trying to establish independent trade unions. They systematically dismiss spokesperson of strikers and arrest them for "economic sabotage crimes."

In addition, the regime curtails freedom of expression, association and assembly. It arrests and imprisons journalists, human rights defenders, women's rights activists, student youth, members of national minorities such as Kurds, Azaris, and Arabs, members of the Baha'i faith (a religion that is banned in Iran), people who convert to Christianity and others who voice dissent. Torture and other types of ill-treatment of detainees are also common and are committed with impunity.

There is no accurate estimate of the number of political prisoners in Iranian jails but there are thousands.

Palestine

The resistance of the Palestinian people have remained steadfast despite the continuing war of the Apartheid, settler colonial and racist state of Israel. At the end of February 2016, 6,204 Palestinian security detainees and prisoners, including more than 422 Palestinian minors, were held in Israeli prisons, which constitute the highest number since the end of July 2010.

Against the Israeli authoritarian state and repressive prisons system, many Palestinian prisoners have adopted the tactic of hunger strikes, which has a long history in Palestinian resistance, despite many attempts by the Israelis to try to put an end to this strategy.

Few recent examples: on February 26, after completing 94 days of hunger strike, Palestinian journalist Mohammed al-Qeeq suspended his strike following an agreement in which al-Qeeq's administrative detention will end on 21 May 2016. He will be treated in Israeli hospitals before that time, and he will receive family visits that have been denied up to this point. Recently, it was Sami Janazreh, who after 69 days of refusing food, suspended his hunger strike on May 11, for one week, following an Israeli military court's decision to postpone his appeal hearing for another week. For the next seven days, Janazreh will relax his hunger strike to ingest liquids. Many other cases exist.

The steadfastness, known as "sumud", continues to prevail among Palestinians.

Egypt

For the past several weeks, with the new increase in popular protests from various sectors of the society, hundreds of activists were arrested and imprisoned, including lawyer and activist Haitham Mohamedain, member of the Socialist Revolutionary Movement, by the Sissi dictatorship. On Saturday the 14th of May, 152 protesters were handed sentences of two to five years in prison for participating in protests on April 25. The activists arrested recently joined the tens of thousands of political prisoners and the hundreds of victims of "enforced disappearances" in recent years, not to mention the massacre of the Rabia square (August 2013) that killed more than a thousand victims linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Security forces arrested actually 11,877 members of "terrorist groups" between January and the end of September in 2015, according to the Assistant Minister for Public Security at the Ministry of the Interior. The crackdown targeted mainly members of or perceived supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also regime critics and leftist and liberal opposition activists. The authorities had previously stated that they had arrested at least 22,000 people on such grounds in 2014. In some cases, detainees in political cases were held in prolonged detention without

charge or trial. By the end of the year 2015, at least 700 people had been held in preventive detention for more than two years without being sentenced by a court.

At least 3,000 civilians stood trial before unfair military courts on "terrorism" and other charges alleging political violence. Many, including leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, were tried in mass trials. Military trials of civilians are fundamentally unfair.

Numerous campaigns of hunger strikes and different forms of resistance were nevertheless launched by the political prisoners to protest against their detentions and its conditions such as in March 2016 when dozens of detainees at the Aqrab maximum security prison in Egypt were on hunger strike.

Bahrain

In an interview with RT Arabic, Bahrain's Foreign Affairs Minister denied media reports stating there are political prisoners in Bahrain. He declared that Bahrain does not have a policy of "silencing voices" and that "there are no prisoners of conscience in Bahrain." Foreign Affairs Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa asserted, "Those who have been imprisoned are individuals involved in the murder of policemen and terrorist bombings". Well this is quite far from the reality as opposition leaders and human rights activists remained imprisoned, while hundreds of people were convicted in unfair trials on charges of rioting, illegal gathering or committing terrorism-related offences. Many defendants in terrorism cases were convicted largely on the basis of "confessions" that they said interrogators had forced them to make under torture; some received death sentences.. Torture and other ill-treatment remained common. Scores were sentenced to long prison terms after unfair trials. Authorities stripped at least 208 people of their Bahraini nationality.

Ibrahim Sharif, former secretary general of National Democratic Action Society, was imprisoned recently once again for a speech made in July 2015, just a month after being freed after serving

over four years in prison for his role in 2011 protests, in which he said that opponents of the government engaged in peaceful protests while authorities used violence to put down demonstrations. "In our case, there is no going back to building a wall of fear."

Zainab al-Khawaja, an activist since the first days of the Bahraini popular uprising was sent to prison in March 2016, once again, with her 17-month-old son, and faces up to three years for tearing up a picture of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, the country's dictator. She was on hunger strike in previous detention. Recently in a letter, she wrote "if nothing changes for the people of Bahrain, then my staying in jail or release is not of great consequence," while adding that "I am the daughter of a political prisoner and the mother of a political prisoner. But my story was never about my family, and the pain I carry is not the pain of a family but the pain of a people". Al Khawaja is the daughter of Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, former president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, subjected to life imprisonment for his leading role in the 2011 protests advocating for peaceful and democratic change. Before her imprisonment, Zainab drew attention to the condition of her father's hunger strike and attempted to visit him in Jaw Prison in August 2014. Her sister, Maryam Al Khawaja, has been sentenced in absentia on politicized charges and advocates for democracy and human rights in Bahrain from abroad.

Political prisoners used the hunger strike arm on many occasions since the beginning of the uprising in 2011. In February 2012, 14 leading political prisoners began refusing food after reporting systematic abuses in Bahrain's jails, including beatings, torture and the use of tear gas. The number of strikers then increased to nearly 250, with detainees demanding fair access to legal proceedings and respect for human rights.

Last year, blogger and human rights activist Dr Abduljalil Al-Singace, who has been in prison in Bahrain since 2010, went on hunger strike to protest the treatment of prisoners in Bahrain. Al-Singace, suffers from polio in his left leg and vari-

ous other health issues, was held in solitary confinement in a windowless room in Al-Qalaa hospital and has denied any form of media or writing materials. Al-Singace's hunger strike lasted for 313 days.

Saudi Arabia

The Saudi kingdom continues to arrest, prosecute and imprison political activists (such as bloggers and other online commentators, political activists, members of the Shi'a minority, and human rights activists and defenders, including women's rights defenders), including under the 2014 anti-terror law, often after unfair trials. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained common. Unfair trials continued before the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a special court for hearing terrorism-related cases, with some trials resulting in death sentences.

Blogger Raif Badawi continued to serve a 10-year prison sentence following his conviction in 2014 for "insulting Islam" and violating the cybercrime law, including through the creation and management of the Free Saudi Liberal Network website. He was also sentenced to be flogged. He was on a hunger strike in December after being transferred to a new, isolated prison.

Human rights defenders are still the targets of Saudi repression. They are arrested and prosecuted under anti-terrorism legislation and other laws. Those detained, on trial or serving prison sentences included members and activists of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), a group founded in 2009, which the authorities never licensed and then banned in 2013. At the end of the year, seven members of ACPRA, which campaigned for the release or fair trial of long-term political detainees, were serving prison sentences of up to 15 years imposed on vague, overly broad charges. Two were free pending the outcome of their trial, one was still detained without any charge or trial, and one had served his sentence but was yet to be released.

The monarchy does not permit as well the existence of political parties, trade unions or independent human rights groups, and the authorities continues to arrest, prosecute and imprison those who set up or participated in unlicensed organizations.

This is without forgetting the execution in January of Shi'a Muslim cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a leader of the popular demonstrations against the Saudi kingdom started in 2011 in the eastern regions of the country populated in its great majority of Shi'a population.

18,000 foreign migrants are also currently in detention in Saudi Arabia

Turkey

The AKP government has engaged a war against the Kurdish popular resistance and all democrats and members of the civil society, including journalists, activists, human rights lawyers, etc... in the country opposing its authoritarian practices.

According to data released by the Association of Human Rights and the Foundation of Human Rights in Turkey, 173 civilians were victims of arbitrary executions and 226 others injured by the police or the army in Turkey during the year 2015. In addition to these civilian massacres, the Turkish authorities are trying to stifle the political will of the Kurdish people by arresting activists and political representatives. A recent report from the Association of Human Rights in Turkey stated that this political repression resulted in over 6,000 arrests of Kurdish activists in 2015, of which nearly 1,300 were imprisoned.

From these 1,300, 17 included mayors and many other local elected officials. More than 10,000 political prisoners, including more than 9,000 Kurds, exist in Turkish jails,

Images also circulated on the internet showing the naked and disfigured body of female PKK member

Kevser Eltürk (Ekin Wan) being paraded in the streets of Varto in the eastern province of Muş, after clashes with state forces in August. Another photograph showed the body of Hacî Lokman Birlik being dragged behind an armoured police vehicle in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır in October. The reported autopsy indicated that the man had been shot 28 times.

Hunger strikes in the Turkish prisons have been used often by Kurdish political prisoners, but also other democrats and progressists.

Conclusion

We could continue with our unfortunately long list of political prisoners in the region and their resistance from their prison cells. Hunger strikes unite the prisoners across the borders in refusing to submit to their detentions conditions or and act in solidarity with other prisoners.

We have also seen in the past solidarity campaigns between political prisoners across countries such as in 2014 when the Palestinian Prisoners' Club announced the decision of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli Gilboa prison to participate in the relief campaign for the population of Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria starved by the Assad regime forces, by paying a sum of 500 Israeli Shekel taken from their pay, which account to nearly \$ 140.

Zeinab Al-Khawaja wrote: "As for people who are trying to help anyone who is oppressed, I send my love and gratitude from behind bars."

We say that we send our solidarity and love to all political prisoners in the Middle East and the world struggling for democracy, social justice and equality, in other words a better future for all. Your resistance is an inspiration for all of us...

Freedom for all political prisoners!

May 15, 2016

Syria Freedom Forever

PHILIPPINES

After the Philippines election

RAYMUND DE SILVA ·

As of this writing, the canvassing of voting results has reached 96.5 percent of the total votes cast on May 9, 2016. More than a million votes have still to be counted including the 17,657 votes coming from 14 municipalities and 55 barangays in Mindanao and Visayas which had been declared failure of elections due to security and technical reasons.

Almost all of the local candidates have been proclaimed winners. These include members of the House of Representatives (District Representatives), governors and vice-governors including the members of the provincial legislative bodies, the mayors (cities and municipalities) and the vice-mayors including the members of the cities and municipal legislative councils. Formal proclamation had also included the Governor and Vice-Governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) including the members of its Regional Legislative Assembly.

While there has been no formal proclamation yet on the final results of the Presidential elections, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte has been recognized by everybody as the runaway winner. He got the mandate of almost 40% of the voters on Election Day. He has more than 16 million votes which is a mile ahead of the second runner candidate (administration candidate - Mar Roxas). All other presidential candidates had already conceded their defeats and had sent their congratulatory greetings to the presumptive President Duterte saying his victory is the victory of the Filipino people. Some of the world leaders have already sent their greetings to the president-elect even with no formal proclamation yet-breaking diplomatic protocols.

It is altogether a very different situation with regards to the vice-presidential race. It is still a neck-to-neck battle between the administration's candidate Congresswoman Leni Robredo and Senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.-the only son and a namesake of the ousted dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos. Currently, Robredo is leading the young Marcos by a very slim margin of 225,226 votes with still more than a million votes to be canvassed including those coming from the Absentee Overseas Workers.

Since the second day after the elections, Robredo has been leading Marcos by overtaking the latter's lead of more than a million votes during the early period of counting. Such development prompted the Marcos' camp to raise complaint of possible irregularities in the pattern of vote counting. Their complaint albeit informal, has been re-enforced when the SMARTMATIC- a Venezuelan computer company, which won the bidding for the supply of the instruments used in the voting counting machines (VCMs)-Specialist mentioned that there was its intervention in the COMELEC Transparency Server to correct some topographical errors. But it (SMARTMATIC) claimed that it was just a cosmetic change and did not affect the counting of the votes. The so-called cosmetic change became more serious when the COMELEC claimed that it did not give its approval to the SMARTMATIC move. The timing of the cosmetic correction corresponds to the observations of the Marcos camp of the time when its lead began to decrease over the votes of Robredo.

Currently, the two camps and the COMELEC have been focusing on the points raised by Senator Bongbong Marcos. But as the day of the formal proclamation by Congress of the new President and

Vice-President of the country is fast approaching, the Duterte-Marcos tandem is becoming bleaker.

With regards to the Senatorial race, the first 10 slots are becoming firmer and final. With the more than a million votes still to be counted the contested slots will be for the last two slots (11th and 12th). Only 12 senators are elected this year. At this point, it will be safe to mention that there will be 5 or 6 senators coming from the Liberal Party (LP), 3 or 4 Independent Senators, 2 Senators from United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) and 1 from the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC). Two (2) re-electionists Senators (Senator Serge Osmeña and Senator TG Guingona) did not make to the magic 12.

The just concluded elections in the country once again reinforced the belief that machineries and resources (technical and financial) did matter. It will be different of course in the case of the President-elect Duterte. But those who won in both national and local positions have maximized their machineries and their resources especially finances to effectively use all forms of media including social media to project themselves and increased tremendously the level of people's awareness of their candidacies.

Those candidates who have less resource and machineries often times were not able to project their political platforms and could not have a fairer chance to match the rich candidates. This development can be clearly seen in the case of the elections of the Party List Representatives. The top scorers of this system are those whose nominees are either millionaire or even billionaires (case of AKO BICOL-number 1 scorer of the PL system-and its first nominee is connected with a big construction firm in Bicol. And another case is the 1-PACMAN PL whose first nominee is a billionaire businessman). The other Party List who have won are those which are controlled by political dynasties including Anak Mindanao or AMIN whose first nominee is the wife of the ARMM incumbent governor. The few others who made it to the winning list are those

with strong and widespread machineries and effective advocacies like the Makabayan Block.

This is a broad picture of the composition of those who will represent the marginalized and voiceless sectors of the country.

The results of the local elections are also revealing because many of those who won from the mayors up to the governors are those identified by the ruling coalition-the Liberal Party and Akbayan. Vote buying was so widespread and rampant. Money was literally and figuratively flooding the streets especially a day before and the actual election day. Alliances and commitment of support of candidates had been readjusted and realigned which explains why the overwhelming presidential choice of Duterte is a foregone conclusion.

The senatorial candidacies of people like Walden Bello and Neri Colmenares whose strong and consistent advocacy for good governance and commitment of pro-people economic programs and political reforms are beyond question have no chance in making it to the Senate. People have elected new leaders that promote elite politics and political dynasty and neo-liberal globalized economy remains the same. The new administration can either continue and strengthen such policies and programs or can make some substantial reforms for the people who overwhelmingly put them into office in the firm beliefs and unwavering hope that change can indeed happen.

I. Duterte's Presidency

The people have spoken and they made sure that it will be heard throughout the four corners of the country and of the world. In fact the voters turn out was the highest (81%) in the Philippine election history. It should be recalled that the turn out of the 2016 elections when the outgoing president Benigno Simon Aquino III was elected was only 71% and in 2013 (mid-term elections) was 77% turn out. People from all walks of life had made sure that their voice through their votes would be heard

and be counted by patiently queuing in their respective polling precincts to cast their votes.

Mayor Rodrigo Duterte was voted by people from all the classes in the society. In fact, the higher the class the higher the votes he got compared to all his opponents.

Duterte has the highest votes in the country's history of Presidential elections, that whatever sinister plan to block his candidacy was overwhelmingly thwarted. His seemingly unstoppable victory as shown in the pre-poll surveys had made not a few economic elites and the ruling political parties very uneasy. Some global powers including the United States of America do not feel comfortable with Duterte's presidency. This explains the panic mode of the administration and the last minutes "below the belt" attacks against his (Duterte's) person coming from attack dogs and their principals who definitely would not want the perks and privileges they enjoy under the second Aquino presidency to be affected and discontinued. Reliable sources would even reveal that if Duterte will only lead the administration's candidates by 10% they were prepared to change that lead in favor of the latter.

But the people simply would not want to give up their hope to immediately and sustainably end their predicament and extreme desperation under the current administration. They strongly expressed their voice for change and they want to have it now notwithstanding the non formal proclamation of Duterte.

President-elect Rodrigo Duterte has made history because he is the first president of the country coming from the south-Mindanao. And as the 16th President of the country since 1935, he and his team prepare themselves to hit the ground running.

Presumptive President Duterte will become the president of more than 100 million peoples on the afternoon of June 30, 2016 after he officially take his oath as the President of the Republic until 2022.

At this period he has already formed his Transition Team and Selection Committee, an indicator of the consultative nature and collectiveness in making his decision in his administration.

A strong manifestation that his 6 years administration will be open and transparent is its prioritization of the approval of the long-delayed Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill mothballed in Congress for years.

Duterte has revealed that the composition of his cabinet will be gender-balanced and sensitive. He will appoint young and committed people into his cabinet and those who are not involved and tainted in anyway regarding corrupt practices or corruption cases.

II. Economic Agenda of Duterte's Administration

Duterte's economic team has already made a broad picture of his economic agenda (8-point Economic Agenda) which are the following:

1. Continue and maintain the current macro-economic policies. However, reforms in tax revenue collections efforts will be complimented by reforms within the bureaucracy of the top collecting agencies (Bureau of Internal Revenue-BIR) and the Bureau of Customs-BOC).
2. Accelerate infrastructure spending by addressing among others-major bottlenecks in the Private-Public Partnership (PPP) program. Maintain the target of setting aside 5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to infrastructure spending.
3. Ensure attractiveness of the Philippines to foreign direct investments by addressing restrictive economic provisions in the Constitution and our laws and enhancing competitiveness like "ease of doing business".
4. Pursue genuine agricultural development strategy by providing support services to small farmers to increase their productivity, improve their market access and develop the agricultural value chain by forging partnership with agri-business firms.

5. Address the bottlenecks in our land administration and management system.

6. Strengthen the basic education system and provides scholarship for tertiary education which are relevant to the needs of the private sectors' employees.

7. Improve the income tax system to enable those who earn little to have more money in their pockets.

8. Expand and improve implementation of the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program.

According to Duterte's Economic Team, these agenda have been the results of consultations among various stakeholders throughout the country.

In the main, the economic agenda of the new administration is to continue to develop and improve better the neo liberal program of the past Philippine administrations. Duterte's Economic Team is headed by businessman Carlos "Sonny" Domiguez his classmate and close friend and one of the authors of President Fidel Ramos' Philippine 2000 Economic Program.

The early announcement of the economic agenda is to remove altogether the uneasiness felt within and among the foreign and local business communities. And true enough the peso currency strengthens (0.7%) against the US Dollar. The stock exchange has also shown upward trend (6%) increase right after the election of Duterte and the announcement of his economic agenda.

The Economic Team has emphasized that the focus of the economic agenda will be the removal of opportunities for corruption. Efforts will be vigorous in catching people involve in corruption and immediately prosecute and put them in jail.

This early the presumptive president and his team have announced the need of major revisions of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. The focus of such change will be to make sure that the protectionist parts of the constitution regarding ownership of business in the country will be removed. Thus, lev-

eling off the playing fields between the foreign and local business firms. The incoming administration has also indicated a major constitutional change in the system of government in the country. That is from Presidential with bicameral legislative body and judiciary system to Presidential unitary and parliamentary form of government.

These constitutional revisions will be done through a Constitutional Convention which means calling for the election of the National Constitutional Delegates.

Moreover, the incoming administration strongly believes that they can implement these constitutional revisions because it has just received an overwhelming mandate from the people. This simply means that the past and unpopular administrations could not do such changes without inviting nationwide protests. They (past administrations) would surely be accused of having self-interest as their motive behind such kind of initiative. So the new Duterte administration is "striking it out while the iron is hot".

The important consideration here is the timing of the start of the Constitutional revision. There should be identification of its priorities. It should practice the principle of first thing first. This simply means that aside from constituting its new cabinet and other organizational and administrative positions and machineries, the incoming administration has to literally and figuratively organize itself in Congress. These legislative works are very basic in order to ensure to get the support of friends and allies in Congress to pass its urgent bills and pave the way for the constitutional initiatives.

As the current standing in the Senate (including the results of the 2016 elections), the following are its composition and their party affiliations. Out of 24 senators the LP has the highest number with 7 members. These include the old and newly elected senators. UNA has 5 members. There are also 5 independent senators. The Nationalist Party (NP) has 3 members. The Nationalist People's Coalition or NPC has 2 and one each for the Partido

Democratiko ng Pilipinas-Laban ng Masa or PDP-Laban-Duterte's Party and the Philippine Reform Party or PRP of Senator and losing presidential candidate Miriam Defensor.

With such composition in the Senate, it needs to have effective and brilliant alliance/coalition works for the PDP Laban to steer the Senate towards Duterte's Legislative Agenda. In fact, the urgent question here is who will be the Senate President.

With regards to the House of Representatives, it has been known that the LP dominates this part of Congress. The PDP-Laban has hardly reached 2 dozens in terms of membership in this Lower Chamber. Again, it means brilliant alliance/coalition works in order to get the effective majority in this 282 house members. In addition, the question of who will be elected as the Speaker of the House is a very important consideration. This point is decisive in the sense that impeachment process starts from the House of Representatives. This chamber also appropriates and approves the National Annual Budget of the country.

On the other hand, a very important consideration in this regard is that in the Philippine politics, the politicians specially the traditional ones tend to gravitate around the victorious president. In short, it will be expected that there will be a massive "jumping of ships" from different parties and coalitions to the PDP-Laban, the incoming ruling party. Otherwise, it is next to impossible to think about congressional leadership supporting the programs of a very popular president.

Earlier, Senator Aquilino "Coco" Pimentel III, the PDP-Laban chair and the only PDP-Laban member in the Senate, said that while they expect a massive increase in the number of their membership in both houses of Congress, they prefer to work in coalition to push for the Legislative Agenda of the president. This kind of arrangement will not surely work in the context of Philippine politics. There is always strong tendency among politicians to be identified organizationally in a ruling party in a given period.

III. Political Agenda of the Incoming Duterte Government

The day after the elections, Duterte's votes had already indicated that he would leave his opponents miles behind.

Presumptive President Duterte with his sure victory at hand, offered his hands to all his opponents including his critics for reconciliation, healing and unity, a very unorthodox practice in Philippine politics.

He won the hearts and sympathy of many if not most media practitioners. And his activities have been closely watched. His early morning visit to the tombs of his parents had been recorded including his sobbing and begging for help from his mother asking for guidance to see him through in fulfilling his job as president of the country. His driving of a taxicab (his ways to check and be updated in the events of the City of Davao) and fetching passengers did not escape the attention of the media. He did this activity incognito and got answers from ordinary folks.

People have come to know about these activities of the incoming president through different means and ways of communications.

He has been projected as an ordinary human being and as a hands-on administrator. One could immediately recall the kind of packaging and projecting of Duterte as the president of the masses and of the people to that of the late President Ramon Magsaysay. The latter had been very popular to the masses and was able to initially solve the insurgency problem of the country at that time. But concerned observers have also become wary about this kind of projection for it might be in exchange of strong hand approach in governance and people might pay a high price for this kind of discipline.

Duterte's famous moniker is "The Punisher" so he most likely instill discipline with iron hand approach in solving the heinous crimes, drug problems and lawlessness in the country. He will use the Davao experience to make things happen in the whole country. Duterte even made his announcement to

revive the death penalty in order to emphasize his point in curbing out the crimes and lawlessness through this form of extreme punishment. And there have been strong reactions from different sectors in the country including the church, very divisive move for the incoming administration.

The presumptive president's approach in peace process will still be in general the mainstreaming approach. This means that he will continue the talks with the Moro Revolutionary Fronts including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under the framework of one nation-state. In fact, he made known his concept of peace process with the Moro fronts, which includes the review of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which will be done in an inclusive manner. He said during the campaign period that peace talks without Misuari (Prof. Nur Misuari is the chair of the MNLF) will not be complete. He also mentioned the Indigenous People's Agenda in any of the peace processes is very important and therefore can only be inclusive if the IPs can actively participate.

He has advocated federalism as political framework to invite the Moro fronts to directly participate in the economic and political affairs in their respective territories. It was also in this manner that he said more possibilities for the indigenous people to have their proportionate representation and participation to directly determine their lives and their future.

The incoming President has also made clear his openness to resume the peace talks with the communist movements especially with the Communist Party in the Philippines (CPP), the New People's Army (NPA) and the National Democratic Front (NDF). In fact, in the skype conversation with Jose Maria Sison the founding chair of the CPP a few days before the elections, he (Duterte) promised to visit Sison in the Netherlands to have initial talks before his inauguration as the President of the country. This promise seems to become a reality.

Duterte's spokesperson has already mentioned the presumptive president's plan to visit the Pope in Rome to personally ask for forgiveness for his curses on the Pope during the early period of the campaign. He will make the visit before June 30, 2016 which means among others is to fulfill his promised visit to Sison. Of course this last activity is not publicly announced. Earlier on, he also made a promised to release a considerable number of political detainees and agreed with Sison to have a bilateral ceasefire.

Some points will be worthy of considerations with regards to these initiatives. First consideration is the tone of the CPP leadership based in the Netherlands about the release of political detainees including all NDF consultants, which seem to be a pre-condition of the resumption of the talks. There is also a some sort of reminder for the incoming Duterte' government to honor all the past agreements with the past administrations in order to proceed correctly with the plan peace talk with the new Philippine government. Still another concern is the statement of several sectors and groups identified with CPP, which in effect is criticizing the economic agenda of the incoming administration. These groups have already raised their own agenda and programs to be the only viable ones vis-à-vis Duterte's economic agenda. For instance the CPP identified groups would want to have national industrialization and implementation of genuine land reforms, which are all parts of their own transitory national democratic programs since almost four decades ago.

Currently, these kinds of sentiments have provoked negative reaction from the Duterte's team and this is not providing proper and healthy atmosphere in approaching the resumption of the peace process with the CPP. But the presumptive president is still open to offer some government positions to the CPP personalities and their allies.

Conclusion

The Philippines has just finished its fifth National and Local Elections since 1986. It has yet to have a

final conclusion but one can already see the general political landscape of the country in the next six years.

Through these democratic activities, the people of the Philippines had elected more than 17,000 national and local officials. The methods of these electoral activities have been more of the same as in the past practices that have been controlled by the elite and traditional politicians. The difference is the use of the modern information technology to the advantage of the resource-rich politicians. Another difference is that the people's participation turned out in the actual election day had been monumental with 81% voting percentage. And the most blaring difference is that people from all classes of society want a change. This phenomenon is comparable only to the people's participation in the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986.

Now when all the dusts and smokes have begun to settle down one can already have a clearer glimpse that political dynasties have been in place once again. If there is a difference, it is a new family of politicians replacing another political families in different levels in government.

At this period, a clear choice of a president has been made with more than 16 million votes—the highest in the history of Philippine elections.

Duterte and his team have bared their economic agenda, which in the main can be described as the continuation of the macro-economic framework of the country's economy—a Neo Liberal economic program. A promise to curb out corruption in the government is mentioned as integral part of the economic agenda of the new administration.

The incoming president and his political team are initiating peace processes with the Moro revolutionary fronts and the communist movements. The guidepost for these peace processes in order to be genuine and sustainable should be directed in solv-

ing the root causes of insurgency. The framework of the peace talks should be the elimination of economic deprivation, political oppression and cultural alienation of the vast majority of the people with multi-nationalities in character. The extreme poverty of 26.4% of people living on the annual income of USD 230 should be effectively addressed and reduced.

The continuous exodus of the workers in the country (6,092 workers leaving the country every day) to seek employment abroad because there are no job opportunities in the country should be stopped by creating more jobs through sincere rural and urban development programs. And these can only be realized not only with strong political will of the administration but with economic framework, which is not export-oriented and import-dependent.

The incoming government of Duterte should invite all the revolutionary fronts and parties to be active stakeholders in building the country for the people and for the next generations.

In the attempt to hit the ground running, the Duterte's presidency will try to organize the Congress to hasten the administration's legislative agenda. The Constitutional revisions will be the priority of Duterte in order to implement the economic and political programs of the next government.

The incoming president is very popular and no body has doubted about this fact but he must make the realization of all his promises like solving or suppressing the crimes, drug problems and social ills in 3-6 months. These should be urgently implemented or the people might get back to their old frame of mind of getting used to the politicians' promises not being fulfilled. People should go back to the basic principle that in achieving real change they should defend its own interests and depend upon themselves in achieving change for themselves, for their families and for the country.

Ten theses to explain five years of the 15M movement

BRAIS FERNÁNDEZ ·

These ten theses are not intended to give a concluded or final explanation but raise a number of issues that seem useful for political action which can transform thing.

15M is better understood looking at other European countries that have not experienced a similar movement.

Toni Negri recently said that the 15M movement produced an antifascist rupture. This may sound a bit exaggerated as it presupposes an axis of conflict that is absent in Spanish society since there is no fascist regime with which to break, but it is very useful as a metaphor.

In 2011, the Spanish society was rapidly impoverishing, with a decaying middle class and a significant presence of migrant population that could easily become scapegoats for some demagogue. That is, a number of objective conditions were present which in other European countries have led to the material base for right-wing populists.

However, the spontaneous outburst of mobilization in the squares made clear what the problem was. As one of the most popular slogans was, "We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers". From there on, the crisis did not become more pleasant, but less barbaric.

15M was not merely a cycle of demonstrations, it was a movement

Demonstrations often pose a set of concrete, defensive or offensive demands, which ought to be resolved by the institutions. 15M was mobilizing, but it was more than that. It proposed practices, forms, desires that were so vague and abstract that "did not fit in the ballot box."

The assemblies in the squares intended to replace parliaments as spaces of deliberation, direct democracy to replace the representative fiction, citizens aimed to regain politics, urban space became public again for a few weeks.

Even though the movement never managed to go from being "anti-power" to being "counter-power", it left a cultural mark, a series of combative practical proposals that reappear when any sector of society erupts expressing their discontent.

15M didn't get to constitute a political subject, but it disbanded the dominant social bloc

The backbone of 15M were the children of the middle classes, that ideological construct based on the capacity of consumption and debt.

Built patiently for decades by the Spanish elite, the 2008 crisis involves the decomposition of the material of the material relations that supported this construct.

Tens of thousands of young university students (who, let us not forget, do not make up the majority of young people) suffer from the economic crisis as a crisis of expectations: the Spanish capitalism has not been able to produce jobs at the same pace as university degrees.

The social sector on which the '78 regime had based its stability came apart: starting by the children of the middle classes, the 15M movement quickly reached their parents, turning it into an inter-generational sentiment.

15M was not a class movement but indeed was "class struggle"

The middle classes in the process of proletarianization did not fight during the 15M as "universal class" but resisted precisely this proletarianization.

Some social sectors such as the public sector workers related to health or education joined the movement through the "tides". Other social sectors such as the traditional working class or the metropolitan precariat looked at 15M with sympathy but did not collectively participate in the movement.

Although the 15M movement didn't get so far as to build a class subject, we can say it was an episode crossed by class struggle as it linked economics and politics, i.e. uncovering the links that bind profit to political power and vice versa.

Yes, 15M targets the consequences of the structural relationship between politics and economics that exist under capitalism but never gets to question the relationship itself.

15M was neither left nor right wing, but it had a radical soul

I will tell you an anecdote to illustrate this thesis. In an assembly at 15M, after hours of debates between leftists, a girl picks up the microphone. Tired of so much verbiage, she says: "I don't know if I am left wing or right wing, but I do know how I feel when I wake up in the morning to go to work: I feel exploited."

I think this is an illustrative metaphor for the crisis of the left, their codes, their politics, their cultural expressions. What good is all the ideological apparatus of the traditional left if it isn't useful to express hatred against exploitation?

What was expressed in the 15M movement was diffuse and diverse, but also radical. So when 15M stated that "we are the underdogs against those above", there was no ideological waiver but a new radicalism was expressed here which the actually existing left was unable to carry.

15M was not anti-capitalist but was built around the greatest enemy of capitalism: democracy

Marxist theorist Ellen Wood Meiksins proposed in a famous essay that the axis of struggle for human emancipation should be "democracy against capi-

talism." That means that capitalism, as a historical construction, comes increasingly at odds with democratic approaches.

Neoliberalism has managed to subsume under the capitalist logic spaces that were partially outside of it, such as certain rights once considered fundamental in welfare Europe, i.g. health and education.

15M was a deeply democratic rebellion, as it tried to recover the thread between rights and citizenry, which was broken by the neoliberal counter-reform.

Although it never posed anything like a socialist alternative, with its practices and yearnings it was able to deeply question the neoliberal hegemony.

Unfortunately, the democratic rebellion of the 15M movement stopped at the gates of the workplace, allowing what Marx referred to as the secret of power relations to remain inaccessible.

15M was not inevitable, but it was necessary

Gramsci warned mechanistic Marxism that "it may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historic events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life."

This means that the occurrence of 15M was not inevitable, but that it was implicit in the situation. And it happened, it caused a mutation in the "crisis". Being it a crisis experienced with extreme hardness and in a dispersed manner, it became a regime crisis, a crisis of the political system.

15M did not resolve the question of organization but did raise that question

Far from seeing the movement as a moment of celebration, 15M was, to use an expression of the philosopher Daniel Bensaid, a moment of reopening of the strategic issue.

After bringing the crisis from the economic to the political: How to convert indignation into effective

social conquests? How to organize when it became clear that the old political forms of the left are no longer useful? How to avoid falling into the "permanent happening" proposed by certain sectors of the movement and move on to a patient "war of positions", running counter to the tempo proposed by postmodern politics?

These are many questions, but an observation: no organization of the movement itself arises. Only this can explain our next thesis.

Podemos is not 15M nor the other way around, but without 15M, Podemos would not exist

The 15M movement creates the conditions for the emergence of Podemos, but Podemos does not arise from it. Podemos arises from the exhaustion of 15M and its subsequent expressions like the Tides, unable both to achieve concrete gains and to make the leap to the struggle for power.

This combination between the possibility (15M creates an objecting social base) and disability (the social base is unable to self-organize in a stable manner) gives rise to Podemos.

This is why Podemos permanently lives in a relationship of tension: as an heir to the legacy of 15M it has been unable to develop beyond the electoral arena the social self-organizational capacities that 15M proposed.

15M is gone, but it returns again and again

If there was a turning point in the election campaign of 20D, it was the famous minute of Pablo Iglesias. Podemos arrived very worn out at that election campaign and during a debate between the leading candidates Pablo Iglesias appealed to the "loyalty" to the "Event" that was 15M, addressing millions of people via TV.

The appeal worked out. Although there is no longer any mobilization in the streets or self-organization in assemblies or tides, 15M remains a way of saying social justice and democracy.

One of the features of what Badiou considers an "event" is that it is unrepeatable. However, the 15M movement has proposed forms of struggle and organization that come back when the only thing that is foreseeable in the capitalist society shows up: the conflict.

Now, in a way, 15M is "the specter's smile".

BRAZIL

"If the coup succeeds, the country is heading towards a process of social collapse"

We are used to referring to the strategy of the PT in the federal government as an attempt at class conciliation. And as you have pointed out in a recent article, the speech of former President Lula on the Avenida Paulista on March 18 last seems situated in continuity with this strategy. But currently, this strategy is breaking down. What are the sectors of society who now consider this conciliation as old hat?

To make such an analysis we must consider two major dimensions of contemporary Brazilian society. The first necessarily relates to the question of the economy. The country is in a period of counter-cycle after, I would say, ten to twelve years of relative growth. Against the current of the dynamic of international capitalism from 2008, with the global financial and economic crisis, the country has continued to grow in a certain way. Except that the contradictions, which are basic contradictions, of its social structure, cannot be administered by the intermediary of the traditional instruments of management of economic policy, such as exchange rates and so on. It is very important to note that, in the face of the imminence of the crisis, from 2012, the Dilma government has clearly taken the path of regression in the field of social rights. Thus, what has taken place basically is an attempt to restructure the government around an employers' agenda. This agenda is based on privatization, the limitation of public expenditure and the government's lightening of the alleged burdens on businesses. This micro-economic administration of company costs - including electrical energy prices, but also the relief of "company costs", the collection of PIS-Cofins [3] and so on - undermines public resources in a peri-

od of counter-cycle. What is the general meaning of all this? This means that the government, in its childish and naive attempt to favour and a certain way restore the profitability of companies, has acted in an irresponsible manner in relation to the public accounts and workers' savings. This employers' agenda has developed in the course of the last four years of the Dilma government.

And this agenda has led to a stalemate: the path chosen by the government, favouring accumulation by economic exploitation - even if it involves social policies - has proved ineffective in restoring economic growth, and in fact restores above all the exploitation of labour. It is in this sense that there is not from the economic viewpoint any alternative to the reduction of the rights of workers in favour of those of companies. That is where there is the biggest problem because the political dimension enters into play. So when you look at the government's choices, you understand that the government really wants to deepen this neoliberal agenda and challenge workers' rights. In particular, the most recent challenge was the reform of unemployment insurance, but there has already been a series of measures concerning unemployment insurance and now this resumption of the debate on the regulation of subcontracting. The government has done nothing to counter this, and on the contrary stimulates it, it is they who offer this kind of solution. In addition, the government is also cutting expenditure on health, education; it is cutting expenditure which affects more or less directly the overwhelming majority of Brazilian workers who depend on education and the system of public health. If this agenda has proved ineffective and unable to combat the crisis, it has shown itself on the contrary very effective for deepening the process of the eco-

economic crisis, amplifying and extending economic recession. What is the political problem that this poses? It is that, on the one hand, the sectors of the bourgeoisie who had aligned with the government understand the limits of this strategy of accumulation and, on the other hand, they require that it should be deepened. On the other hand, the social bases of the government are exerting pressure to roll back these measures. And the government, to a certain extent, is still linked to its social bases, even if this link has become more and more fragile in recent years. That is why it shows itself at certain times reluctant and hesitant to assume in a clear and unambiguous manner the agenda that the bosses are calling for, namely the end of the CLT [4], the radical counter-reform of unemployment insurance, increased unemployment, more flexibility, especially through subcontracting, the development of informal work, the deepening of flexibility in relation to the working day and so on.

It is not a coincidence that the Fiesp [Federação das Indústrias of São Paulo] is one of the main organizations directing the process of the coup against Dilma. This same Fiesp had participated in the neo-developmental pact with the CUT, Força Sindical and the government in 2011. It has abandoned it because it understands that the government is hesitant and ineffective, unable to further deepen this agenda of social deprivation, which, according to the Fiesp, is necessary for the re-establishment of the bases of private capitalist accumulation in the country. This has meant that many employers have abandoned the government because they have understood that this government is not strong enough to apply these measures in relation to the pressure of its social bases. Hence the idea of replacing the current government with one led by Michel Temer, in other words a PMDB-PSDB government fully aligned on an agenda of what I would call social deprivation. This is the policy that the Brazilian bourgeoisie is betting on as the way to a solution of the economic problem. Except that this will be throwing a sword into the water. It is a disastrous road that will lead the country to twenty years of ever

growing intensification of the process of class struggle, with few opportunities to predict what the result will be.

Many analysts have pointed out that this crisis is mainly a crisis between fractions of the dominant classes. You enter another actor in this context, stating that the government is also driven by a rising wave of strikes and workers' demands. Is that right?

There is not the slightest doubt. From 2008 - with an intensification in 2010 and 2011 - the country experienced a cycle of strikes which is quite complex to analyze. I would say that this cycle really began in the most traditional sectors, the more organized in terms of unions, workers who earn more, especially in the public sector or even in the private sector, particularly among those in metallurgy, chemistry, oil, and immediately after those in the banking sector, who are not as well paid but mobilised very intensely from 2010. This first wave, whether in the private sector or the public sector, eventually evolved towards a second phase where it was the workers in the services sector, the least organized, the most casualised workers, who come to mobilize in their turn.

The explanations are well known. On the one hand you have a labour market which is relatively tight [5], on the other hand, you have very poor working conditions, an intensification of subcontracting and of turn-over, accidents, occupational diseases, very low wages. In Brazil we have eventually got used to this idea that formal work is also precarious because the level of remuneration is so low that the worker is unable to reach the minimum conditions for a decent life, which tends to reverse the dynamics of the 1990s where precarious work was generally informal work. Now you have a job which is formal and very precarious at the same time. This is well known in the services sector, as clearly seen in the recent period, and it is quite obvious in the strikes of the municipal workers, who are the workers most affected by casualisation: those in highways, for example, or the public transport workers - drivers and clerks. In total, you have a wave whose

dynamic is roughly the following: from 2008, starting in the more organized areas in the private and public sector and then reaching sectors which are less organized, more fragile. In other words, sectors of the semi-periphery and the periphery of the labour market. In the case of the state, there is clear evidence that the flow of strikes goes from the federal level towards the municipal level.

So, from 2013 there was a wave of strikes of municipal workers. Which put pressure on the Lulaist, pro-government trade unionists, who responded, of course, in a very uneven manner. In any case, they realized, first, that the social policies of the government no longer satisfied this discontented rank and file, and then, that they must do something, that they could not simply ignore this strike wave, this impetus coming from below. Hence the hesitant attitudes that we have seen. The classic, typical example, the most easy to identify that I give in the studies that I have made recently, is that of the Union of Bank Employees of São Paulo, which is a 100% pro-government union, which has given a lot of senior cadres to the government including making up the councils of pension funds and that kind of organization, and which has ended up on strike. It has led strikes in the state of São Paulo and through the intermediary of the Banking Federation, it has led national bank workers' strikes. All this to say that there is a lot of dissatisfaction at the rank and file level. This is related to the deterioration of working conditions and, at the same time, this dissatisfaction puts pressure on Lulaist trades unionism and pushes its back to the wall.

Lulaist trades unionism has reacted. This reaction takes place on two fronts: on the one hand, a certain attempt to control the strike movement, on the other, a certain attempt to exert pressure on the government to get it to row back on the unpopular measures. This dynamic has marked politics at the rank and file level, the politics of the subaltern social classes over these last three or four years. It is very clear. Added to that is the mobilization which, from 2013, became very intense, very important, that of the new urban social movements, the strug-

gle for housing. This means - and this is a key point of the Brazilian debate today - that the urban issue, the question of work and of the city, the mobilization of the social movements of the homeless or badly housed has become visible in the large urban centres in Brazil. That is to say that there is a bubbling of an effervescent culture at the base level. This bubbling has really put pressure, that is what I am trying to demonstrate in my article, on trade unionists and especially on the government. What I am trying to demonstrate - we will put it like that, speaking in a more speculative manner - is that from the point of view of political logic, or its logic of social class domination, the Brazilian bourgeoisie is not comfortable when it must accept a government which is not a pure blood government, in other words this is not a government capable of satisfying it at 100%, as I have said previously. And at the same time, it is a government which is not able to do what it has done throughout the 2000s, with a certain capacity to absorb the social movement, to integrate the social conflict within the state, the bureaucratisation of the social conflict, and at the same time to appease the sources of dissatisfaction.

So if you have a government which is neither one thing nor the other, that is to say that on the one hand does not deepen its social strategy of accumulation by dispossession and on the other is unable to check the dissatisfied social base, with a perspective of the deepening of a process of crisis, it is a government that can be described as unnecessary.

If the impeachment occurs, a government which still has a social base and on which it can exert pressure will be eliminated. But to this day the government has not launched the mobilization of this base, on the contrary, you have stressed that the governments of the PT have tried throughout these years, to render it passive. Then, in this sense, can eliminating the PT government and replacing it by a pure blood government improve the process of intensification of exploitation, which is one of the things that

this government has not succeeding in doing by calming its base?

Among the predictable scenarios, the most probable is that of the intensification of the class struggle and a social collapse of the country. If the coup succeeds, the country enters on the path of a process of social collapse for several reasons. The political sectors aligned with the most conservative and reactionary interests imagine that something like what happened with Collor in 1992 will happen: you have a vice-president, the economy shows signs of revival, the process of impeachment brings together the political forces around a kind of pole of national salvation and leads to a quiet transition toward a government resulting from elections two years later. This is pure stupidity. It is a gigantic stupidity.

In the first place because Dilma is not Collor. From a double point of view: Collor was the accused of the process, he had been accused by his brother. The commission which had been formed by the Congress had proved the crime, his guilt. Such is not the case with Dilma, there is nothing, at least up to now. I am against this government, I am of the left opposition to the government, and I find this government very bad. I find this government - we will put it like this - virtually indefensible. The fact is that there is no crime. No crime has been committed by the President of the Republic. Therefore this thing would be a political rupture. This would be a coup. Even if it is a parliamentary coup.

In the second place, Dilma is not Collor for another reason, Collor had no social base. He had been in power for a year and a half when the process of impeachment began. The PT has been the government for 13 years, almost 14. The PT today still has a social base, the PT has influence on the trade union movement, and it has influence on the social movements. The PT has a parliamentary group which is the biggest in Congress, we cannot forget that. The PT has a real implantation. The PT is not the PRN of Collor. So there will be resistance to the coup. I

don't have the least doubt of that. What happened with Collor will not be repeated.

Also, the idea that a political pacification, a quiet transition could prepare an economic recovery is an even greater stupidity. The country will become ungovernable. An illegitimate PMDB-PSDB government will be faced with growing social dissatisfaction, which will tend to grow to the extent of the adoption of the unpopular measures they intend to implement, and with a PT, in some way, strengthened - as incredible as it may seem - through the fact of having been the victim of a coup. They will say this and they will not be wrong.

This cold coup which is being implemented against the government of Dilma Rousseff will very probably throw the country into political chaos for the next 20 years. There will be no peace, there will be no tranquillity. Although the reactionary and conservative sectors think that it will happen, it will not happen. What I imagine or what I can predict because I know the Brazilian bourgeoisie a little, is that after this parliamentary coup, in the light of the hardening of political conditions, of resistance, what must happen is an even stronger hardening of civil conditions, that is to say of politics in the most elementary sense: they will attack the freedom to protest, they will become ever tougher, up to the time when the country will openly become a dictatorship.

Do you think there is really such a concrete risk of coup, even if it is not a military one?

I have not the slightest doubt, not a single one. In reflecting with what I know today, I would bet that the solution which would be best for the Brazilian bourgeoisie, which is organised around the agenda of the impeachment, institutional discontinuity and the deepening of social deprivation to restart growth, is dictatorship.

What they want is a dictatorship in Brazil. A dictatorship which may not even take the military form, because it is really not presentable at the international level, but which will surely the form of a state of emergency, with civilians in the govern-

ment, which will control through physical violence the increasingly frustrated masses. To implement this process of transition to a regime of accumulation based on social deprivation articulated with a political mode of authoritarian regulation, there is no other word than dictatorship.

Whereas the political crisis is at its height, we see the Dilma government take measures which distance it from the left, like the adoption of the anti-terrorism Act and the announcement of a package of measures which even includes the laying off of public employees. What can we expect from the government in response to this crisis? Is a left turn possible?

I believe it unlikely that the government has the strength to prevent the impeachment, I believe that that is unlikely because of its own errors. I only see a more or less progressive solution in the intensification of the pace of the popular mobilization, which would be at the same time capable of blocking the road to the coup and putting pressure on the government to at least not take the anti-popular measures that it has prepared. I believe that this would be the only really credible way to a restoration of political, institutional normality. But it would have to put pressure on the Congress, which is, as the Americans say, hopeless, without the slightest hope, they are incorrigible. Therefore, neither on the Congress nor on the bureaucracy of the federal government

We should rely on a broad process of mass mobilization around a politically progressive agenda, which is capable of effectively asking the questions that must be asked: Where is the money for the public debt going, the need to protect workers, to have a concrete agenda that strengthens the public finances and which redistributes income, which distributes wealth, which taxes the banks and the rich.

From 2011, each time that we have seen a movement inside the government it was to make things worse, always moving to the right. It is impossible

not to understand, with everything that has happened, that the only possibility for this government to obtain support is in popular mobilization and the only way this could happen is if it adopted a progressive agenda. There will not be a popular mobilization for something which is not worth fighting for.

You have talked a little of the reasons for which the employers have abandoned the ship of the government and how the workers have lost out and how that has caused the rise in strikes and the disaffection for the Dilma government. What about the middle class?

The Lula era, Lulismo, has led to a certain de-concentration of profit among those who live from incomes from work and this has eventually produced certain effects which have had an impact on the middle class. The first of these effects is the inflation of services, which is greater than the inflation of the *cesta básica*. [6] The subaltern services which gravitate around the middle class have also seen their prices rise, so concierges, pedicures, manicures, hairdressers, are more expensive, and especially domestic employees. If one takes into account the tight labour markets, strategies to increase the minimum wage at more than the rate of inflation, which have a direct impact on domestic work, the cost of living has got dearer. Combined with this is the fact that you have a structural problem, the Brazilian labour market has produced very few middle class jobs over the past 13 years. The figures for 2014 from Caged [7] indicate that 97.5% of the jobs created in 2014 correspond to a salary of up to 1.5 of the minimum wage, these are not middle class jobs. In other words, the market has become more competitive and restrictive. This is combined again with the fact that the governments of Lula, and then Dilma, have adopted a kind of social and racial quota policy in the universities, which made the public universities, primarily those which depend on the federal state, more plebeian, and this has sharpened the competition for the children of the traditional middle class.

As a final factor, you have the 2015 crisis, which affected small and medium owners. The contraction of consumption has a direct impact on small and medium-sized enterprises. Then you understand that there is a growing dissatisfaction in the middle sectors in relation to governmental measures, a dissatisfaction which does not date from today, which did not start today, but which has become worse today. The ultra-reactionary and conservative media in Brazil, highly monopolized, influences these middle sectors means. All this has contributed to the middle class going onto the streets.

The non-governmental left is in the street, and denounces the "coup" which is underway. Why is the left on the streets at such a time? What are, specifically, the democratic conquests of the workers which are threatened and which must be preserved?

Concretely, there is the "Bridge to the Future", which is the program of the PMDB, which must be applied if Dilma is replaced. In practice, Dilma is not really committed to seeing the reform of unemployment insurance through. So, you have two hard

facts. The famous "bridge toward the future" forcefully attacks two sectors of society with a very heavy impact. First, there is public spending on health and education which attacked will be even more through the "delinking of expenditure" that the program involves. Today, the constitution specifies that a determined percentage of the national public budget must be devoted to health and education. They want to "delink" this and further limit spending to pay for the interest on the debt, increase interest rates and so on.

Secondly, there is an agenda clearly opposed to the rights of workers. What they want is the end of the Employment Code, the CLT, and any protection for the workers. That is the picture before us, to speak concretely. The great threat is precisely the threat against the structure of public expenditure, relating to social spending, health, education and social security. And on the other side, a labour market which is even more flexible and degraded, with wages reduced more and everything that follows from that. This is the concrete picture. In my opinion, immediate. Immediately after the fall of Dilma, that is what is on the agenda.

SPANISH STATE

The elections and the Podemos-IU agreement

ANTICAPITALISTAS ·

Anticapitalistas believes that this opens a historic opportunity to disrupt the normal course of events. The normality of the PP and the PSOE consists of corruption, unemployment, precariousness, cuts and a democracy of low quality. That is why we believe that in these elections it is not only parties but two alternative models of society which confront each other: on the one hand that we have always had, which is at the service of the elites and, facing that, what we propose from the bloc of change that, through its diversity and plurality, is committed to building an alternative to the service of the people at the bottom.

It is time to mobilize in all possible areas. To activate a broad unitary campaign, to include the social and trade union movements, which goes beyond the social base of Podemos and IU, capable of going beyond the traditional electoral spaces. There is a need to include all those people who, without being a militant of Podemos or IU, are ready to make their contribution so that things change.

Winning the elections does not mean winning power, much less changing the world, our world. A pos-

sible electoral victory is only the first step to implementing a program of ambitious reforms, that puts the economy at the service of the people, placing our rights before the payment of the debt, repealing the employment reforms, that nationalizes the banks and electric companies under the control of the citizens, prohibits forced evictions and free dismissal, ends sexist violence, brakes once and for all the ecological disaster and puts public investment at the service of the creation of employment, education and health.

Winning these elections means, therefore, the opportunity to begin to conquer a new course. That is why the economic and political powers that be will not rest easy. The campaign of slander and threats will be serious and we must prepare to resist their blackmail, generating popular power to advance in the electoral and also in the social field.

To sum up, we call for a "yes" vote in favour of the agreement in the internal consultation within Podemos, a project of which we are a part and which we have been building since its inception. It is time to multiply to win. Yes we can!

May 10, 2016

See Anticapitalistas.

CANADIAN STATE

Don't let the Fort Mac fire turn into feel-good boosterism for the extractive industry. They knew this was coming.

NORA LORETO ·

And the workers: the ones who have lost everything and the ones who haven't but who sleep on cots in camps.

And the workers who fly in and fly out and are now sitting in their homes all over B.C., especially Vancouver Island, wondering if they're going to work again. And the workers who cross Canada to get to Alberta, over the boreal forest, from the east every 10 days, 20 days or 30 days.

Will Fort Mac will remain a sacrifice zone or will it be rebuilt? Is it the canary in our ecosystem? What else awaits us, summer of 2016?

I'm remembering working in the Yukon with some of the men who became my very good friends and all the guys who were on the initial attack crew. How we helicoptered to fire sites and I either cooked for 500 or 10, depending on the size of the fire and the urgency of the other ones. The heart-pounding excitement of the twice-daily updates on the size of the fire, the weather, the wind, the humidity — it was completely absorbing.

I'm remembering something I'd forgotten — I took a year and a half of an Environmental Science program at Langara and one of our pastimes was extrapolating from the predictions of the effects climate change would have on the Prairies. How continentality would get worse and the summers would get hotter and drier. How fire loads would grow. How regular wildfires burn at a temperature only needed to burn off the shell of the seeds the boreal needs to reproduce.

How the extreme wildfires we were modelling would carbonize the seeds we were talking about

and have unpredictable impacts on the boreal itself. How the boreal forest is one of the last, best ways the earth has to transform carbon dioxide into oxygen.

We knew it was coming. The oil and gas companies knew it was coming. We just didn't know how fast or how shocking.

We're angry at the corporate executives and shareholders for whom profit is the only directive.

We're angry at a system that only offered good paying jobs to people in economically depressed regions if they were willing to leave home and live in a jumped-up prairie boom town essentially creating its own doom.

We're angry that these people's lives were never as important as what they were taking out of the ground.

We're angry that it would take a disaster to demonstrate the danger of our addictions to oil and the gamble that politicians and resource extraction companies have taken on land, air and water are for the gain of a select few.

This feels like reset time.

We won't let this become a feel-good booster opportunity for extractive industries. They're about to shed almost their entire workforces. Their workers are the ones we need to fight for, not shareholder profits.

It's time to re-dedicate ourselves to the struggle against climate change in a way I'd been resisting, because it's just too much to sit with sometimes. It's so overwhelming to contemplate our gradual slide into the climate red zone — we seek to create a

sense of normalcy daily by blunting the edge of that awareness.

It is overwhelming. We can do it. It's both at once.

May 9

rabble.ca

SYRIA

Solidarity with Aleppo and popular democratic resistance in Syria

JOSEPH DAHER ·

A new wave of violence hit the city of Aleppo from April 22, to May 5 resulting in about 300 deaths in total, mostly civilians in areas controlled by the opposition which is composed of civilian democratic forces, FSA groups and Islamist oriented armed brigades. [Daech (also called (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra and other salafist jihadist forces are excluded.] Some civilians in regime controlled areas were also targeted. It is in this context that groups and individuals launched an international campaign called "Aleppo is Burning" in recent weeks around the world supporting the Syrian revolution to demand the cessation of all bombing and launching of rockets against all civilians in Aleppo and demonstrate solidarity with the wounded city. Popular demonstrations have also taken place in many part of liberated Syria condemning the bombing by Assad and its allies' warplanes and demonstrating their solidarity with the inhabitants of Aleppo.

It is true that the firepower of the regime has no equal on the side of the armed opposition and that the number of civilians killed by the regime and its allies is much higher, but this does not in any case justify the bombing and the killing of civilians and destruction of hospitals by armed opposition groups (a shelling hit a maternity hospital in Aleppo in the regime-held area, the opposition armed groups have been accused, although this still need to be proven). As the demonstrators chanted at the beginning of the revolution "who kills his

people is a traitor", today we say the same and add "who kills civilians is a traitor and a criminal". We can't claim to want to present a democratic alternative to the monster Assad by using methods similar to him.

A temporary truce in Aleppo was nevertheless announced Thursday, May 5, which still stands at the time of writing despite a rocket fired by armed opposition groups on Sunday night killing 3 civilians in areas under the control of the regime, after a cessation of hostilities throughout the country between regime forces and its allies on one side and the armed opposition on the other applied since February 27 has been shattered in the city. This has not prevented the dictator Bashar al-Assad to declare just a day after the start of the temporary truce in a telegram to Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which he thanked Moscow for its military support, that the Syrian army would not accept anything less than "attaining final victory" and "crushing the aggression" by rebels in Aleppo. Despite the various truces the Assad regime and its allies have indeed continued military offensives in various parts of the country. This is actually the main reason why the "peace" negotiations are stalled.

Fighting is actually continuing elsewhere in the province of Aleppo and in the governorates of Deir Ezzor (east), Damascus, Homs (center) and Deraa (south) between regime forces and armed opposition groups of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and jihadist groups not included in the truce agreement such as Jabhat Al-Nusra (branch of al-Qaeda in Syria) and Daech (also known as ISIS). A camp of internal displaced people was also bombed, by the

Syrian regime's or Russian warplanes, on Thursday, May 5 in the Idlib province (northwest), which killed 28 people including women and children, according to the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights.

Regime wants to destroy all democratic popular alternatives

The battle of Aleppo is of a significant political and military importance and the recapture of the city by Assad regime forces and its allies of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and others would be a very big blow to the opposition, while strengthening reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces. Aerial bombardments by the Assad regime do not simply have the objective to kill as many civilians as possible but also to prevent any popular democratic alternative on the field to exist such as the liberated territories of Aleppo.

Aleppo represents indeed a powerful symbol of a democratic popular opposition, which first opposed and pushed out the Assad regime, and then drove away Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra, opposing their authoritarian and reactionary practices. There are only Free Syrian Army groups and Islamist oriented armed factions in these neighborhoods. The liberated areas of Aleppo, where 300,000 people still live, are self-organized by the local population through local popular councils that manage all sectors of society in the administration of schools, waste management, provision of food and first necessary products, democratic campaigns, cultural events, psychological assistance to civilians, etc.

The power of the civilian democratic forces was seen once in mid April when medical staff throughout the Aleppo liberated areas demonstrated against the recent torture and killing of a medical worker by an FSA-linked faction, "Turkmen Front" group. The civilian democratic forces continue to protect and uphold the principles of the revolution.

This is why the Assad regime and/or Russian warplanes target mainly civilian infrastructure in these liberated areas such as a-Quds hospital destroyed

by an air raid on April 27, killing at least 55 people, including one of the last pediatricians in the city of Aleppo. The al-Quds Hospital, with had 34 beds, was "the main reference center for pediatrics" in the region said Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which has supported the hospital since 2012. It is in this same logic we should understand the bombings that hit the only civil defense station in the city of Atareb, periphery of Aleppo, in late April, killing five of its members, in the latest of a series of attacks against civilian and opposition infrastructures in the Northern province. A few days before, it was the city hospital that was bombed.

In the past, bakeries, schools, hospitals, care centers and other infrastructures were also the target of the regime throughout the liberated areas of Syria. Physicians for Human Rights has reported that, since the conflict began, at least 346 attacks on medical facilities have been carried out by parties to the conflict, with 705 health workers killed. Syrian government forces and their allies have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of these. Amnesty International in a recent report denounced attacks on hospitals and health centers by the Assad regime and its allies and characterized these actions as a deliberate war strategy.

The regime wants to empty the liberated territories of their population and prevent the existence of any popular democratic alternative, which are its greatest threat and not the Islamic fundamentalist forces that are its best enemies.

Popular resistance continues

Demonstrations also took place in the city of Sweida, composed in its vast majority of the Druze minority, in recent weeks following the arrest of activists in the province. The demonstrators marched through the streets of the city chanting slogans such as "the Syrian people are one and united", "Syria is for us and not to the Assad family" and "Religion for God and homeland for all" (the last slogan is a famous slogan during the struggle against the French occupier during the French Mandate 1920-1946). The demonstration ended in

the main square of the city, on which the protests have removed the statue of Hafez al-Assad and renamed it "the place of dignity" instead of "the place of the President", with the flag of the Syrian revolution. Solidarity messages were sent from other parts of liberated Syria with the protesters of Sweida.

Local populations of the Eastern Ghouta on their side have organized mass demonstrations against the internal fighting between the Army of Islam, which dominates the region, and forces led by the rival faction Failaq a-Rahman, which saw its influence increased in recent months after its creation in February 2016, and demanded them to unite their rifles against the Assad regime. These military confrontations are the result of the will of the two armed groups to control these territories and increase their military influence, all to the detriment of local populations.

An insurrection also began in early May in the Hama prison and prisoners took control of the prison. The revolt began after an attempt by the police to transfer five prisoners sentenced to death by a extra judiciary military court from Hama's prison to Sadnaya's prison, which is known for its extreme violence against detainees. The prisoners in the "terrorism" wing refused to hand the five detainees, and took hostage nine police officers who had come to take them. The revolt started from there. The rest of the prison joined the insurrection and the prisoners removed the doors of the quarters and opened them for each other, taking control of the whole prison. The prison has about 1,200 prisoners, including 850 political prisoners arrested for their opposition to the regime. The regime tried to storm the prison on Friday, May 6, using tear gas and rubber bullets to try to end the rebellion, but without success. Negotiations then resumed with

the prisoners who are demanding the release of political prisoners. Thirty have already been released by the regime last week. The latest news (Monday May 9), is that a tentative deal has been reached to end the strike in the Hama that would eventually lead to the pardon and release of those held without charges, in other words the political prisoners.

Meanwhile, the town of Maaret al-Numaan continues its popular protests, which has been ongoing for more than 50 days, against the reactionary organization Jabhat al-Nusra, which continues to intimidate local activists and protesters. During the last big demonstration on Friday, May 6, militias of Jabhat Al-Nusra tried to break mobilization by violently attacking the demonstrators, but without success.

The establishment of a transition without Assad and his partners in power at the head of the state towards a democratic and free Syria is a necessity to hope for a real change in the country. And as stated by the Human Rights activist Mazen Darwish, recently released from Assad's prison after several years, any transition should include "accountability for all is the only way to protect the Syrian community from the spiral of revenge" in a period transition and that means all the leaders of the regime and its allies, fundamentalist Islamic groups and others should be held accountable for their crimes against civilians and others.

Solidarity with the Syrian people struggling against all forms of counter revolution trying to crush it.

As written by the revolutionaries of Maarre Al-Numaan "The Revolution is for all Syrians," "We want a Syria for all"

May 9 2016

Peacenews.org

BRAZIL

The saga of "hope" defeated by "fear"

JOÃO MACHADO ·

With the worsening of the economic crisis in Brazil since 2014, the contradictions have deepened between the PT and its original social base. Attacks have been strengthened against social rights, which have been reduced, and an allegedly drastic tax adjustment has been begun, which has largely contributed to the deepening of the recession. The conditions have been created for the chamber of horrors that was seen in the Chamber of Deputies on April 17 (see the statement by Joana Mortágua, of Portugal's Left Bloc), which has demonstrated how Brazil has a legislative body which is scandalously conservative, fundamentalist, misogynist, homophobic, corrupt and illegitimate.

Thus a complex and difficult conjuncture has opened for the socialist left and for the Brazilian social movements, who seek outcomes that avoid the people having once again to pay for this crisis.

The sad end of the PT government

There remains to us the irreducible force of indignation, which is the exact opposite of habitude and resignation. Daniel Bensaïd

How is it possible that such a despicable right (the one that was on view during the explanations of the vote on April 17) has taken on such weight in Parliament? The explanation lies, for a large part, in the choices of the government in two areas: how to govern and with whom to ally.

The victorious campaign of the PT in 2002, at the end of which Lula was elected to his first term, was very different from the campaigns which had previously failed, primarily because it was marked by an

explicit alliance with sectors of big Brazilian capital, represented by the Vice President José Alencar, leader of a party which is openly bourgeois (the Liberal Party), and head of one of the largest conglomerates in the textile industry. Lula guaranteed that he would not attack the banks and businesses, that he "would respect contracts"; big companies financed his campaign, on a scale far superior to what had happened during previous campaigns [2]. The PT definitively dropped the militant profile of its first election campaigns, prioritizing professional campaign structures, with paid employees. Campaigns cost millions and were increasingly dependent on marketing professionals [3].

Lula was elected, but the PT and the allied parties to its left did not have a majority in the National Congress. The PT then resorted to alliances with parties more to the right, openly bourgeois, and to do this had recourse to the political methods traditional to Brazil - distribution of departments and other public offices as well as other economic benefits. As was later learned, it also made use of another traditional method, the direct payment of money to members of parliament. This was revealed in 2005 with the famous scandal of the "mensalão" (big monthly payments) [4].

The PT and Lula lost a large part of the prestige that they had, especially among what is called the "middle class", which imperilled their mandate. However, the strengthening of social policies - in particular the "bolsa família" [5] - and the healthy state of the economy helped Lula recover popularity and he was re-elected for a second term. But already the PT found it difficult to repair the damage caused by the "mensalão".

Once re-elected, to obtain a majority during his second term and ensure "governability", Lula es-

established a preferred alliance with the PMDB (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro – Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) and since then, the PT and the PMDB have been the main parties in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, with the latter being given important ministries in Lula's government. This party remained an "ally" to the PT throughout Lula's second term and chose the vice-presidency of Dilma Rousseff in the elections of 2010 and 2014.

The spectrum of PT alliances within the Congress also extended to other parties on the right, including some with fundamentalist conceptions, like those who have parliamentarians participating in the Congress's Evangelical Front. This group currently includes 18% of deputies and has parliamentarians from 22 parties. Its members do not have a specific ideological profile, except that they are very active against human rights, as well as the rights of black people, women and LGBTs. But what animates them in reality is the guarantee of public radio and television licences [6], as well as tax exemption for the churches. Thanks to its weight in the media, this sector has succeeded in reaching massive sectors of society and building a political and religious empire. The current President of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, of the PMDB, one of the main political enemies of the President Dilma, is part of this evangelical intergroup.

Known as the "intergroup of the Bible", these parliamentarians, associated with the "intergroup of the bullet" (composed of police and military personnel) and the "intergroup of beef" (parliamentarians related to agribusiness) ensure that the composition of Congress today is the most reactionary and conservative known since the restoration of the general elections after the fall of the dictatorship. More astonishing is the fact that many in these sectors were the direct allies of the Dilma government, and were then among those responsible for its defeat in the vote for the opening of the process of impeachment.

For a long time the PT believed it was possible to "make an omelette without breaking any eggs". It thought it could favour the poorest strata of the population without harming the interests of the bourgeoisie. For many years this worked. There have been punctual improvements for the poorest, which have responded to some of the expectations raised by the PT's coming to power. But these improvements have never been based on structural reforms guaranteeing changes in the economy and society.

All this remained dependent on a relatively favourable economic situation, which basically lasted in Brazil up to 2012-2013, dependent itself on an especially favourable situation for "commodities" [7] on the world market. Since the beginning in 1990 of governments of neoliberal economic orientation in Brazil (especially the governments of Collor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Lula and Dilma), the country has suffered a regression in its productive structure: it has experienced an intense process of de-industrialization, and has amplified its role as an exporter of primary products. Thus favourable prices for commodities on the world market have much benefited it. They even allowed a relatively favourable weathering of the first phase of the crisis opened in 2008-2009 (this has also been the case in other South American countries).

The PT in government, in addition to adopting practices associated with the "old politics", has promoted a development model for the country which is regressive from the economic and social viewpoint, and anti-ecological. Although it has presented its economic policy as neo-developmental, the only real "developmentalist" aspect has been trying to accelerate economic growth (with little result) through increased state participation. In place of the emphasis on industrial development that was the former "developmentalism", the PT, in continuity with the Collor and Fernando Henrique Cardoso governments, has stimulated agribusiness as a producer of goods for export, to the detriment of agrarian reform and peasant agriculture. It has also promoted and funded, through the PAC (Program of

Acceleration of Growth), major dam and mining projects, linked to the big inter-oceanic project of the IIRSA [8]. This ecocidal aspect of the PT project for Brazil has also affected its Bolivarian neighbours (Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela) and has led to the most radicalized and bloody socio-environmental conflicts in Brazilian history since the genocide of the native peoples following the arrival of the colonizers, while causing the most serious environmental disasters recorded in the recent period.

Brazil, governed by the PT, would have been able to play another role in the Latin American context, by stimulating alternatives of regional integration which would have encouraged the sovereignty of the peoples of this continent by confronting the imperialist interests of the United States and Europe.

In recent years, with the deterioration of the economic situation, it has become more difficult to reconcile the irreconcilable, and Dilma's government has gone further to the right. However, during the election campaign of 2014, faced with the risk of losing, Dilma turned to the left (especially between the two ballots), and attacked the bankers (omitting the fact that the PT governments had been very favourable to them), bosses and the rich in general. She won the election, but she seriously endangered the alliance she had made with big capital.

Once elected, her support among the popular sectors suffered a serious blow: an ultra-orthodox economic policy of intense austerity was introduced and has led to harsh attacks against the rights of the working class (including those guaranteed by the federal constitution of 1988), with draft laws for the casualisation of public employment and more general changes to employment law, as well as undemocratic attacks against the right to demonstrate, with the Anti-terrorism Act (introduced using the pretext of the Olympic Games), and with budgetary reductions in education and health spending. However, as the PT still has links with trade union and popular movements, the party opposed certain aspects of this policy, and Dilma was not able to implement it in the way that the bourgeoisie demanded. She turned against the people to

search for support among the dominant classes, but this has not worked. As always in such cases, the implementation of austerity policies in an economy already in recession has considerably worsened the latter, without any improvement in public accounts (the situation there has, on the contrary, deteriorated).

The economic crisis has made the PT policy of class conciliation unfeasible and inaugurated a political crisis. In addition, the advancement of the investigations on corruption, in particular (but not only) those of "Operation Karcher" by the Federal Police, has amplified the political crisis, to such a point that it has become a decisive factor in a worsening of the economic crisis.

Some of the main leaders of the PT, including Lula, are involved in these investigations, alongside politicians of several other parties, in particular the main partner of the PT governments until March 2016, the PMDB. Some of the leaders of the PMDB, like the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, are much more involved in these investigations than any leader of the PT (one of the complaints against him has already been taken into account by the Supreme Federal Court; he is therefore already accused in this process). It is possible that the crisis of the PT project precipitates the end of a cycle in South America, because the economic and political crisis besetting the biggest of its countries is accompanied in the other countries by the progress of conservative and right wing sectors, with the aggravating circumstance that the radicalized and rebellious social movements who had been at the origin of these governments and had supported them, are now anesthetized, weakened or disappointed.

"A tomb which you have dug yourself": the nature of the coup launched in Brazil

*There is dignity in indignation, in the unconditional rejection of injustice,
even when you don't yet know what the justice of the just could be. [...]*

One poses principles before even knowing the rule

of calculation of interests and opportunities.
Daniel Bensaïd

In the face of this conjuncture of political, media, and legal conspiracies which have captured the Brazilian scene, the PSOL and other social movements that have taken a position against the impeachment of President Dilma characterize it as an institutional coup. There is not a classic coup underway in Brazil, since this is not a change of regime as was the case with the coup of 1964, which began a dictatorship. What has taken place is a great political battle under the command of some sectors of the bourgeoisie to replace the PT presidency. A substantial part of the bourgeoisie had supported the PT governments as long as they had been able to promote class conciliation.

Temer, the vice-president, a clearly bourgeois politician, is prepared to apply a much more intensely anti-popular policy than Dilma. Since this is the case, the FIESP (Federação das Indústrias do Estado of São Paulo) and other employers' federations have played a role as protagonists in the organization of the impeachment. In this framework, the bourgeois parties have followed their natural course, which is to align with the interests of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois mass media have also taken part in this work. The other aspect which has led all the parties more to the right to support the impeachment is that they believe that this manoeuvre will create far more favourable conditions for doing what Dilma has not succeeded in doing, namely interrupting or, at least limiting, the investigations on the corruption of the Federal Police, especially "Operation Karcher". At the end of the day, all the major bourgeois parties are threatened by these investigations (and a number of their representatives have already been indicted). They hope that the media, with the new government, will cease to stimulate the continuation of investigations, and that the police, prosecutors and judges, who are already more interested in the investigations on the PT than on the other parties, will become less severe.

The establishment of a process of impeachment, in itself, does not constitute a coup, given that this mechanism is provided for by the Brazilian constitution. Nevertheless, several aspects of the process allow such a characterization.

In the first place, the heavy mobilization of the media, in association with some of the prosecutors and judges, with a view to destroying the image of the PT (more particularly of Lula) and of the government. For sure the PT and the government are not innocent of the corruption of which they are accused and they have a responsibility for the worsening of the economic crisis (especially in having tried to carry out the austerity policy demanded by the bourgeoisie), but there was a totally unequal treatment between, for example, Lula (who is not innocent either) and Eduardo Cunha, much more compromised than Lula, at least up until now, in the accusations of corruption. Lula was put in custody by the Federal Police, on the order of a judge, when he had not refused to submit himself to questioning, with a huge media resonance; and then there was telephone tapping, even of conversations with his family, very often obtained illegally, that have been published.

In the second place, we must consider the legal inconsistency which characterizes this process. The "crime of responsibility" charged to Dilma (essentially consisting of accounting manoeuvres) has been up to now a common practice of different governments, at both federal and state level, and it has been practiced by Michel Temer when he has temporarily occupied the presidency.

In the third place, it must be noted that the whole conduct of the process is absurd. The initiator is the Speaker of the House, Eduardo Cunha, who should not have been in this position for several months, given not only that he is accused, and has already been charged, for corruption and other crimes, but also that he has lied to the Chamber itself, when he denied having bank accounts abroad (the existence of several of these accounts has since been proven without doubt). More than half of the members who were part of the Special Commission which

has analyzed the accusations against Dilma are implicated in "Operation Karcher". The same goes for many of the members who have initiated the judgment of Dilma. The impeachment is not only a process of judgment of the PT for corruption. It is a judgment on Dilma Rousseff herself, although she has still not been charged [9], in order to replace her by Michel Temer.

Backs to the wall, Dilma and the PT have attempted to save themselves in a lamentable manner: by trying until the end to offer political benefits to the bourgeois politicians. On this terrain, they did not have the means to beat their opponents: the possibility of a Temer government meant his group had much more to offer. The PT has been the victim of its own "way of governing".

The vote in the Chamber of Deputies on April 17, 2016, which approved the initiation of Dilma's impeachment process, was a theatre of horrors. It revealed what we suspected already: the Brazilian Parliament is, in fact, fundamentalist, depoliticized, conservative, racist, misogynist and illegitimate, to a point never previously seen in the history of this House. The deputies succeeded each other in their voting statements "dedicated to God, to the family, the children, my country..." and the worst of declarations was uttered by deputy Jair Bolsonaro, who dedicated his vote to Colonel Ustra, one of the main torturers and murderers of the military dictatorship, which tortured the President Dilma Rousseff, when she was trapped in the cellars of this emergency regime, under which hundreds of political activists were murdered.

Many deputies justified support for the impeachment of the President by the great unpopularity of Dilma's government and the corruption associated with the PT. This makes no sense: Temer and the PMDB, according to the polls, are as unpopular as Rousseff and are more directly implicated in the corruption cases that have been revealed. Approximately 60% of the population favours the resignation or dismissal of both Rousseff and Temer.

The PSOL, with its group of six members of parliament, took a position against the impeachment because it believes that this process has no legitimacy and that it is a complete farce. Although the socialist left had generally, and correctly, taken position against the coup and for the defence of existing "democracy" in Brazil (a minority part of the socialist left, without parliamentary representation, advocated abstention in the vote on April 17), all these episodes reinforce the need to think about the differences and limitations that exist between the democratic rights of the people and the defence of the democratic state of law and of representative democracy. A considerable part of the Brazilian population is not familiar with the armed aspect of the state. For them, as José Saramago puts it "democracy is there as if it was some sort of saint in the altar from which miracles are no longer expected". Workers, youth and black people, massacred in the peripheries of the cities, in a true civil war, in particular under the pretext of the "war on drugs", do not experience what could be called a democracy or even the democratic state of law. Given that "democracy" was "sequestered, packaged, amputated" and that the rights acquired painfully, guaranteed in the immutable clauses of the constitution, are dismantled by representative democracy, dominated by economic power, it remains only for us to demand real democracy now, to conquer it in the streets and in the struggles of the 99%, to extract it from the 1% of the powerful of this world who do not want it, as an alternative of resistance and possible advances.

The streets are boiling again, but they no longer have the same "colours"

Indignation is a beginning. A way to rise up and get oriented. We are indignant, we are outraged, and then we see. Daniel Bensaid

Brazil has already had the experience, in its recent history after the military dictatorship, of a process of impeachment against a President of the Republic. In 1992 the then president, Fernando Collor de Melo, lost his mandate after having been

convicted in a trial similar to that which was begun on April 17 against President Dilma. At the time, as today, the country was plunged into an economic and political crisis, although, unlike Dilma, Collor was directly accused of several counts of indictment.

The other fundamental difference is that, in 1992, the "Caras Pintadas" [10] took to the streets in a unified way, because there was a unanimous opinion in the country that Collor should go. Today, in relation to the events underway, the country is divided between supporters and opponents of the impeachment, in relation to supporters or opponents of the government, in addition to the fact that there are demonstrators opposed to tax adjustments and other government measures, and there are still more variants in the demonstrations.

There are four positions that associate, in different ways, sectors of the left (parties, social movements, sectors of the government and so on) and sectors of the bourgeoisie and the conservative right. The bourgeois front is relatively unified. Three fronts have been created in the camp of the left: Frente Brasil Popular, Frente Povo Sem Medo and Espaço Unidade de Ação. In Frente Brasil Popular we find organized political parties and social movements, such as the PT and the PC do B, the CUT (Central Única dos Trabalhadores), the UNE (União Nacional Dos Estudantes), the MST, with other sectors that have the strongest link to and are the least critical of the government. The Frente Povo Sem Medo only includes social movements; its action and its composition are more autonomous in relation to the government, while its slogans are more critical with regard to the government's austerity policies and the restriction of the rights of the working class. Here we find the MTST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto), the youth movements Juntos!, Rua-Juventude Anti-Capitalista and UJS, the trade union movements Intersindical, CUT and CTB, as well as intellectuals such as the liberation theologian Frei Betto and political leaders of parties such as the PSOL. The other front which has been created is Espaço Unidade de Ação,

under the leadership of the trade union federation CSP-Conlutas, the student organization ANEL, parties such as the PSTU (which advocated abstention in the vote on impeachment), and some sectors of the PSOL. The abstentionist position of this sector on the impeachment question has led it to distance itself from the others.

The development of the right has led to a large popular mobilisation against the impeachment, including left sectors opposed to the Dilma government. There is a sector of the national bourgeoisie and the conservative right (including a fascist sector), which constitutes the right-wing opposition to the government and heads the mobilizations for the impeachment of Dilma, like the FIESP for example, and which has financed the entire infrastructure of the marches and camps mounted in some cities to protest against the President. These are massive demonstrations, where the number of participants has exceeded that of the participants in the demonstrations against impeachment. Sectors of the extreme right, openly fascist, participate in this movement for impeachment.

A survey published after the largest of the pro-impeachment events revealed that the majority of participants belonged to a layer of the middle class which is dissatisfied with certain actions of the federal government, which has lost purchasing power with the crisis. However, even if there are working class people involved, who are well intentioned and have only revolted against the government's adjustment policies, there is not the slightest doubt that these actions have been carried out under the leadership of the right. One of their forms of protests is to use the green and yellow colours (in reference to the defence of the "homeland" against Communism) and to take exception to the colour red, even going so far as to attack persons wearing this colour.

It must be remembered that the support for Dilma began to drop with the application of the adjustment plan against the majority of the population, and not with the revelations about corruption. The demonstrations that took place in Brazil in 2013,

remembered as the "days of June" already showed dissatisfaction against the economic measures taken from the arrival of the international crisis in Brazil. In addition to these mass demonstrations, strikes in the civil service and in the universities have been part of the development of the political crisis which has led to the current scenario. If the PT and the government have had difficulties in mobilizing against the impeachment, there are reasons for this: loss of support in the middle class because of corruption and austerity policies, the successive scandals involving the national leadership of the party, the transformation of the PT into an electoral machine, among others. Abandoning the historical slogans of the left and of the PT has had the result that the working class is disarmed in the current ideological battles against the dominant classes.

Alternatives and challenges: "The way out is to the left"

For the socialist left, there is no doubt: this crisis is not ours, and that is why we must not fail in our task of denunciation of the reasons which have led to it and which penalize the poorest. The PSOL, as its leaders and spokespersons have stressed, is against the tax adjustment and the restriction of the rights of workers, against the development of subcontracting and the new reform of unemployment insurance, against the developmentalist project and the criminalization of struggles, among other measures initiated by or supported by the government. It is certain that a new stage of resistance and change is coming: Dilma is still president until the Senate confirms the opening of the impeachment process (which it certainly will). But it is obvious that already she no longer governs.

This will not however be the end of the process: the political and economic crises will sharpen. The

probable Temer government will face strong resistance, and will resort to increased repression, making use of the laws voted through under the Dilma government. Given the illegitimacy which hangs over the Congress and Temer, it should be the people, consulted by mechanisms like plebiscites, referendums or general elections, who decide who will lead the destiny of the country. However, the chances of turning the situation round at the institutional level are slim; we must combine efforts to do so with the street occupations, struggles and campaigns already underway. Any process of struggle and *résistance* will go through the movements which have been at the political forefront in this period of our history.

A key question, naturally, is that of unification of the left, which is currently difficult. The sectors which have been in the left opposition to the PT governments, today divided, should reunite. But what should be said to the sectors which still identify with the PT, when it is no longer the federal government? How will they act? It's necessary to articulate denunciation of the coup with a struggle for the rights of the people, for the realisation of the real reforms Brazilian people are struggling for. These are agrarian, urban, fiscal and political reforms, as well as historical demands which have not been met, like the demarcation of indigenous lands and quilombolas [11], and a radical reorientation of environmental and climate policy for example. Resistance is fundamental, including resisting the criminalisation of these movements and popular struggles. What the conjuncture demands of us is a broad vision to construct, simultaneously, the unity of the left and popular forces, and a platform of struggle which takes these challenges into account.

22 April 2016)

PHILIPPINES

The situation as it was three days before the elections

RAYMUND DE SILVA ·

The Context

The vicious attacks have been concentrated on Mayor Rodrigo Duterte by all presidential candidates after the latest and the final pre-election survey came out which showed Duterte having a two digit lead from all the rest of the presidential candidates. Duterte's opponents, especially the camp of the administration's endorsed candidate seems to be in a panic mode. The latter has been building up its political propaganda advertising to create a picture of Mar Roxas (administration's candidate) rising up in the surveys. It could be recalled that since he was formally endorsed by President Noy Aquino as administration candidate for the presidency, he had ranked consistently on the fourth (out of five candidates). Since last week, he got the second highest rating in the poll surveys. He has overtaken Vice President Jojo Binay and became statistically tied with Senator Grace Poe. Mar Roxas' camp has tried to present a situation where those undecided voters (around 20% of the registered voters) have opted to choose for Mar Roxas.

But with three days more before elections it is almost impossible for Roxas to overtake Duterte at least if one base it on survey results.

The President himself has called on other candidates, especially Senator Grace Poe to join rank with Roxas to ensure the defeat of Duterte. The administration through the President has insinuated to the Senator to give way to Roxas, which the for-

mer has politely rejected. Meanwhile, all issues thrown by Senator Trillanes- an independent vice presidential candidate-against Duterte seem not to affect the mayor but instead it has promoted him all the more-as shown in the surveys. The issues raised by Trillanes and his principals on Duterte's various undeclared bank accounts and unreported properties have not seriously affected the Mayor. Trillanes thought that Duterte's connection with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) would bring down the survey ratings of Duterte but the opposite result happened. Trillanes last resort is to bring his accusations to the Ombudsman to stop the candidacy of Mayor Duterte but time has run out on his favor. His (Trillanes) demolition job seemed to be effective only on Vice President Binay and his family because he did have the luxury of time.

The other day, Trillanes has paid a political advertisement using children to strike down Duterte on killings in Davao City by the Davao Death Squad and the non-declaration in his bank accounts and 40 properties by the mayor. People have reacted on these negative advertisements using children. Senator Allan Cayetano-Duterte's vice presidential candidate has filed a temporary restraining order (TRO) in the court to stop the airing of the said advertisement.

Duterte has a unique situation because his rise seems to be dependent on the continuous failure of the administration to solve the day-to-day issues and problems of the country. The peoples' desperation over the inaction of the administration has pushed up Duterte's popularity with his promised of swift action and alternative program.

So, the Roxas rising endgame strategy of the administration cannot be applied to Duterte because

base on the people's perception that if election is held today it will be Duterte who will easily be the President of the country. Such situation has created a massive bandwagon effect. For the first time one can see that in the province and the municipal levels, the opposition and administration candidates are united to support and vote for Duterte. For those areas run by political dynasties they family members have to divide among themselves to vote for the administration because the campaign funds of the ruling party but other members of the dynasty are supporting Duterte.

Even in the administration senatorial candidates, one can notice that some of them have overtly expressed support to Duterte as shown in their posters.

Again as mentioned in the earlier series, the popularity in people's perception cannot be automatically translated into votes. In a very close race to the Presidency, machineries and logistical resources are indispensable.

Meanwhile, this period of the electoral campaign is called as the dangerously decisive hour. It is during this time that candidates and their supporters can be seen having house to house visits. This is one of those few times when the politicians will be generous to the voters with their money and material resources like food and medicines. In return those who received this generous gifts will give assurance that they (voters) will give their votes for these politicians. This will also be the time when the local lenders (the actual power behind the economic and political lives) of the local and rural areas will have their heydays. Politicians with fewer resources or those who have ensured their victory through vote-buying methods have to borrow money from the local lenders with exuberant interests. These lenders/usurers will be the ones to practically control albeit informally the political and economic affairs of the city or of the municipalities. The Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of the province or municipality have already been used as collateral by the governor or the mayor to get their urgent loans in a decisive hours like this time. These

lenders will surely have influenced over these politicians and the whole electoral process.

Possible Scenario

As the endgame of the campaign is fast approaching, several sectors of the society have raised situations, which the concerned voters have to consider.

Aside from vote buying, there are signs that the poll fraud will be done especially by those who are desperate to win and those who have resources.

As the country will again use the automatic election system in which the votes will be counted by the votes counting machines (VCMs), there are two possibilities where fraud can happen. The first is during the voting using the secured digital (SD) cards and human intervention can manipulate the votes and the second is during transmission, which can be delayed to give way for human intervention to happen.

The first type of fraud is putting data to the SD cards of the voter's personal data. These data most likely may have come from the COMELEC database, which was hacked several weeks ago. The politicians can buy these cards with voters' data and pictures to get votes during Election Day. There are already news that the buying of SD cards is happening in the province of Pangasinan. The best way to counter this kind of fraud is to check the voters receipt if it indeed reflect the candidates one has voted upon. The total votes receipts in local precincts can also be used to counter check the votes in the said precinct levels.

In the second type of fraud, there will be delays in the transmission of the results of the canvassing. It will be during the delays that identical VCMs will transmit another or different sets of results of the canvassing. The COMELEC Resolution 10103 which says that the Board of Canvassers (BOC) cannot transmit the results of the canvassing until those from the main SD cards have been imported. This means delays of the proclamation of the winning candidates from the local to the national levels. This also means that parallel transmission of

fake or doctored canvassing results can be possible to replace the authentic and genuine canvassing results. In this case, one should be vigilant and watch the printed election returns to compare the latter to the results received in the different precinct levels.

This scenario has been boasted by the sudden change of VCM technicians few days ago. Accordingly, the technicians' contracts have ended and therefore they are replaced by a new set of technicians. Still earlier on, some executives in the national printing office (NPO) were eased out from the said office because there were overprinting of the number of ballots needed for the May 9, 2016 elections. Up to this day, these extra copies could not be located.

With a very tight Presidential race and where the front runner is Duterte who has promised to use iron hand to solve the problems of criminalities, drugs and lawlessness in the country when he is elected as president, the other candidates led by the administration standard bearer have advocated to use all means to stop a Duterte's presidency. This election crusade does not exclude the use of fraud and terrorism.

The President himself in the last campaign sorties of the administration and its candidates had been heard giving warning that the dictatorial government and the dark days similar to martial law period will be back in the country if Mayor Duterte and Senator Bongbong Marcos are elected to the presidency and vice-presidency respectively. President Noy Aquino and the standard bearer Mar Roxas have defined the election race as the battle between light and darkness, between decency and barbarism and between good and evil forces. And they are calling all the other candidates and the voters in general to rally behind them against the victory of the forces of darkness and evil. This means that Grace Poe will give up in favor of Mar Roxas for the presidency. The former has already rejected this offer.

Some are thinking that this kind of last campaign call is part of built up activities to prepare the peo-

ple for a scenario of cheating the elections. It is as if this undemocratic action is justified to save the country's democracy. It is a desperate manifestation of Mar Roxas to attain victory win through cheating.

But a few concerned citizens are worried as the unfolding of events towards the attainment of victory by the administration's standard-bearer. Duterte's followers and sympathizers have expressed their willingness to launch people's uprising to thwart this administration's efforts. For these citizens (Duterte's followers) the only way that Duterte will be defeated is through fraud and terrorism. And they are more than willing to stop such actions.

Pastor Apollo Quiboloy, a Davao-based religious sect and a close friend and supporter of Mayor Duterte has already expressed his willingness to lead a revolution in support and for the defense of Duterte's victory. Jose Maria Sison, the Utrecht Netherlands-based founding chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has similarly expressed their party's support to stop the cheating on Duterte. This is a very unique phenomenon where the extreme right like Quiboloy and the extreme left led by Sison will join forces to defend a presidential candidate.

If this expression for support for Duterte will serve as deterrent to the programmed massive cheating in the coming elections no body cannot be so sure. But one thing is so sure though that the administration of President Aquino will not easily give up their power and their seemingly one sided determination to win by all means.

By such scenario, instability in the country is just the least that one can expect. People should prepare and struggle that the worst will not happen. After all, six years had been too long for the majority of the people in the country to suffer and to add another six years will already be too much. A change in leadership is a necessary demand.

Electing a Minority President

If indeed voters can cast their votes on Election Day, then all signs are pointing to having a minority president in the country. This conclusion is mainly based on the series of pre-election surveys where the winning presidential candidate can get between 25 to 35 percent. If the turn out of the registered voters will be at the maximum 80 percent of 54 million voters then the winning candidates will be getting less than 20 million votes.

The elections have seriously divided the country and its people and it will be additional uphill battles for the newly elected president to unite the country once again. The politics of vindictiveness will surely not a good start for the six years governance of the new administration. And it will not be healthy either to have a continuation of the current regime.

On the other hand, one should not exclude the threats thrown in by Senator Antonio Trillanes to lead the impeachment process when a president he feared most will win. He (Trillanes) gave a warning of coup d' tat if the forces of evil and darkness will triumph.

But one should not only focus on the possibility of Duterte's presidency. As mentioned earlier, this kind of neck-to-neck presidential contest the one with effective and reliable machineries will have a

big comparative advantage over the others. Resources both materials and financial will definitely tilt the balance in favor with the one with more of them.

Currently, these descriptions can be applied to the administration's camp with their "Daang Matuwid" (Straight Path Coalition) whose machineries are found in all levels notwithstanding the jumping of ships of some leaders in several areas.

The other camp with almost similar machineries is the Binay's camp- United Nationalist Alliance (UNA), which has party organizations from the municipal to the national levels. The other camps like Duterte, Poe and Santiago have set up skeletal machineries and organizations and have thousands of volunteers but they have less capacities in ensuring that their millions of votes should really be counted on the actual voting day. UNA is considered as the principal opposition and therefore has the right to have watchers and can receive the extra copy of the election returns at precinct level.

Duterte and Poe can be very popular but such popularity cannot automatically be translated into actual votes. And this is a big gap between people's perception in pre-election surveys and the actual election votes of the next leaders of the country

May 6, 2016

PHILIPPINES

Brief description of the current situation before the elections - Part 2

RAYMUND DE SILVA ·

The Context

The candidates who have enough resource can always gain the upper-hand in influencing the minds of the voters through information technology. This comparative advantage is game changer in the close electoral contest which is happening in the country today.

The voting of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) thru the absentee overseas voting system (AOV) can virtually be observed from any point in the country. The very minimal voting results or participation of the OFWs (only 15% of the total registered OFW voters) has reached the country in real time. Through the internet exchanges, one would easily know that OFWs in almost all the receiving (host) countries in the world have strongly indicated their preference to vote for Mayor Rodrigo Duterte as the president. For many of them, Duterte symbolizes change and they want to express the profound dismay for the general unconcern of the corrupt government on their welfare and well being. But as of today, complains of OFWs of some irregularities of the absentee voting system have been raised. The voting receipts they got do not reflect the name of the one they voted.

In the past few days, websites of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) have been hacked and government bodies like the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) cannot still determine the extent of the damage. This incident is popularly called 'Comeleak'. People have strong apprehensions that the data and information stolen from the website can be used to manipulate the conduct and eventu-

ally influence the results of the elections.

Just before the second and last presidential debates (April 24) the poll surveys conducted on April 19 to 24, Mayor Duterte has continued to lead the other Presidentiables. In fact he got the highest point lead away from the second candidate (he got 33% while Grace Poe got 22%). At this stage, the presidential race has narrowed down to only four presidentiables.

I. The Importance and role of the Political and Electoral Party

The two party system which had played a very important if not decisive role in the Philippine elections in the past, is not existing anymore today. The Marcos dictatorship had succeeded in the elimination and banning the existence of a multi-party system. The dictator had built and strengthened new party-reflecting his one party system of Kilusang Bagong Lipunan or KBL (New Society Movement). This party faded away after the dictator was ousted. However, the Marcoses have tried to revive the KBL today. Traditional politicians have also revived the old traditional parties but they (parties) are closely connected to the individual personalities who are running for different positions in government.

When the Liberal party was revived, it was closely linked with the PNoy's presidency and when the Nationalist Party was given life again it was for Senator Manuel Villar's bid for 2010 Presidency. United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) was put up purposely for Vice President Binay's presidency. The People's Reform Party (PRP) of Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago was revived three times when she attempted to become President (1992, 1998,

and 2016). Partido Demokratikong Pilipino (PDP) is the party which was used to put up Duterte's presidential bid.

The current phenomenon reveals that it is more of the personalities rather than the parties who plays an important role in the country's elections. As the situation stands today, there are presidentiables running with vice presidentiables both coming from the different parties. The situation of the Nationalist Party is a case in point. Duterte's vice president is Senator Allan Peter Cayetano (Nationalist Party). Miriam Defensor's tandem is Senator Bong-bong Marcos (Nationalist Party) and Senator Trillanes, another member of the Nationalist party is running for vice president as an independent. The NP does not have decision whom to support for the president and vice president respectively so as to maintain coherence and continue to stay afloat as one party. Individual NP members can support their preferred candidates.

Traditional politicians are very pragmatic. In one party they can support different candidates, expecting their candidates to also support them or their preferred candidates in return. They approach politics as always addition and not division. Principled politicians can never survive in this kind of set-up or they can also end-up as traditional politicians.

One of the most glaring phenomenon which has developed in the country's politics is dynasty. Members of the family are running politics in all levels in government. It is ordinary to see a situation where the father (husband) is the mayor and his wife or sons or daughter is the vice mayor. More than 50% of the members of the Congress are related either by blood or by marriage. But it will be the family interests that matter rather than Party politics. Hence, it is also ordinary to see members of the family belonging to different political parties just to maintain the family interests in a given territory. Their party affiliation is just tactical and only for the purpose of getting all the resources and support extended by different political parties to their political base. They (families) can even agree to divide the votes to different parties but maintain

their power in their political base. More often, they do not have opponents in their political bailiwicks.

One of the worst practice of political dynasty is in the Party List system. The 1987 Constitution has tried to correct the country's elite politics especially in Congress by introducing reform in its composition. The framers of the Constitution has instituted the marginalized sectors' representation in this legislative body by making sure that 20% of the composition is elected by the unrepresented and marginalized sectors of the country. The first application of this system was in 1998 national and local elections. Marginalized sectors put up their own Partylists and elect their nominees to represent their Party in Congress. The Party which gets the 2% of the total votes casted for the Partylist will have a seat in Congress (4%-2 representatives and 6%- will get 3 seats and the maximum number of seats a Party-list can get in Congress). The Partylist system was faithfully practiced in spirit and in substance during the first two elections (1998 and 2001). Later, the ruling elite got wind of this system and they found out the loopholes in the law to make them participate in the Party list election – stating that one does not need to be coming from the marginalized sectors in order to represent the latter. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the elite's interpretation so as to accommodate at that time the son of the former President (Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) who claimed to represent the security guards, drivers, etc. So from then on the elite of the country began to represent the marginalized and control the Party list system in congress.

The worst thing is that when political dynasty is combined with the Party list system, one will find that family of political elite is controlling the partylist nominees. The number one nominee is the father, the second nominee is the mother, and the rest of the nominees are the sons and daughters or their relatives. At present, there are more millionaires in the Party list representatives than from those in the district representatives (percentage wise).

And the worst still to happen is, in the same Constitution, it is stated that there will be a ban to the political dynasty in the country. It will be the congress which will define the implementing principles and guidelines for the specific law. With all the elites controlling the 80% of the Congress and have now gotten control of the remaining 20% of the seats intended for the unrepresented marginalized sectors, one can only ask who will ban whom. It is just like expecting a genuine land reform implemented by landlords in Congress.

The ruling Party (coalition of Liberal Party, Akbayan, etc) has the advantage today because the current President is with Liberal party (LP) and in the past, many, if not all politicians from all levels would jump ship and become members of the ruling party. So today, the LP has 69 out of 81 governors in the country. But since the elections this year will include the election of a new President, this advantage of the equity of the incumbent will matter less because it will depend on the popularity and winnability of candidates. For instance, if the standard bearer of LP is not showing positively well in the poll ratings/surveys then it will be expected to see politicians from this party to jump ship to the most popular candidate and his/her Party as the actual elections is approaching. Unless of course, the allies of the ruling coalition could create their own surveying institution to make their standard bearer top their own make believe survey.

The situation at present as described by the poll surveys and observations on the ground is such that the four presidentiables and vice presidentiables are in a very tight race just a few days remaining in the campaign period. Some of them are considered statistically tied for a period. The lead taken by Mayor Duterte and Senator Bong-bong Marcos for president and vice president respectively can still change in the next few days. All other candidates, their allies and attack dogs will throw any garbage at the ones leading the surveys. It will become dirtier as the election day is nearing.

Clearly, it can be seen that the respondents of the poll surveys reflected only the sentiments of around

80% (43.52 millions out of 54.4 millions registered voter) on the actual day when the survey was conducted. This means that the four sets of candidates are not very far from each other's lead because the poll ratings range from 33% to 18%. The remaining 20% (10.9 M) of the undecided voters or have not participated in the survey's will really make a big difference. The number of almost eleven (11) million voters even if only 50% will participate in the elections will be almost 5-6 million votes. Definitely, these voters can make or unmake a President or a Vice President for that matter.

A big consideration here is given, that is, if those who preferred a candidate in the popular surveys will not change their choice of president or vice president up to the election day.

In any case, to attract those undecided to vote for candidates, there is a need for machineries and workable coalitions and alliances. Effective machineries can really make sure that the undecided or those who will make changes in their choices of candidates will vote for those with organized human as well as financial and logistical resources.

The popularity of Mayor Rodrigo Duterte and Senator Grace Poe as shown in the latest poll surveys does not or will not automatically be translated into actual votes in the election day. The two (Duterte and Poe) are known to have weak machineries and less resources. They are building and strengthening their machineries as they are campaigning. There will always be problems with translating the spontaneous and popular sentiments of the people into warm bodies and actual votes for a certain candidate.

Candidates with strong and widespread machineries and alliances will definitely have big comparative advantage over the other candidates with weaker machineries and lesser resources.

Social media has played a very important role for swaying options and choices. Projecting the popularity of candidates to enhance the voters awareness on the candidate's platform will try to fill in the gaps of weak machineries and lesser resource.

But they definitely could not replace the role of actual machineries especially in the actual voting. And more than ever, machineries can always play a very important role in protecting the candidates' votes during the actual and post election period.

II. The role of Demographic Location of Voters and the choice of Candidates

The five presidentiables and their running-mates belong to the different parts/provinces of the country. It has been a practice that if a presidential candidate is from Luzon, most likely his running-mate should be coming from either Visayas or Mindanao. The reason is simple, they want to cover the whole archipelagic country in terms of the spread and reach of their campaigns and captured voters. It will be a natural advantage for the candidates to naturally spread their followers and allies from the north to south and from the east to the western parts of the country.

Vice President Binay who is from Makati and his running mate Senator Gregorio Honasan is coming from Southern Tagalog area. The tandem has a natural weakness in the Visayas and Mindanao areas. They try to reach other areas through other machineries like fraternities and other civic and religious organizations. Binay is very strong with his fraternity and the Association of Boy scouts in the Philippines by maintaining its presidency for more than a decade.

Mayor Duterte is a far away leader in the poll surveys in Mindanao. He also gets much support from the Cebuano speaking islands in the visayas, e.g. Cebu, Bohol, part of Negros and Samar. Senator Allan Peter Cayetano's influence can bring them votes in Metro Manila and Southern Luzon.

Senator Grace Poe is very strong in Metro Manila and the Ilonggo speaking provinces in the visayas and Mindanao. Senator Chiz Escudero, her running mate is strong in Metro Manila as well as parts of the provinces of Southern Tagalog.

Former Secretary Mar Roxas, aside from being promoted by the loyalists of the Administration, he is

very strong in Metro Manila and the Ilonggo speaking in the Visayan islands like Negros and Iloilo. His running mate Representative Leni Robredo is very strong in the Bicol areas and the women workers, advocates, and women voters.

Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago is strong in the Ilonggo speaking provinces in the Visayas and is influential with the student voters. Her running mate Senator Bongbong Marcos has maintained his strong base with the Ilocano voters. He is projecting a strong support from the solid North.

It has been known that voters would always prefer candidates from their places and when they belong to the same ethnolinguistic groupings. The Ilonggos will tend to vote for the Ilonggo candidates, the Ilocanos will vote for Ilocano candidate and the Cebuanos will most likely vote for a Cebuano candidate.

There should also be a considerable importance given to the endorsement and support of influential civic and religious movements and personalities. Some of these groups are known to have maintained command votes.

So it is not surprising that in the very tight race on these national and local elections, many candidates are seen visiting the houses and headquarters of these groups' personalities. These politicians are even making big donations for these groups and their movements just to get their blessings and support.

Nobody can really ascertain the difference that these religious and civic groups can make or unmake for the politicians who have sought the latter's endorsements. Most of these endorsing groups are known to make concessions and favors for their support. In short, most of the endorsement is not voluntary nor for free. Definitely this is not out of principle like the groups and movements are openly and formally endorsing these candidates because of their record on good governance and sincere commitment to serve the people and their constituencies.

The officials and the hierarchies of these civic and religious groups and movements are endorsing certain candidates in the name of their followers in exchange of favors and interests.

This is another form of elite politics in its worst form. The leaders of these groups are commanding their followers to vote for their chosen politicians.

It should be noted that the timing of the endorsements happens in the later period of the campaign. It could only mean that the leadership of these civic

and religious groups and movements have already studied the voting trend and pattern as shown in the pre election poll surveys. They (civic and religious leaders) usually give their endorsements and support to the winning candidates in the surveys. And in the past, the politicians who won would also be the ones endorsed by these groups. In short, we should really have serious rethinking whether there is really what is called block or command votes.

April 28, 2016

RUSSIA

The 2016 Russian Elections: Putrefaction as the Laboratory of Life

ILYA BUDRAITSKIS ·

The rationale of radicalization

At a recent meeting with activists of the Russian People's Front, Putin noted that external enemies would preparing ever more provocations to coincide "with elections to the State Duma, and then with the presidential election. It's a one hundred percent certainty, a safe bet, as they say."

Regardless of their real value, the upcoming elections have been turning right before our eyes into a point of tension on which the state's repressive apparatus has focused. Beginning with the establishment of the National Guard [1], the process has been mounting. Each security agency has now inaugurated its own advertising season, designed not only to remind the president and public of its existence but also to show off its unique capabilities, inaccessible to other competing agencies, for combating potential threats.

Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika has uncovered a plot by the Ukrainian nationalist group Right Sector [2], while in his programmatic article [3], Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin essentially suggested canceling the elections since holding them could prove too dangerous. He made a direct appeal to stop "playing at pseudo-democracy" and provide a "tough, appropriate, and balanced response" to the country's enemies "in light of the upcoming elections and the possible risks presented by the stepping up of efforts by destabilizing political forces." With the appointment of Tatyana Moskalkova, even the previously neutral office of the human rights ombudsman has, apparently, been turned into yet another bastion of the

fight against conspiracies.[See The Russian Reader This Ain't No Disco.]]

This nervousness is certainly due to the fact that the growing economic and social crisis has had no visible political fallout for the time being. There have been no mass spontaneous revolts or sectoral strikes, although there has been an overall uptick in isolated labor disputes. The political realm has long ago been securely purged of any uncontrollable opposition, while the president's personal rating has remained phenomenally high. Nothing, it would seem, portends serious grounds for political destabilization this autumn. The absence, however, of real threats itself has become a threat to the internal stability of the state apparatus.

Where does the threat lie? In recent times, it has become obvious that decision-making at all levels and whatever the occasion has been subjected to a rationale of radicalization. Its principle can be described roughly as follows: no new decision can be less radical than the previous decision. Bureaucratic loyalty is measured only by the level of severity. MPs must propose more sweeping laws against latent traitors. Law enforcement agencies must expose more and more conspiracies, while the courts must hand down rulings that are harsher than the harshest proposals made by the security officials and MPs. Permanently mounting radicalism enables officials to increase budgets, expand powers, and prove their reliability, while any manifestation of moderation or leniency can cost them their careers. This radicalization, whose causes are rooted in the political psychology of the Russian elite (which suffers from an almost animal fear of uncontrollability), has set off an extremely danger-

ous bureaucratic momentum. Its main problem is the inability to stop. It is not only unclear where the bottom is, but who is ultimately interested in reaching that bottom and leaving it at that.

All this generates a strange situation vis-à-vis the elections, which have generally functioned primarily as a political balancing mechanism for the Putinist system, and even now function in this way. Elections have always been a reminder—not to voters, but to the elite itself—that varying opinions within a clearly defined framework have not only been possible but have also been encouraged. This reminder has been important not out of faithfulness to an abstract principle, but as confirmation that political bodies (first of all, the presidential administration) have had the monopoly on deciding domestic policy, not a military or police junta.

Fixing the broken mechanism?

For the Kremlin, the upcoming elections are overshadowed by the political trauma of 2011, when the smoothly functioning system of managed democracy suffered a serious breakdown. The current chief political strategist Vyacheslav Volodin has more or less consistently focused on making sure the failure of five years ago is not repeated. Volodin's mission is to fix the broken mechanism with political methods, not by force.

It is worth remembering that, for the greater part of the Putin era, parliamentary and presidential elections were parts of a single political cycle, in which the same scenario was played out. The triumphal success of the ruling United Russia party was supposed to precede and ensure the even more resounding success of Vladimir Putin. In December 2011, however, the cycle's unity backfired against the Kremlin's plans. The interval between elections enabled the protest movement to maintain its grassroots energy for several months.

The political rationale of Putin's third term is now aimed not only at technically but also at conceptually disrupting this cycle. Amidst a sharp drop in confidence in the government, the Kremlin decided

last summer to move parliamentary elections up from December 2017 to September 2016, and, on the contrary, postpone the presidential election from March 2017 to March 2018. The point of the maneuver is obvious. The presidential and parliamentary elections must now represent not two parts of the same script but two completely different scripts. In the first script, a limited number of parties, which make up the symphony of the Crimean consensus, will criticize the government and each other, thus competing for the sympathies of the dissatisfied populace. In the second script, the natural patriotic instinct of voters should leave no doubt as to the need to support Putin unconditionally.

The new ideological content was embodied by Volodin's famous statement: "There is no Russia today if there is no Putin." [4] This personification virtually means that, as a symbolic father, Putin transcends everyday politics. You can be a liberal or a nationalist, a proponent of greater intervention in the economy or a fan of the free market. You can choose not to like the government or government officials. But the nexus Putin-Crimea-Russia is beyond any doubt. Those who fundamentally disagree with it are simply removed from the Russian political spectrum and branded "national traitors."

In keeping with this rationale, responsibility for the sharp drop in living standards and the consequences of the neoliberal "anti-crisis" measures has been borne by ministers, MPs, and governors, by anyone except the president. Even now, when the propaganda effect of the "reunification" of Crimea has obviously begun to fade, the president's personal rating remains high. Thus, according to the latest opinion polls, 81% of respondents trust Putin, while 41% do not trust Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, and 47% do not trust his government overall.

Within the new-model Crimean consensus, United Russia will no longer play the role of the backbone it played in the noughties. Untethered from the non-partisan figure of the president, it will take on the burden of unpopularity borne by its formal leader, Dmitry Medvedev, and his government. The

mixed electoral system will enable candidates from local "parties of power" in single-member districts to dissociate themselves from United Russia, presenting themselves as "non-partisan Putinists" criticizing the soulless federal authorities. Volodin's scheme involves loosening United Russia's grip on power and slightly increasing the value of the pseudo-opposition as represented by the Communist Party and A Just Russia.

It is worth noting that the very existence of a bureaucratic mega-party previously played a stabilizing role by dampening intra-elite conflicts. Now they will inevitably come out into the open, including in the shape of inter-party struggles. Of course, the presidential administration counts on being able to effectively ensure compliance with the clear rules of this competition, but there are no guarantees. The managed multi-party system with the "father of the nation" towering over it consummates the new architecture of the Putin regime as a personalistic regime, and becomes more and more vulnerable.

In the new reality of the crisis, Putin's depoliticization also facilitates a more intensive "natural selection" among bureaucrats at all levels by culling those who have not mastered the art of maintaining the conservative sympathies of the populace while simultaneously implementing what amount to aggressively anti-social policies. The September campaign is supposed to go off without a hitch, culminating in a predictable outcome. Having given a human face to the Central Elections Commission, which was seriously discredited by the previous leadership, Ella Pamfilova [5] is meant to increase this manageability and predictability. It turns out that the upcoming elections are the primary pressure test of the new, post-Bolotnaya Square design of managed democracy. The future of Vyacheslav Volodin and his team, as well as Putin's willingness to trust them with the extremely important 2018 presidential campaign, probably depends on how smoothly they come off.

From the foregoing it is clear that the objective of reestablishing the rules of managed democracy is

directly at odds with the above-mentioned rationale of radicalization, whose standard-bearers are the competing law enforcement agencies. Their individual success in the internal struggle is vouchsafed by the failure of the political scenario, which would give rise to the need for a vigorous intervention by force. After all, the National Guard's value would be incomparably increased if it put down real riots instead of sham riots [6], and Bastrykin's loyalty would all the dearer if, instead of the endless absurdity of the Bolotnaya Square Case, he would uncover real extremists. To scare someone seriously, the ghosts have to take on flesh and blood.

Life is everywhere

Marx said that putrefaction is the laboratory of life. Now we see how Putinist capitalism has embarked on a process of gradual self-destruction. The upcoming elections provide a clear picture of how this has been facilitated by two opposing rationales, the political rationale (Volodin and the presidential administration) and the law enforcement rationale. Thus, the first rationale, in order to generate the necessary momentum and expand the range of opinions, must respond to social discontent by providing United Russia's managed opponents with greater freedom to criticize. Restoring the internal political balance will inevitably lead to the fact that topics related to the crisis and the government's anti-social policies will become the centerpiece of the entire election campaign. On the other hand, the security forces will destabilize the situation outside parliament. Together, they will do much more to undermine an already-flawed system than the long-term, deliberate efforts of any western intelligence agency.

Of course, Russian leftists should in no way count on events following an automatic course. But it is absolutely necessary to take into account the conflicts of interest within the elite and understand their decisive influence on the shape of the upcoming elections. These elections have nothing to do with the real struggle for power or traditional parliamentarianism in any shape or form. But they are

directly related to the internal decomposition of an authoritarian, anti-labor, and anti-social regime. So our policy vis-à-vis these elections should be flexible and remote from all general conclusions. That means we can and should support certain leftist candidates in single-member districts. We must use all the opportunities provided by the leftist, social-

ist critique of the Medvedev government's so-called anti-crisis policies. We must be ready to go to the polls. Or we must be ready to reject them, taking to the streets when the time comes.

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SPANISH STATE

If there are new elections, what shall we do?

BRAIS FERNÁNDEZ ·

The goal of the elites is simple: it comes down to building a new normality so that they can continue to govern while the crisis stabilizes, a normality that can support corruption scandals [3] while the cuts demanded by the European Union are accepted like the rain that falls from the sky [4]. On this question, which is fundamental, the PP (Popular Party), the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) and Ciudadanos (a party that emerged in in 2006 and is led by Albert Rivera) agree, even though they are all considering different strategies to achieve it.

The various negotiations for the formation of a government clearly show that the PSOE has no intention of breaking with those who hold economic power. Along with all of European social democracy (with the exception of Labour's Jeremy Corbyn), it has been converted into a neoliberal zombie: the differential factor in the Spanish state lies in the irruption of an electoral force that is outside the traditional power structures. And that is able to penetrate corners of society in which the classical left never managed to establish itself. This is the result not only of the skill in communication of some spokespersons, but especially of the cycle of struggles that was opened up by the 15M the *indignados*, on May 15, 2011), which overturned former loyalties and gave birth to a popular active base capable of being the component of a new majority. This social substrata is not dead, as was demonstrated in the last consultation organized by Podemos [5].

This situation is however marked by a special feature. We are in a moment of deadlock, where, if we stay where we are, it will mean a setback. A small leap forward means everything, just keeping our

positions means stagnating, going back to the routine and allowing the so much hated normality of budget cuts and corruption to continue.

However, new elections can be an opportunity to change this routine and to prevent our post-election offer to be a "a Valencia-style government" [6], that is to say a government in which there can be movement on only a few little things, while on all the fundamental points everything remains unchanged. There is another option, to handle the question of investiture in an offensive way, following the "second electoral round," one based on the "relationship of forces" and not on a conditioning resulting from a "correlation weaknesses," putting us on the defensive.

This option involves, in the first place, an identification of the means: to overtake the PSOE, to turn it into a subordinate force. At present, the realization of this objective involves an alliance with IU and its million votes and an open, participative, campaign, which could lead to it having its own dynamic, as happened with the Ahora Madrid campaign [7]: it would also have to have a programme of breaking with the existing order.

This also involves maintaining and strengthening the agreement with the formations Comú Podem (Catalonia), En Marea (Galicia) and Compromís-Podem (Valencian Community). An alliance does not mean a fusion of projects: it means reaching agreements to achieve concrete objectives. It is a matter of common sense that to overtake the PSOE involves today establishing this alliance, which could also have the multiplier effect of polarizing the options: the three parties of the rich against the alliance of the plebs. An axis of conflict favourable for those who are aiming for real change because, in fact, the great struggle that the country is going

through concerns a property-owning and parasitical minority which is getting rich while the majority of society, which works, experiences a deterioration of its living conditions and sees the destruction of the elements of social security that still exist [8].

Antonio Gramsci spoke in his *Brief Notes on Machiavelli's Politics* of two types of politics. "Small politics, partial and everyday issues within an already established structure because of the struggle for supremacy between the various fractions of the same political class." "Big politics",

however, deals with issues of the state and social transformation. The Sardinian genius [Gramsci] warned against the danger that "any small political element necessarily turns into a big political issue".

We must ask of Podemos generosity and a capacity for openness; of IU, that the interests of its apparatus and its identity reflexes should not be an insurmountable barrier. Let us follow Gramsci by saying that "small politics" should not be the obstacle that prevents us from solving the big questions.

23 April

ENVIRONMENT

Paris Agreement on Climate Change

DANIEL TANURO ·

New Politics: Do the Paris agreements begin to solve the environmental crisis?

Tanuro: No. The Paris agreement won't solve the climate crisis. The nations signing the agreement have adopted the goal of a global temperature increase of 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius. But this is a phony claim. The important things in this agreement are the INDCs, that is the "intended nationally determined contributions," or each nation's contribution to reducing the global temperature. If one takes the INDCs and globalizes them and make projections on that basis, the likely increase in warming will between 2.7 and 3.7 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, or double what the agreement says.

There are among the world's leaders, some smart people, who understand the seriousness of global warming and the threat it poses to the capitalist system. For example, the former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore; Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England; and Nicholas Stern, a professor at the London School of Economic. They want to fight within the bourgeoisie over climate change. The Paris agreement is a victory for this current. Their problem will be to find a way to make up the difference between the goal of 1.5 degrees of warming and the INDCs 2.7 degrees, which is the overall objective of the agreement. If they're serious in their strategy against climate change, they will have to find ways to make up that difference, at least partially.

NP: How might they that do that?

Tanuro: It's extremely difficult because given the climate budget remaining for this century, in order to have a 66% chance of achieving the 2 degree goal, the world must emit less than 1,000 gigatons

(GT) of carbon between 2011 and the end of the century. The carbon budget for 1.5 degrees is only 400 GTs. The annual emissions at present are about 40 GTs, so the remaining budget today for 2°C is about 800 GTs and for 1.5°C only about 200 GTs.

To stay within those budgets is totally incompatible with capitalism because it is incompatible with growth, and capitalism without growth is a contradiction in terms. There's no doubt that the carbon budget will be exceeded, so the only way to try to fill the gap, even partially, between 1.5C and 3.7°C will be the use of the so-called "negative emissions technologies." That's why I say the agreement is not only insufficient, but it entails new threats, threats from geo-engineering on the one hand and threat of a massive appropriation of the ecosystems to capture carbons on the other.

NP: What do you mean by geo-engineering?

Tanuro: The British Royal Society's definition is this: Geoengineering is human intervention to change the climate system. The massive use of fossil fuels from the beginning of the industrial revolution until today was a kind of geo-engineering, so those who want to stop global warming will have to find something similar to reverse our current direction.

NP: They need a technological solution then. Is there one?

Tanuro: Yes, there are various things that can be done. The first thing would be planting trees, for example. Some research suggests that one could capture 10 GTs of carbon yearly simply through the planting trees on a massive scale.

But, there are two social problems with this. One is the appropriation of ecosystems and the other is competition with other land use, such as the production of food, of course. The appropriation of ecosystems would mean a new era of enclosures, something like Marx's description of "primitive accumulation of capital." For example, in Africa, where this is already happening, businesses investing in the carbon market expropriate the land from farmers and then turn those former farmers into workers to plant trees.

We should be very critical of this approach because of its social implications. But there are also environmental issues. They aren't planting forests. They're engaging in monoculture, that is, planting just one specie such as eucalyptus trees. Or they may plant genetically modified fast-growing trees. I think we should oppose all GMOs, including trees, because new problems can be introduced. If one, for example, one introduces GMO trees, they might create new allergies that would affect humans

NP: What about more high tech solutions?

Tanuro: The major technology is called BECCS, that is, bioenergy with carbon capture and sequestration. The idea is to combine the use of biomass as an energy source with the technology of geological capture and sequestration. This is very hypothetical. It has been done in Norway on a small scale and there are a few pilots in Europe financed by the European Union, but nobody knows if the gas will stay in the ground or how long it will stay in the ground.

If there is an earthquake the gas could escape. Or perhaps the storage of gas might cause earthquakes. This has already occurred in the North Sea where Norway is experimenting and it also happened in British Columbia, where there was a 4.5 Richter scale earthquake last summer.

BECCS is really the priority for these people and this would be one way that they might try to make up the gap between the goal and the global projection on the basis of the INDCs. According to some

researchers, the technical potential of the BECCS could be greater than the 2°C carbon budget.

There are other technologies of course. One is ocean liming. If you disperse lime in the ocean, the CO₂ in the ocean will react with this lime and Calcium carbonate will precipitate to the bottom of the ocean. This would create a virtuous circle, because as the captured CO₂ fell to the bottom, the water could also absorb more atmospheric CO₂. This could be one of the most massive responses in order to lower the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere and in the ocean (thus lowering the acidification), but nobody knows what might be the effect on the marine ecosystems—nobody knows that. Technically it would be quite tricky to organize. If you want to distribute enough lime to have an impact, you would also have to build as many new ships as currently exist on earth.

NP: Are there other technologies?

Tanuro: One technique is quite similar to the ocean liming, partly the same reaction between CO₂ and lime, not at sea, but on the earth. After the reactions take place, the CO₂ could be released to be stored in the ground. This would require an enormous economic investment in order to build the thousands of huge of devices that would be necessary.

The problem then becomes, how does this affect economic growth. The consumption of matter - thus of energy - must be lowered in absolute terms if we are to solve the climate crisis. Certainly the developed countries should lower their consumption of matter and energy, or there is no possible solution to the climate crisis. Because the situation is worsening so quickly, it might even prove to be necessary to lower consumption of matter and energy on a world scale.

The discussion of degrowth, therefore, is not absurd in my view. However, degrowth is not a project for a different kind of society. It is not a social alternative.

This is a problem for these smart people that I've mentioned, because they know from the economist Joseph Schumpeter that you can't have capitalism without growth. So they will want to use geo-engineering to deal with the issues.

All of this can be seen in Nicholas Stern's "Report" on climate change made for the English government. We need to stabilize at 450 parts per million CO₂ equivalent, but that would cost 3 percent of the world's GDP. To stabilize the climate at 550 ppm would take 1 percent of the world's GDP. The economic costs thus lead Stern to recommend that we not do too much too fast. For him it's all too expensive and too disruptive. But 550ppm most probably means a 3 to 4°C warming by the end of the century.

NP: Well, what should those of us concerned about these issues do then?

Tanuro: We need to block investments in fossil fuels. We need to throw sand in the productivist machine as happened with the XL Pipeline, and with

the struggle against the new airport in Notre Dame des Landes in France, and as is happening with the struggle against the exploitation of brown coal and coal in general in Germany. The German government decided to phase out the nuclear plant but they didn't change the nuclear power with renewable but by coal. So there's a very important movement to block the mines. We need to throw more sand in the machine and stop these fossil fuel investments.

At the same time, we have to put forward a program for the transition towards an ecosocialist society. Key demands are the expropriation of the energy and finance sectors - which are deeply interconnected - the development of the public sector and the reduction of hours in the workday. This is the only way to simultaneously solve the ecological crisis and the social crisis, particularly the problem of unemployment.

April 25

New Politics

| ARGENTINA

Challenging a new government in Argentina

CLAUDIO KATZ ·

MAURICIO MACRI, the former conservative mayor of Buenos Aires, won the presidential elections against the handpicked successor of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who, together with her deceased husband, had held the presidency since 2003. The Kirchners ruled on the strength of a version of center-left populism in the tradition of Juan Perón. Can you describe what has changed in the first few months of Macri's administration?

THE GOVERNMENT began with a brutal assault on ordinary people's living conditions—applying outrageous cuts every day seems to be the new rule.

Macri began with the devaluation of the currency and tax cuts for the wealthy, and he is now introducing utility rate hikes for the same companies that had already received enormous subsidies under the previous administration. Projected inflation for the year stands at 35-40 percent, without any increase in salaries so far.

A recent report indicated that during his first three months in office, Macri increased the number of people living in poverty by 1.4 million, while another 350,000 fell into extreme poverty.

The most dramatic development is the rise of unemployment. As of today, there are 110,000 newly unemployed, and traditional restrictions on layoffs for public employees are being torn up. The extreme wing of Macri's government hopes to recreate the massive army of unemployed prevalent during the 1990s under Peronist president Carlos Menem [who implemented a brutal shock therapy privatization program] in order to put permanent downward pressure on working-class demands.

Meanwhile, Macri is cynically settling outstanding disputes with the so-called vultures [international creditors who refused to agree to debt restructuring], supposedly to avoid punitive debt sanctions. However, new foreign borrowing will end up restoring IMF audits and maintaining restrictions on social spending, all to satisfy the creditors. This offensive goes hand in hand with new attacks on democratic rights. For instance, one social movement leader from the north remains in prison, and a protocol is being prepared to repress strikes and pickets.

The right-wing character of the new government is obvious—it is acting brazenly on behalf of the ruling classes, without any mediation, without any disguises. All state ministries have been assumed by managers from big business, establishing a kind of "CEO-ocracy."

THE BOOM in the prices of basic commodities, especially petroleum and agricultural products, helped Argentina recover from the catastrophic depression it fell into in 2001, leading to almost 12 years of growth. But today, commodity prices have collapsed. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this model of economic growth? Were there other potential developmental strategies?

THE PREVIOUS government attempted a neo-developmental economic model with the intention of jump-starting industrialization, encouraging consumption and reorienting the surplus generated by the boom in commodities toward social spending.

Yet after a decade of these policies, it must be said that they failed to achieve their main goals. Hopes

that local entrepreneurs would reinvest in the economy faded in the face of their continued demand for state aid and efforts to promote an efficient civil service was smothered by inept bureaucracies.

This neo-developmental experiment was undercut by numerous imbalances. Especially critical was the failure to productively manage agricultural revenue through state control of foreign trade. The government gambled that capitalists would use public resources productively, without simply moving their profits offshore.

At the same time, the model preserved all of Argentina's economic structural imbalances. It strengthened reliance on the production of raw materials, opened the door to the stagnation of energy supplies, perpetuated a skeletal industrial base and sustained a financial system that deterred investment. Additionally, since a regressive taxation policy was preserved, it was to get at the roots of social inequality.

Another model was possible, but this would have required a clash with the dominant economic and political groups, and Kirchnerism was never willing to face up to that.

ARGENTINA UNDER the Kirchners came to be identified with the reform-oriented Pink Tide governments in South America, including the Workers' Party in Brazil, the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and Evo Morales' government in Bolivia. But the end of the economic boom has led to a rapid decline in popular support for the Pink Tide governments, with Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil all paying the price. Why is the right and not the left benefiting politically from this crisis?

MANY FACTORS have combined to create these results.

The progressive South American cycle had no international counterpart. Similar processes that did begin in some places, such as Greece, were suffo-

cated. Neoliberalism not only persisted, but in many ways, it deepened on a global scale after the financial crisis of 2008-09.

In our region, the death of Hugo Chávez marked a negative point of inflection for any potential radicalization of the processes underway. ALBA [the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, or Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América] was created, but it failed to root itself in any genuinely massive social movements. The Cuban Revolution could only continue its defensive battle for subsistence, while radical change stalled in Bolivia.

When, in recent years, symptoms of popular dissatisfaction began to grow in countries governed by the center-left—strikes by public-sector workers in Argentina, protests in Brazil, community and indigenous mobilizations in Ecuador, etc.—these presidents choose confrontation instead of seeking convergences with the protesters.

The right took advantage of a new scenario defined by internationally adverse economic conditions and used its control over the corporate media in unprecedented ways. On top of all this, the judicial powers within various countries acted as a substitute for the military in coup-mongering maneuvers.

For its part, the left has rebuilt itself in many countries throughout the region, but it has not achieved the credibility that the socialist project enjoyed during the height of revolutionary ideals in the 1960s and 1970s. Of course, I'm improvising these characterizations in this conversation, and they should be understood only as notes in what is an ongoing process.

THE RIGHT will have its own problems in maintaining popular support. For instance, Macri himself has been implicated in the Panama Papers for failing to reveal offshore family accounts before becoming mayor of Buenos Aires. Can he survive this scandal?

WE DON'T know what impact the flood unleashed by the Panama Papers is going to have because it's

an international scandal, and Macri can't control its spread, not even with the complicity of the Argentine justice system and the media.

But for the moment, the scandal has robbed the government of the legitimacy it needs to implement cuts. For example, with respect to the vultures, the government planned to pay them off using the same banks involved in offshore operations implicated in the Panama Papers.

We are discovering that Macri is a veritable champion of corruption. He figures among those at the top of the lists of officials in companies named for using tax havens that help them evade taxes and facilitate capital flight.

This hasn't surprised anyone since Macri headed up a business group that did dirty deals with the state for decades. He secured government contracts, benefitted from the public assumption of private debt and gained when the Argentine peso was delinked from the U.S. dollar. Charges were filed against him for tax evasion and dealing in contraband, but he was granted immunity as a favor from Supreme Court judges appointed by Menem.

His justifications are ridiculous. He claims he was the director, and not an investor, in the businesses in question, but in reality, the investors were just a screen for shady deals in the hands of the directors. This is par for the course for a government that censors reports about tax breaks granted to similar firms.

Meanwhile, Macri vacations in a villa owned by an English magnate usurping land in Patagonia, while his cabinet ministers appoint family members to government posts all around.

FOR HIS recent visit to Argentina, Barack Obama was originally scheduled to arrive on the anniversary of the 1976 coup that started the dirty war against the left, students and the unions. After an outcry, Obama changed his arrival date, but he and Macri visited the Museum of Memory, founded in honor of the military's victims.

Is there a danger that Macri's decision to bring Argentina back into the orbit of U.S. imperialism will make the military and security apparatus more assertive and repressive?

OBAMA'S VISIT was intended to re-establish the carnal relationship that existed between the two countries during Menem's era. So all the fantasies from those years about "returning to the world" and "recognizing American leadership" are being repeated endlessly today.

The State Department wanted to build up Macri as a counterweight to the instability in Brazil. The U.S. wants to displace China regarding negotiations over public infrastructure projects and incorporate Argentina into the Pacifica Alliance – a free trade agreement signed in 2011 with the U.S., Chile, Mexico, Colombia and Peru.

The U.S. aims to put the brakes on autonomous development in the nuclear sector, for instance, and put itself in a position to take advantage of Argentine mineral resources, especially lithium.

But these plans have run into resistance, as much of the population is aware of the lethal effects of national subordination to the U.S.

On the economic plane, Argentina has gained absolutely nothing and remains in a completely uneven commercial relationship. Despite Argentina's claims to the Malvinas Islands [a.k.a. the Falklands], Macri will continue cooperating with the United Kingdom—and DEA, CIA and FBI agents operate freely, annulling Argentina's control over its own territory.

Macri tried to generate a sort of "Obamamania" in the press, but his pro-colonial message had very little impact on the public. The media argued that Obama could not be held responsible for the 1976 coup because he was only 13 years old at the time. Be that as it may, the real problem is Obama's current imperial policy in Honduras, Colombia and the Middle East.

The most encouraging sign was the mobilization on March 24. The protest should be seen as an anti-imperialist day that revived the tradition of demonstrating against visits by American presidents, as happened with Roosevelt, Nixon, Clinton, Bush and now Obama. In Argentina, the empire cannot rely on a façade of middle-class support, mobilized by its fascination with Miami.

AFTER THE collapse of the military dictatorship in 1983, and especially during and after the 2001 economic crisis, workers and the poor in Argentina organized some of the most vibrant mass movements in the world—the unemployed (the piqueteros), unions, students and women built powerful organizations. But Peronism, whether in its institutional or Kirchnerist aspects, managed to retain the loyalty of the leadership of many of these organizations. Has the combined experience of 12 years of rule by the Kirchners and the onset of a new crisis weakened these links? Or does Peronism still command influence and the ability to reconstruct its base as it serves as the opposition to Macri's more open austerity?

IT'S PREMATURE to formulate any assessment of a movement as deeply rooted as Peronism.

Kirchnerism represents the progressive wing of this conglomerate, and even today, it contains very contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, Cristina left office with a monumental sendoff mobilization organized by a network of militants who filled plazas and led marches. Now out of office, she is once again calling together crowds and taking advantage of Macri's flailing as he tries to discredit her with the help of a sycophantic justice system.

Yet the expectation that Kirchnerism can count on a powerful continuity as the opposition in Congress, the provincial government and various state institutions is fading. She has lost influence in the Justicialist Party [the official name of the Peronist party], and we don't know how she may be

affected by significant corruption allegations involving her personally.

But the most important thing to keep in mind is that because her handpicked successor Daniel Scioli lost the elections last November—and thus the Justicialist Party will not be saddled with the legacy of austerity left by center-right presidents such as Raúl Alfonsín and Fernando de la Rúa—Kirchnerism is positioned to resurrect popular illusions in Cristina and her political faction.

She can hide the fact that her government was preparing the austerity that Macri is implementing today. For a more accurate view of her policies, one need only review the crackdowns ordered by Kirchnerist governors in the provinces of Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego.

Having said that, we're just beginning to enter a process with unpredictable results.

LAST FALL, Nicolás del Caño, the presidential candidate for the Left and Workers Front (FIT in Spanish), won more than 800,000 votes or 3.23 percent. The FIT represents a coalition of small revolutionary parties and their supporters, but there are other political, union, student and social movement forces that oppose Macri's conservatives, as well as the Peronists. What are the prospects for a new round of struggles and how would you characterize the challenges facing the left today.

THE LEFT has gained much stronger electoral, social and political implantation than it had in the past. It remains a minority movement, but the left has well-known public leaders, and it has consolidated a network of militants.

There are many debates about union tactics and what policies should be adopted with respect to relations with Kirchnerist forces. But there is a generalized understanding that the current period must center around resistance to Macri's offensive.

This is the priority of the moment. Macri's outrageous attacks must be stopped before it's too late.

This battle is being waged in the streets, factories, and offices against layoffs and wage cuts.

The population is still suffering a disorienting combination of shock and indignation, but several major strikes and marches have already had an impact. I think the most significant was the large mobilization on March 24, at which the left had a large presence. That mobilization was organized as a response to Obama and Macri, making it more than just another anniversary of the coup.

The mobilization showed that, since 2001, a layer of left-wing activists have grown and cohered; and this layer is very much alive and ready to fight against austerity. This is another difference between now and Menem's time. Right from the start, Macri has faced opposition from below, and this may lead to a wave of rebellion.

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THE NETHERLANDS AND THE EU

Unfriendly Terrain

ALEX DE JONG ·

The Netherlands has been a loyal supporter of the European Union. The small country's economy consists primarily of financial services and trade — sectors at the core of the EU project. At the same time, many Dutch people like to see themselves as cosmopolitan, tolerant members of a peaceful trading nation and understand participation in the EU as a logical extension of this.

The mood, however, has shifted. The clearest example was the victory of the right-wing "No" campaign in the April 6 consultative referendum on the EU association treaty with Ukraine. The treaty would be a step toward more political and legal cooperation between the EU and Ukraine and establish a free-trade area between the two.

As early as the 2005 referendum on the EU constitution — which was rejected by 61.5 percent of the voters — it was clear that Dutch citizens were changing their attitudes toward the EU. [1] The motivations for this "No" were mixed. Many voted with the understanding that EU policies demolish social services, but national chauvinism also appeared, each sometimes mixing with the wish to defend the Dutch welfare state against outside influence. But despite the presence of the Right in the campaign, the 2005 "No" was a clear rejection of the EU's neoliberal economic policies.

The Dutch political climate has shifted rightward over the past decade, however. According to Kevin Levie, a left-wing Socialist Party (SP) member, a new, nationalist right wing has "been advancing already for fifteen years. Established parties have partly taken over their vocabulary and agenda, and

for fifteen years the Left has not been able to adequately respond."

This nationalist right combines free-market economics, nationalism, populist demagoguery, xenophobic sentiment, and racism, especially Islamophobia. Today, Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party (PVV) are the most prominent representatives of this current. They see the EU as a threat to Dutch sovereignty and an obstacle to the draconian anti-immigration laws they would like to introduce. Instead of a political union, the PVV wants a purely economic free-trade zone in Europe. [2]

Although the PVV and its forerunners have not yet succeeded in becoming part of the government, they have successfully pushed the previously dominant progressive liberalism to the sides, and their ideas have become accepted as part of the country's common sense. [3] Since 2005, this right has only grown stronger, successfully shaping the anger and insecurity caused by the recent euro crisis. Their winning narrative: the EU is transferring money from hard-working Dutch workers to lazy Greeks.

Right-Wing Climate

Given this context, it is no surprise that the Right dominated the recent referendum campaign. The right-wing think tank *Forum voor Democratie* and the popular news and entertainment website *Geenstijl* drove the debate. *Forum voor Democratie* is the brainchild of publicist Thierry Baudet — who combines the pretensions of a conservative intellectual (he took a course on how to smoke cigars) with a talent for self-advertisement.

Baudet promotes anti-feminism, nationalism, and Islamophobia. *Geenstijl* (loosely translatable as "tasteless") is a product of the major Dutch right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf*. It shares the right-

wing agenda of Baudet and the PVV, cultivating Islamophobia and hostility to the Left. It hides its blatant racism (for instance, it routinely refers to refugees drowned in the Mediterranean as *dobber-negers*: "floating Negroes") behind the name of "satire."

While writers like Baudet make reactionary ideas respectable, a forum like *Geenstijl* provides the populist vulgarization of the same agenda. With the help of *Geenstijl*, who produced an app so people could sign electronically, the three hundred thousand signatures that require the Dutch government to organize a consultative referendum were easily gathered.

Just as in the campaign around the European constitution, the country's center-left and center-right supported the association treaty. The most outspoken voice in the "Yes" camp was the neoliberal D66 party. Often called social-liberal, it's a formation that combines neoliberal economic policies with socially liberal rhetoric about individual rights.

The party positioned the treaty as if it would protect Jews, the LGBT community, and Ukrainian democrats against Putin's authoritarianism. The social-democratic Labour Party (PvdA), who is in government, and the Greens used similar rhetoric. Underlining the absence of any positive argument in favor of the treaty, the PvdA's and D66's campaign posters featured a photo of Putin, calling for a "Yes" vote to strike a blow against the Russian leader.

The pro-business VVD, the other party in the government coalition, focused on the opportunities the treaty would bring Dutch corporations — an idea that, in the post-2008 era, has lost much of its popular appeal.

Neither of the appeals were greeted with much enthusiasm.

Left-Wing Decline

The far left was divided on the referendum. The left-wing Socialist Party [4] organized its own "No"

campaign focused mostly on the neoliberal character of the association treaty. But its appeals were not free of chauvinism — just like in the 2005 campaign around the EU constitution.

One part of the radical left called for a boycott of the referendum. They justified their position by arguing that the Right dominated the debate, and the referendum would give more legitimacy to its initiators. From their perspective, the best possible outcome would have been a turnout below the 30 percent threshold, invalidating the whole referendum.

Another far-left "No" campaign, set up by socialists, NGOs, and independent activists, called for radically reforming the process of European unification and rejecting the EU's neoliberal course. It published material explaining the negative consequences of the treaty for Ukrainian workers and collaborated with Ukrainian leftists like Volodymyr Ischenko. [5] Supporters of this campaign argued that the Left should try to make its own anti-EU case rather than abandoning the terrain to the Right.

Although the SP was by far the most visible left-wing "No" force, neither it nor the other left-wing initiatives succeeded in mobilizing much support. A substantial group of voters left their sheets blank or deliberately invalidated them to show their rejection of the whole referendum. Turnout was low: 32.2 percent, 61.1 percent of whom voted "No." The low turnout shows that many SP supporters stayed home rather than add their "No" votes to Baudet and his right-wing allies.

The referendum took place in a bleak context for the Left. The SP has been in the doldrums for the last few years, facing declining membership and disorder in its youth wing. Polls consistently predict a massive victory for the PVV and an implosion of the PvdA. Support for the Socialists hovers more or less around its current 10 percent. The dissatisfaction with the centrist government has not benefited the party.

Meanwhile, the Dutch right has largely dominated the recent public debate. In addition to the referendum, refugee policies have been at the center of a national conversation that is moving to the right. Refugees and politicians who are seen as supporting their rights have been the victims of intimidation and violence.

Agitation against refugees is the prelude to more general racist actions: attacks on Muslim citizens and threats to mosques. Right-wing demonstrations, such as those organized by Dutch supporters of Pegida, [6] are relatively small for now, but the popularity of the PVV and Geenstijl indicate a large right-wing potential in the country. They are not opposed to working together with genuine fascists in such mobilizations. The Dutch far right is taking its first steps as a street movement.

Anticipating next year's national elections, government parties are under pressure to give some meaning to this month's result. But few people assume the referendum will change much. Although the association treaty needs to be ratified by all twenty-eight EU member states to become permanent, it already became provisionally active in the beginning of 2016. Most people expect that, after a few cosmetic changes, it will be ratified despite the Dutch consultative referendum — just as happened with the EU constitution.

The clear winner of the whole episode is the nationalist right. Already Baudet has said he wants to organize several more referenda, including one on EU "aid" to Southern European member states and another on immigration policies. Both Ron Meyer, chair of the SP, and the PVV's Geert Wilders responded to the April "No" result by tweeting it shows the gap between "the people" and "the elite."

But who counts as part of "the people" — and more importantly, who does not? Meyer and Wilders would give wildly different answers. But the referendum campaign and the political climate in general favor the right-wing nationalist response, which would exclude Muslims and other minorities.

Pushing back against this trend is difficult, requiring a new emphasis on class issues instead of national, religious, and ethnic divisions. One campaign that has some potential to do this calls for a referendum on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement with the United States. A vote around this, which would necessarily center on the material concerns of millions of workers, would give the Left a much more favorable terrain on which to argue its case.

It's up to us to regain the initiative and propose a real alternative to austerity and racist scapegoating.

*Republished from **Jacobin**.*

PHILIPPINES

Brief Description of the Current Philippine Situation Before the Elections - Part 1

RAYMUND DE SILVA ·

Introduction

More than fifty four millions (54,363,844) registered voters (including the 1.4 millions Overseas Filipino Workers) will elect the seventeen thousand two hundred (17,200) national and local officials this coming May 9, 2016.

The current President and current Vice-President, 12 senators (out of 24), 285 members of the House of Representatives (including 50 members of the Party List), 81 governors, 144 city mayors and the same number for city vice mayors, 2,980 municipal mayors and vice mayors, 1 each for governor and vice governor of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), 24 ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly members, 772 Sangguniang Panlalawigan members (provincial council), 1610 Sangguniang Panglunsod members (city council) and 11,000 members of Sangguniang Bayan (municipal council) will mostly vacate their positions on or before June 30, 2016. There are politicians who have not yet reached the maximum allowable terms who can still be re-elected in the same positions.

There are also politicians (542) who are sure to occupy the same positions because they do not have opponents – simply said there is no elections in their areas. Prominently among those 542 officials without opponents are the daughter of the late dictator Marcos – Imee Marcos – running for Governor in Ilocos and the former President Gloria M. Arroyo – who is running for a seat in the House of Representatives in Pampanga. These are the two areas in the country where the number of voters are

among the biggest – and therefore those who are running for national positions and who want to win in these vote-rich areas – have to deal with people like Imee Marcos and Gloria M. Arroyo and their allies.

The May 9, 2016 elections is significant in the sense that it will be an end of the term of a second Aquino presidency (2010-2016) whose election has been mainly due to the peoples' reaction to a very unpopular presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. His mother (President Corazon C. Aquino) was literally put into power by peoples' uprising against the Marcos dictatorship-a very hated and unpopular president in the country's history. Such electoral process has come full circle. The two Aquino presidencies have greatly failed to institutionalize the democratic principles and peoples' power which put them into office.

Coming from the bourgeois landlord elite of the country, the people do not expect the Aquino-Conjuangco regime to institute a system change but at least they could have started some democratic reforms and pro-people programs and policies. The first Aquino Presidency had greatly failed in making sure that Marcos and his family were made to answer their crimes against the Filipinos. She (Corazon C. Aquino) has even agreed to honor all the debts of the country (including those incurred by the Marcos cronies) by putting this commitment in the country's 1987 Constitution (30% of the national budget is yearly and automatically set aside for debt payment). The most glaring failure of the first Aquino Presidency is to recover the more than 10 billion dollars stolen by the Marcos family from the impoverished people of the country. The same

stolen wealth and money have been used to hire high caliber lawyers by the Marcoses to fight the legal blocks and processes thrown along their way in getting back to power. But more than anything else, the first Aquino presidency had failed to prosecute the Marcoses and made them accountable to the human rights violations they committed against the more than seventy thousand (70,000) human rights victims. It has been thirty years now since the Marcos dictatorship was ousted and yet the victims have yet to see justice.

At present, under the watch of the second Aquino presidency, the Marcoses have not only recovered the Ilocos areas but also consolidated them to become one of the formidable electoral block in the country. This block together with other allies is about to put another Marcos and namesake of the dictator into a heart bit away from the Presidency. Senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. is currently running for Vice President of the country and in fact leading in all the poll surveys conducted before the May 9, 2016 elections.

The two Aquino Presidencies have gravely failed to institute genuine and truly democratic land reform—again a clear manifestation of their haciendero hearts and interests.

They (the Aquinos) have been credited in allowing the bourgeoisie and the elite (of the pre-dictatorial period to gain back and in fact control some of the strategic businesses in the country. The Lopezes, Ayalas and Aboitez among others have been building and consolidating their business empires during the Aquino administrations.

In the case of Mindanao, the current Aquino government has shown the same historical failure as his mother did to the dictator and his family by not acting decisively on the case of the 2009 Maguindanao massacre. The 2009 massacre of 52 people, including more than 30 journalists was the single biggest election related crime in the country and even in the world involving journalists. Obtaining justice to the massacre victims became

one of the bottle cries of the Aquino in 2010 presidency campaign.

This single deadly event is very significant because it is the result of giving special favors and accommodation of then President Gloria Arroyo of a Maguindanao influential clan who became a powerful warlord in the island. Before November 23, 2009 Maguindanao Massacre the clan had been committing murders and crimes basically with impunity. The clan had total control of the ruling political machinery of then President Arroyo in the area as well as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The second Aquino presidency has again failed to continuously prosecute and consummate the hearing of cases against the Ampatuans (the clan behind the Maguindanao Massacre). It is in effect, continuing the policy of impunity of the Arroyo government. Peoples in Mindanao will pay a high price to this historical inaction. At present, the Ampatuans have almost recovered their old power and glory in some areas in Mindanao. They have maintained their arsenal of weaponry and the money they have accumulated during the Arroyo administration. They are participating in the May 2016 elections in the second district of the province of Maguindanao.

The appreciation of this context will help people to understand the current national political landscape and the actual conduct of politicians in their campaigns to win in May 9, 2016 elections. Will there be changes in the conduct of the electoral campaigns of the candidates? Will the political platforms or the personalitycentered campaign styles prevail during these elections? What will be the role of the political-electoral parties and their machineries in these electoral activities?

The Presidentiables and Their Machineries

Five politicians are vying for the 2016 Presidency. The four are running under political parties while one is running as an independent candidate. The current Vice President is running as President un-

der the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) – a multi-party electoral alliance replacing the former United Nationalist Opposition (UNO) which was launched as a single political party on July 1, 2015 by Vice President Jejomar Binay for his Presidential candidacy in 2016. The alliance is composed of Bagumbayan-Volunteers, Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino (PMP) ER Ejercito wing, Nationalist Peoples' Coalition (NPC) Mark Conjuangco wing and LAKAS-CMD and affiliated local parties.

Currently, UNA has three members in the Senate (out of 24) and 8 members in the House of Representatives (out of 282 in the 16th Congress). UNA has a nationwide machinery with local candidates running under its name.

The second candidate is Davao Mayor Rodrigo Duterte who is the last candidate to file his candidacy for the presidency and he is running under the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino (PDP). Senator Aquilino 'Koko' Pimentel is the current President of the party while Mayor Rodrigo 'Rody' Duterte is its national chairman. The Secretary General of the party is Martin Diño who had filed first for the presidency while Duterte was not yet ready and who was later substituted by Duterte as the party's candidate in the last minute of filing and substituting candidates for presidency. PDP members are mainly coming from Mindanao especially after the resignation of Vice President Jejomar Binay as its party chairman.

The third Presidential Candidate is Senator Grace Poe who is running under the Partido Galing at Puso (Wisdom and Empathy). It is an umbrella coalition party between support groups for the 2016 presidential candidacy of Senator Grace Poe and the 2016 Philippine Senate election line up. The Wisdom and Empathy Party is composed mostly of non-affiliated supporters of Poe and a current Senator of the Philippines and her vice presidential running mate, Francis "Chiz" Escudero) and supporters from the Nationalist Peoples' Coalition (NPC). Basically, they (Poe and Escudero) are running as independent candidates.

They are building their party machineries while campaigning.

The fourth candidate is Mar Roxas who is running under the Koalisyon ng Daang Matuwid (Coalition of the Straight Path). It is the umbrella of the administration-backed presidential and senatorial line up for 2016 Philippine elections. It is composed of mostly supporters of former Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Mar Roxas who announced his presidential bid after the endorsement of President Benigno Aquino III during the event dubbed as a "Gathering of Friends" at the historical Club Filipino on July 13, 2015. It is the remnant of the Team Pinoy which was formed by the Liberal Party along with Akbayan (Citizens' Action Party), Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, Nationalista Party, Nationalist Peoples' Coalition and the National Unity Party as its coalition members.

The fifth Presidential Candidate is Senator Miriam Santiago of the People's Reform Party (PRP). It is a center-left political party founded in April 12, 1991 of former Agrarian Reform Secretary Miriam Santiago for her bid as President in the 1992 Presidential elections. In this 2016 elections, Santiago invited Senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos to be her running mate (Vice President). The PRP Senatorial Candidates are all guests' candidates – who principally run in the other political parties.

The Conduct of the elections

As the election day is nearing the conduct of the Presidential campaigns has intensified and has reached its lowest level. Daily the voters and their families have been hearing and witnessing in the tri-media the below the belt styles of campaigning of the presidentiables and their followers.

Earlier on, when the current Vice President Jejomar Binay announced his bid for presidency he has been subject of various attacks. The most notable one is the Senate investigation conducted by senatorial allies of both the administration and op-

position who have been planning to put their own candidates. For more than one year, Vice President Binay and his family have been subjected on issues of corruption heard live in national television. It is no wonder then that from being number one in the earlier poll surveys, the Vice President has been tailing two other candidates in the current poll surveys.

It has become a trend then, that whoever tops and is the leading candidate in poll survey he or she will always be subjected to different issues and attacks by those tailing in the said surveys. This is a big advantage for those candidates who have not been on the top's spots notably Mar Roxas-the administration candidate and Miriam Santiago who have never been in serious campaigning because she is under medication for cancer.

The three candidates who have been topping the poll surveys namely Binay, Poe and Duterte have been the center of attacks and harassments mainly coming from the followers/supporters of the administration and for those candidates who are not on the top of the surveys. So after Binay, Poe has been attacked on the issues about her citizenship and number of years of stay to qualify for the Presidency. These attacks have persisted even after the Supreme Court has declared that Poe is qualified to run as President. At present, it is Mayor Duterte who has been leading the latest survey and therefore everybody has attacked him from all angles.

In the last three to four surveys conducted nationwide, the Mayor (Duterte) led all other presidential candidates. In fact, many have expected him (Duterte) to drop his rating after his famous or infamous statement on rape case of an Australian woman missionary in the 1989 hostage case in Davao City. But the opposite is happening – the mayor has still topped the latest survey (conducted after his rape statement).

Seemingly, there are reasons for this phenomenon. The people or the voters for that matter are so fed up with all the bad news that they have been ex-

posed that they simply want a change. The rape case for instance happened when people have heard about the killings, intensifying drug issues, lawlessness and the inability of the current Aquino government to act and prevent such crimes and implement basic social services. Many people have reacted especially to the failure of the government and its agencies to give adequate and timely assistance to the victims (mostly farmers) of the El Niño or the long drought which affected many farmers in the rural areas.

It can be observed that Duterte has been consistently showing in his campaigns and speeches a decisive and determine leader to act on the most pressing problems like drugs and corruption. He shows that he is not bothered by bureaucracies and even legal processes when solving these heinous crimes. People want to see immediate action to solve these crimes. Duterte promises to deliver solutions in the first three to six months of his presidency. And the people seem (as shown in the latest survey April 12-17) to approve such method and swiftness in solving such crimes. On the other hand, it might also be that Duterte's statement on the rape case has not yet reached and digested by the people/voters so that it has not yet manifested in the result of the poll surveys.

Surely this phenomenon is affecting the administration-backed candidate Mar Roxas. He has been tailing in all the surveys and some administration supporters in the provinces have continue to jump ship (Governor Joey Salceda of Albay has declared his support to Grace Poe) and the Almarios in Davao Oriental have supported Duterte and not Mar Roxas).

This trend is showing the voters' preference of the hard line approach or even dictatorial tendencies of leadership styles as personified by Duterte. This is indeed bringing some serious concerns. This is even alarming when one sees that in the vice presidential candidates – Senator Bongbong Marcos – the son of the former dictator Marcos – is also leading in the poll surveys for the vice presidency. What is even worst is that the voting preferences for both

Presidency and Vice-presidency is coming from the voters from the people in Metro Manila and the upper and middle classes of the country. And to think that it has just been thirty years (this year), that the people had ousted the Marcos dictatorship. Today, all signs have shown that the dictatorship in another form is coming back and this is having chilling effects on the democratic and progressive forces in the country. A Duterte and Bongbong Marcos presidency and vice presidency respectively is becoming a reality.

It is simply that the people is so desperate of the current miserable situation that they are ready to cling and believe to any promise (solving these problems in three to six months) that people like Duterte and the younger Marcos have promised them.

Despite the administration's difficulties in running its campaigns on the slogan of the continuity of the "matuwid and daan" (The Right Path), it has tried other stocks and reserves in its arsenal to hit a surprise to its opponents.

The administration has been maximizing its resources (finances and influence in the other branches and agencies in the government) to hit or debase its opponents. For instance, the Ombudsman and the Sandigang Bayan not mentioning the Department of Justice, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to file cases against well known supporters of other Presidential candidates. Not a few governors and local officials have been unseated to their offices during the crucial periods of the campaigns. This method of cam-

paigning is running the elections by eliminating the opponents and their supporters before the actual elections. The areas affected by this method is the vote-rich provinces like Laguna (the suspended governor is a well known Binay supporter, The Mayor of Cebu city- the highest registered number of voters in the country but also a known Binay supporter was also recently suspended by the DILG.

At this stage of the campaign, funds have been seen changing hands among local politicians identified to the administration, to put hold and control their supporters and machineries while the elections are nearing. This is an attempt to prevent them from jumping ship and prevent a bandwagon effect of the leading trend of other candidates. The funds are coming from the national leadership of the ruling coalition.

It is not circumstantial that drugs-related crime and kidnappings have intensified during this period. This is obviously to raise funds for the elections. Everybody has been fully aware that in the coming election funds coming from drugs related activities are flooding the communities especially in those areas where people are experiencing extreme miseries and hardship because of the long drought. Buying votes have reached Php 5000 per family. This is known as narcopolitics – using drug money to influence the results of the national and local elections. The drug lords have supported candidates who can protect their interests.

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ENVIRONMENT

Break free from fossil fuels

ALAN THORNETT ·

As the website for the action says: "2015 was the hottest year ever recorded and the impacts of climate change are already hitting communities around the world. From rising sea levels to extreme storms, the need to act on climate change has never been more urgent. Added to that, the fossil fuel industry faces an unprecedented crisis — from collapsing prices, massive divestments, a new global climate deal, and an ever-growing movement calling for change. The time has never been better for a just transition to a clean energy system."

Actions will be taking place in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Equator, Germany, Indonesia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Turkey as well as in Britain. In the USA, protests are taking place in: Denver Colorado, LA, Washington DC, Chicago, as well as in the Northwest and the North East.

In Brazil between 2-13 May thousands of indigenous peoples and climate activists will join together in four different peaceful actions focussing on key parts of the country's oil and gas infrastructure. Mobilizations will take place across all four corners of the country, including an indigenous rally in the Amazon (north), a thermal power plant blockade in Ceará (northeast), another blockade at the Jurong Shipyard railway and highway blockage (southeast) and anti-fracking occupation in Paraná (south).

In the Philippines on 4 May anti-coal activists coming from parts of the local government, the church, and affected communities from all over the Philippines converged in a climate march that aims to mobilize 10,000 people in Batangas City, where

JG Summit Holdings aims to put up a 600-Megawatt coal fired power plant that is set to occupy a 20-hectare site in Barangay Pinamucan Ibaba, Batangas City. The people will be demanding the cancellation of the coal plant in Batangas as well as all 27 other proposed plants in the Philippines.

In South Africa two actions will take place each with hundreds of people highlighting the local impacts of coal and climate change. The first on 12th May will see people gathering in Witbank, one of the most polluted towns in the world, to speak out on the effects of climate change. The second on 14 May is focused on the Gupta residence in Saxonwold, Johannesburg. The Gupta family has recently been awarded a lucrative Eskom supply deal through the acquisition of the Optimum mine from Glencore.

In Germany during the weekend of 14-15 May a few thousand activists are expected to come to Lusatia (1.5 hours from Berlin, close to the Polish border), where local communities have struggled against mining and resettlement for years. There they will engage in civil disobedience to stop the digging in one of Europe's biggest open-pit lignite mines, which the Swedish company Vattenfall has put up for sale. The action will involve blockading the excavators in the pit and also blockading the coal trains which deliver coal to two power plants in the area. The action will show any future buyer that all coal development will face resistance, and demonstrate the movement's commitment to a different kind of energy system that prioritizes people and the planet over corporate power and profit.

There's never been a bigger wave of actions against the plans of the fossil fuel industry. Communities on the front lines of climate change aren't waiting for governments to act they are doing it themselves.

The only way to tackle climate change is through a rapid and socially just transition to 100% renewable energy, keeping oil, coal and gas in the ground. Naomi Klein has said: "The global climate justice movement is rising fast. But so are the oceans. So are global temperatures. This is a race against time. Our movement is stronger than ever, but to beat the odds, we have to grow stronger."

May Boeve the director of 350.org said that "By backing campaigns and mass actions aimed at stopping the world's most dangerous fossil-fuel projects – from coal plants in Turkey and the Philippines, to mines in Germany and Australia, to fracking in Brazil and oil wells in Nigeria – Break Free hopes to eliminate the power and pollution of the fossil-fuel industry, and propel the world toward a sustainable future".

In Britain the first action has already taken place in South Wales on from April 30-May 3. The Reclaim the Power network brought together several hundred people at the UK's largest opencast coal mine at Ffos-y-fran near Merthyr Tydfil. Over 300 hundred activists blockaded the mine for 12 hours and brought it to a halt in the biggest ever mass action at a coal mine in Britain.

The Campaign Against Climate Change and others have called a series of protests around the country under the slogan "going backwards on climate change" which is a reference to the wholesale retreat the Cameron government is making on the meagre climate policies that have been adopted in recent years over the weekend May 7-8.

FRANCE

April 28, another step towards confrontation with the government

LÉON CRÉMIEUX ·

It was the fourth day of mobilization against the El Khomri Law (the three preceding ones were on March 9, March 31, and April 9) and it took place at the end of the school holidays: the youth contingents were fairly small and few high schools and universities were on strike.

One of the first differences with March 31 was the low participation of railway workers who were called out on strike... two days before April 28.

On April 26 there was a one day strike at the SNCF, called by all the unions. These same unions had already called a strike on March 31 on the same question, specific to the SNCF: the application of a 2014 agreement to lower the status of railway workers from July 1 2016 by rescinding the decree that defines their working conditions. The goal is to impose a new minimum-level decree, then to have a collective agreement in the railway sector, seeking to align the condition of SNCF employees (130,000) on those of private-sector railway workers (6,000) in order to obtain gains in productivity of 30 per cent, by reducing holidays and rest days and by other attacks on their working conditions.

Although they are united against this new decree, the unions of the sector do not all have same orientation: UNSA and the CFDT refuse to make any connection with the labour law (both unions are not in the national inter-union coordination) and so they refuse to make strike days at the SNCF coincide with mobilizations against the El Khomri law. The CGT is not opposed to this separation and rejects the perspective of an indefinite general strike in the sector. The Sud-Rail union is in favour of the general strike and of linking up with the

struggle against the labour law. But this breach in the trade-union front is not for the moment making possible the development of a prolonged mobilization at the SNCF that would act as a catalyst for a general mobilization against the El Khomri law. So the strike on April 26 was massive at the SNCF, but there was no extension on the 27th and there was low participation on the 28th along with other sectors of workers and young people.

The youth co-ordinations in the universities and high schools are looking for a second wind after four weeks of staggered school holidays, each region being off for two weeks. But all the combative nuclei of young people took part in and strengthened actions along with workers, as well as the Nuit Debout movement, in many towns and cities. However, few educational institutions were on strike on the 28th, even taking into account that the Parisian region, Montpellier and Toulouse were still on holiday.

The week before April 28, the CGT, the main union confederation, held its congress in Marseille. The Martinez leadership succeeded in maintaining a broad consensus behind it by surfing on the very combative wave that was expressed by many unions, demanding the clear commitment of the CGT to a renewable strike against the labour law. A motion was even adopted calling, in fact if not in so many words, for an indefinite general strike.

But in practice, the confederal leadership is not taking the necessary measures to really orient the union in this direction, which does not correspond to the orientation of this leadership, which refuses a direct confrontation with the government of the left. However, this call and the atmosphere of the

Congress show that there is strong pressure coming from the rank and file.

The days leading up to the 28th also saw negotiations on the method of payment of unemployment benefits to temporary workers in the entertainment industry. This very important battle has been going on for years, and the employers have managed to severely attack the rules governing payment. After a long round of discussions between the employers and the unions of the sector, a draft agreement was reached, negating many of the setbacks that the temporary workers had suffered since 2003. But the project must be ratified by the MEDEF employers' organization and by the union confederations negotiating the UNEDIC agreement. This ratification is particularly problematic since the draft contradicts the positions of MEDEF and the CFDT, which seek to reduce the rights of the unemployed. The draft agreement, obtained under pressure, is positive, but it immediately resulted in the evacuation by the police of the Odeon Theatre in Paris, which had been occupied, like the Comédie Française and other halls and theatres in the country, by the temporary workers.

All these disparate elements had an influence on the demonstrations of April 28. There were many local initiatives to organize blockades in towns and cities, following the example of what had been achieved in 2010: blocking access to the port of Le Havre, blocking the national highway in Angoulême, blocking the Port of Gennevilliers near Saint Denis,.... Whenever these blockades took place, they were the result of local general assemblies involving workers from different sectors and of liaison with militant trade unions and activists of Nuit Debout.

Because the new fact in recent days is the convergence between activists of Nuit Debout and combative trade unionists, those who argue in favour of a general strike.

It is this convergence, which is being expressed in the squares of several cities, that also gave the demonstrations of the 28th their combative charac-

ter, despite a much lower participation in general than on March 31.

This convergence was symbolized by concerted appeals involving Nuit Debout and trade unionists, and by a very large general assembly in the Place de la République in Paris on the evening of the 28th, at which there were speeches by railway workers, postal workers, supporters of the general strike and spokespersons of the (anarcho-syndicalist) CNT and the Solidaires confederation... and by Philippe Martinez, confederal secretary of the CGT. A quite unprecedented participation that speaks volumes, however, on the balance of power that has been established in recent weeks within the movement. The general secretary, whose intervention was interspersed with cries of "General Strike" taken up by thousands of participants, tried to manoeuvre between the confederal line and the demands of the general assembly.

Faced with this radicalization and this real convergence, the government and the right, who are scared, are playing the card of repression and criminalization of the movement.

We can honestly say that in general, the police forces launched violent attacks on demonstrators on April 28.

Among other examples, participants in the blockade of the Port of Gennevilliers were caught in a trap by the police and gassed and clubbed: there were 140 arrests and two trade unionists were immediately taken before the court in Bobigny. In Marseille, the contingent of Solidaires was attacked with direct volleys of tear gas. In Rennes, a young man lost an eye when he was struck by a flashball.

April 28 resulted in 214 arrests and 250 protesters injured.

Obviously, the government has adopted a simple strategy: crush the movement by playing on fear, intimidation and criminalization. It was neither Valls nor El Khomri nor Macron who intervened on behalf of the government, but Cazeneuve, Minister of the Interior and France's top cop. The govern-

ment is trying to dissociate the movement from the leaderships of the CGT and UNEF, with the aim of making the movement seem a minority.

Similarly, the tenors of the UMP and the National Front have called for banning the gatherings of Nuit Debout, in particular in the Place de la République. This strategy of tension is having no effect for the moment.

But the coming weeks will be difficult to navigate for those who are fighting for a confrontation and for a general strike.

The First of May will be the next stage of the mobilization. May 3 will be a new day of demonstrations, because that will be the start of the parlia-

mentary debate on the El Khomri law. The government will suffer from the internal contradictions in the Socialist Party, feeling once again internal pressure and having to reopen a public debate on the law that it had closed three weeks before.

Then, on May 10 and 17 there will be new strike days at the SNCF, during which the CGT will struggle to circumvent the demand for an ongoing strike.

The month of May will see many traps laid, but also the hope of finally making the different movements of confrontations converge and imposing a broad united movement. Today tens of thousands of activists are trying to overcome the obstacles in order to build a relationship of forces that will be sufficient to force the government to its knees.

ABORTION

Trouble Down in Texas (and elsewhere)

DIANNE FEELEY ·

Before the law was passed, Texas had 41 reproductive health clinics where abortions, contraceptives and tests for identifying cervical or breast cancer were offered. When the law first went into effect half shut down.

While the requirements were motivated by anti-abortion organizations and politicians, they were justified on the lying pretext of supporting women's welfare.

Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision established that women have the legal right to control their reproductive lives, the right wing has found that invoking support for women's health and safety is more effective than emphasizing fetal "rights."

HB2 requires that clinics must meet building specifications as if they were ambulatory surgical centers, and its doctors required to obtain admitting privileges at local hospitals. These unnecessary rules target only clinics where abortions are performed, not other medical clinics.

The fact is that these clinics have been operating safely under licensing requirements and annual inspections. Texas' solicitor General Scott A. Keller maintained HB2 was necessary for women's health and cited the statistic that annually 210 women (out of 72,500) suffer complications that required hospitalization. That means a complication rate of approximately three-tenths of one percent.

Before the new law eliminated a transfer agreement, women who needed to be hospitalized were able to receive the followup medical attention they needed.

Texas politicians, in passing the bill, hung their hat on the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1992,

Planned Parenthood v. Casey. This decision modified the *Roe v. Wade* decision by saying that since the state had an interest in unborn life, it could take certain steps to protect it, as long as it did not place an "undue burden" on a woman.

This decision opened the door to imposing mandated counseling (often with erroneous "facts"), a waiting period, and even banned a late-term procedure. The *Casey* decision allowed the state to persuade a woman to change her decision, but not to prevent her from exercising her rights. The right wing ran with that ruling, passing hundreds of laws that blatantly interfere with women's decisions.

Expert Opinions

Forty-five amicus briefs by a broad group of organizations and individuals — including leading medical experts, social scientists, legal experts, reproductive rights and other civil rights advocates — were submitted in opposition to the law. The briefs argued that neither requirement is medically necessary.

A dozen reproductive justice organizations highlighted the problems African-American women would face. Nine local and national Latina organizations explained how these restrictions reinforce barriers to Latina women's healthcare, violating the principle of human rights.

Legal and scientific experts pointed out that the acceptance of these restrictions by the Fifth Circuit's decision to uphold the law was in error. That court ruled that so long as "any conceivable rationale" for a regulation exists (even unsupported by data), judges should accept the justification.

The appeals court sharply disagreed with an earlier ruling, when Judge Lee Yeakel of the Federal

District Court in Austin said the restrictions created not only an undue burden but "a brutally effective system of abortion regulation."

Many of the amicus briefs go beyond the issue of abortion to talk about the need for high quality women's health. Prominent historians argued that the court should carefully scrutinize abortion regulations in the light of a long history of "protecting women" as a pretext to deny them rights.

At the one-hour hearing in March, Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. questioned whether the clinics had demonstrated they would be forced to close if the HB2 law was upheld.

But Justice Elena Kagan noted that 12 clinics did shut down when the law went into effect, reopening only when the ambulatory clinic portion of the bill was temporarily blocked. She remarked "it's almost like the perfect controlled experiment as to the effect of the law, isn't it?"

Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wondered, if the law were upheld, would the remaining clinics be able to handle that many abortions? But an even more important question is the one Kagan attempted to discover from a series of questions: What would happen to the 900,000 Texas women who live farther than 150 miles from a provider? Justice Stephen G. Breyer concluded that the consequence would be women dying of complications from self-induced abortions.

Shortly after the hearing Abby Goodnough's article "Under Texas Law, Women Pay More and Wait Longer for Abortions" ran in the New York Times (3/20/16).

She reported on the long drives, women sleeping in their cars in clinic parking lots, packed waiting rooms and — because of waiting for an appointment — more second-trimester abortion procedures. The dark side of the story is that with the closing of clinics near the Mexican border, more women attempt to induce abortions with herbs or misoprostol, a drug they can obtain across the border.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg noted that even a woman who took an abortifacient pill early in her pregnancy would have to use an ambulatory surgical center (ASC), commenting "Even if a complication arises, it will be after the woman is back home."

Both Justices Sotomayor and Kagan commented that other, more risky procedures, such as dental surgery, liposuctions and colonoscopies, are safely performed in a doctor's office. Justice Stephen Breyer flatly remarked that he couldn't see any basis under which to uphold the restrictions.

High Stakes

If the U.S. Supreme Court were to split in a 4-4 decision, the Fifth Circuit Court ruling that the Texas law was constitutional would stand. It could also opt for putting a decision off to another term or send the case back to the lower court.

Given that there seem to be at least four votes to throw out the law, there is the possibility of a 5-3 decision, in which case it would be binding on the 24 other states with similar legislation. However, given the presence of at least three anti-abortion judges (Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., Judges Clarence Thomas and Samuel Anthony Alito, Jr.), it's unlikely that the court would rule that the undue burden standard adopted in 1992 is just a ruse.

From the moment *Roe v. Wade* was announced, the right has worked diligently to block access to abortion through hundreds of state laws. Many seek to ban abortion after 12-20 weeks, ban specific techniques used in second-semester abortion, prescribe how medical abortion can be performed, regulate clinics where abortions are performed, and demand that teenagers seeking abortion have secured parental consent.

Another set of laws that have been used to thwart first-trimester abortions have insisted that clinics use outdated protocols for an abortion-inducing drug. Ohio, North Dakota and Texas mandate that abortion providers stick to procedures adopted by the Food and Drug Administration in 2000.

Arizona, Arkansas and Oklahoma passed similar laws that are pending legal challenge.

At the end of March the FDA approved an updated, evidence-based protocol that can be used up to 70 days after the beginning of the last menstrual period (instead of the earlier 49-day limit), and the second drug can be taken by a woman at home rather than being administered at a clinic.

Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights, noted that this change "underscores just how medically unnecessary and politically motivated restrictions on medication abortion in states like Texas and Oklahoma truly are...."

Chris France, executive director of Preterm, Ohio's largest abortion provider, said that before the state's restrictive law was passed, 10-15% of patients elected a medication abortion; afterwards only 2% were able to obtain one.

France noted, "Combined with other restrictions in our state, medication abortion has required four-in-person clinic visits, making this method too costly and cumbersome for most people....Now our providers will no longer be forced to practice medicine mandated by politicians whose goal is to shut us down." ("FED OKs new label for abortion drug," Sean Murphy, Detroit News, 3/31/16)

Already the fight for medical abortion is being challenged — the Arizona legislature moved within days of the FDA decision to enact a measure that would limit its impact.

Between 2011 and 2015 state legislatures enacted 288 restrictions on abortion. Currently 57% of U.S. women live in a state that is hostile to women's legal rights. Whenever abortion is illegal, some desperate women will choose self-induced abortion. It's way past time to end the use of women's bodies as a political football.

Donald Trump screwed up badly when he opined that "there must be punishment" for women who get abortions if they become illegal. Of course that's the real "right to life" agenda, but their political strategy depends on hiding it.

However, last year Indiana did sentence Purvi Patel to 20 years in prison on charges of feticide (causing the death of a fetus) and neglect of a dependent. Patel, who miscarried at six months, is the first woman in the country to be charged, convicted and sentenced on a feticide charge.

Prosecutors claimed she delivered a live baby after ordering abortion-inducing drugs online and attempting to terminate her pregnancy. A toxicology report found no evidence of drugs in her system.

Lynn Paltrow, executive director for National Advocates for Pregnant Women, stated that "What this conviction means is that anti-abortion laws will be used to punish pregnant woman."

The Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law 2013 study on arrests and forced interventions on pregnant U.S. women found that approximately 71% were low-income women and 59% were women of color.

Ted Cruz, true to form as the most vicious rightwinger in the 2016 presidential race, has exposed his own lie of standing as a "Constitutional conservative." He's not content with stripping hundreds of thousands of women of the basic health services that they depend on Planned Parenthood to provide. In itself that's a standard conservative policy, which of course would result in more — not fewer — abortions.

But Cruz goes further, saying that on "Day One" as president he'd "instruct the Justice Department to open a criminal investigation of Planned Parenthood." No probable cause, just an open-ended witch hunt. That's neither Constitutional nor conservative; it's Richard Nixon's Watergate White House — or perhaps in the context of the 2016 GOP presidential nominating contest, Cruz's contribution to the remake of "Animal House."

Women in the 1960s raised the slogan: "Our bodies, our lives, our right to decide." The state's job is to help make that dream come true, not block the way.

Against the Current

IRELAND

Easter Rising against colonial rule

SEAN HARKIN ·

From the steps of Dublin's General Post Office, Patrick Pearse with James Connolly at his side read the Proclamation to the Irish people announcing the establishment of an Irish Republic guaranteeing equality to all of Ireland's citizens, men and women:

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

In response, the British Army blitzed Dublin destroying the city center and indiscriminately killing civilians along with rebel fighters. Despite a heroic and courageous stand, the rebels—outnumbered, outgunned and exhausted—were forced to agree to an unconditional surrender. Insurrection leader Countess Constance Markievicz declared, "Well, Ireland was free for a week!"

The rebellion inspired the poet William Butler Yeats to write "Easter, 1916":

Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and McBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
And changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

Historian Piers Brendon, author of *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, described the immense impact of the Irish Rising as "blasting the widest breach in the ramparts of the British Empire since Yorktown," referring to the decisive victory over the British Army during the American Revolutionary War.

In the early 1900s, Britain held 50 colonies and 345 million people under its rule. By 1914, the economic competition between Britain and the other imperial powers spilled over into an all-out industrial war for geopolitical dominance across the globe.

The rising was designed to inflict the maximum damage to the prestige of the British Empire while it was consumed with war on the continent. Ireland, Britain's oldest and closest colony, defied imperial rule, and others under the boot of the Union Jack would follow.

In the weeks following the uprising, leaders of the rebellion were executed, including Pearse and Connolly. Markievicz was sentenced to death, but

her life was spared because British authorities feared the reaction to the execution of a woman.

Martial law was declared across Ireland. Thousands of suspected rebels were arrested and interned. The British commander-in-chief in Ireland, General Sir John Maxwell, hoped that by ruthlessly punishing rebellion participants Britain could instill widespread fear to offset the possibility of further resistance among the Irish population. He declared:

In view of the gravity of the rebellion and its connection with German intrigue and propaganda, and in view of the great loss of life and destruction of property resulting therefrom, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, has found it imperative to inflict the most severe sentences on the known organizers of this detestable rising and on those Commanders who took an active part in the actual fighting which occurred. It is hoped that these examples will be sufficient to act as a deterrent to intriguers, and to bring home to them that the murder of His Majesty's liege subjects, or other acts calculated to imperil the safety of the Realm, will not be tolerated.

Maxwell's strategy backfired spectacularly. The insurrection and its vicious repression assisted in unleashing a political, military and social whirlwind that made Ireland impossible to govern.

A combination of guerrilla warfare creating liberated zones across Ireland and workers' action, including general strikes, mass boycotts and occupations, ultimately led to the expulsion of the British state from 26 of Ireland's 32 counties.

Today Ireland's political establishment is embarrassed by a violent rebellion against what was the world's most powerful imperial state. For example, John Bruton, the former Fine Gael Taoiseach, claims the rebellion "damaged" the psyche of the Irish people through the introduction of "brutal violence."

This is nonsense.

In 1916, Ireland was at times held militarily as a British colony by tens of thousands of British troops. The memory of Britain's responsibility for Ireland's Great Hunger between 1846-51—in which 1 million lives were lost and another 1 million were forced to flee the country—burned brightly.

The Ulster Volunteers were formed in 1912 to resist through armed rebellion the British government's democratically mandated Home Rule for Ireland. The militia illegally imported thousands of guns from Germany with the encouragement of British Army generals and sections of the British ruling class.

Home Ruler John Redmond, the leader of the dominant Irish Parliamentary Party, encouraged Irish Catholics and Protestants to sacrifice themselves together in the service of the British war effort on the European continent during the First World War. His recruiting efforts assisted in convincing 200,000 Irish to fight; nearly 50,000 of them died.

In the Battle of the Somme alone, 300,000 soldiers perished, including 3,500 from Ireland. The Easter rebellion happened in the context of the slaughter and barbarism of the Great War, which consumed 17 million lives and destroyed much of Europe.

Without a doubt, the insurrection was a response to Ireland's brutally enforced colonial status, the trampling of Home Rule's democratic mandate, the inevitability of partition and the growing hatred for the war to "defend little Catholic Belgium" and save "civilization."

The Irish rebels aimed to strike a blow for Irish freedom while the British Army was stretched due to its efforts to hold its great territorial empire. The goal of the rising was an independent Irish Republic free from empire and monarchy.

For Connolly and others, the rising could open the door to a struggle to overthrow capitalism and imperialism in Ireland and across Europe. Explaining his perspective in 1914, Connolly wrote:

Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until

the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shriveled on the funeral pyre of the last warlord.

The 100th anniversary is an opportunity to challenge many of the myths encouraged about the rising. For example, the idea the rebellion was simply a Christ-like blood sacrifice with no chance of success to awaken the soul of a predominantly Catholic and conservative people to struggle to free Ireland is widely accepted.

To the contrary, Connolly rejected all talk of blood sacrifice as nonsense. At the outbreak of the Great War, the Irish Republican Brotherhood committed itself to striking a blow against Britain during the war. Similarly, after the outbreak of the war, Connolly, who was leader of the Irish Citizen Army and Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), argued in 1914:

Should a German army land in Ireland tomorrow, we should be perfectly justified in joining it if by doing so we could rid this country once and for all from its connection to the Brigand Empire that drags us unwillingly into this war.

Should the working class of Europe, rather than slaughter each other for the benefit of kings and financiers, proceed tomorrow to erect barricades all over Europe, to break up bridges and destroy the transport service that war might be abolished, we should be perfectly justified in following such a glorious example and contributing our aid to the final dethronement of the vulture classes that rob and rule the world.

But pending either of these consummations it is our manifest duty to take all possible action to save the poor from the horrors this war has in store.

Yes, the leaders of the uprising were "idealists" and "dreamers," but they organized and planned the rebellion on the assumption there was a possibility it could be victorious. An Irish Republic would not only be proclaimed but "enthroned" also. They hoped to mobilize many thousands of the Irish

Volunteers. They obtained some 20,000 guns and 1 million rounds of ammunition from Germany for the rising.

Connolly and others believed Ireland had become a political and social powder keg awaiting a spark. Recruitment to the British war effort plummeted as knowledge of the continental carnage grew.

Opposition to the war effort and the plan to partition Ireland was so great that when the British government was forced to introduce conscription to keep the supply of raw recruits going for the battlefield, Ireland was excluded.

Ireland's main labor bodies, the Dublin Trades Council, the ITGWU and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, pledged their opposition to the war and to conscription. Support for Redmond's Home Rule party drained away as the constitutional road to Irish self-government collapsed.

On the eve of the rising, the British Navy sighted the German ship loaded with arms for the insurgents and it had to be scuttled before it could land. Leaders of the rising met to debate its prospects now that it was clear fewer insurgents could be mobilized and fewer arms would be available.

Opposition movements in Ireland, as throughout Europe, were already facing increasing repression as their message connected with growing numbers of people embittered by war propaganda encouraging them to become cannon fodder for the imperial war machine.

Ireland's insurgent leaders would be charged with treason for aiding the enemy during the war and face execution as the British authorities became fully cognizant of the scale of the plans for the uprising. For these reasons, they decided to continue with the rising. They calculated it would be more effective to fight and be defeated than not act and face annihilation.

The rising was defeated, but it helped inspire anti-colonial resistance across the world. It should be viewed as part of the growing wave of rebellion and

revolution in response to impoverishment and slaughter of the imperial war.

Subsequently, Connolly's perspective that the whole of Europe, and not just Ireland, was ripe for revolutionary upheaval was completely vindicated. In the weeks before the uprising, he restated his aspirations for the coming rising and the force capable of bringing it about:

We are out for the Irish. But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-owning landlord; not the sweating, profit grinding capitalist; not the sleek and oily lawyer; not the prostitute pressman—the hired liars of the enemy. Not these, but the Irish working class—the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared.

Executed in May 1916 for his leadership of the rebellion, it was a great tragedy that Connolly was not there to lead the great political and social upheaval inspired by his ideas and actions that stormed Ireland from 1918 on toward the goal of a workers' republic.

The focus on the minority of insurgents during Easter week events honoring the rising misses the fact that hundreds of thousands were drawn into the great struggle that finally broke Britain's hold. Indeed, the scale of social unrest terrified the elite who would eventually become Ireland's new rulers. These people had nothing in common with Connolly or even with the more moderate republican leaders of the 1916 Rising.

Today, the Irish elite would prefer to ignore the blow struck against the tyrant empire but must commemorate the event because it is a pivotal event in the creation of modern Ireland and the rebels are viewed as heroes by many the Irish people.

Ireland's contemporary rulers have ruthlessly imposed austerity, promoted the country as a low-wage tax haven to U.S. corporations and allowed the U.S. military to use Shannon airport as a stopover for bombing runs in the Middle East. And, of course, Ireland remains partitioned.

In recent years, they have faced a massive protest movement opposing water charges, and in recent elections the dominant political parties had their worst showing in decades. They would like to keep the rebellion as part of Ireland's far-off political history with no relevance for today. Too much talk about rebellions against injustice and imperialism in this context can encourage people to think about how to bring about society-wide change.

The Easter 1916 Rising was a political rupture attempting to break from the politics of submission and compromise. Therefore, revealing its true history leads to a scrutiny of the injustice, lack of genuine democracy and independence in modern Ireland today.

The gulf between the 1916 rebel generation and the present leaders of the Irish Republic is a tremendous one. High ideals and great aspirations animated the actions of the rebels. In contrast, Ireland's political elite sacrificed Irish people with massive debts created by bankers, developers and the richest sections of society.

The 100th anniversary should be celebrated as a stand against imperialism and for Irish self-determination. However, the goals of the Irish revolution are still unmet. Ireland needs another rising involving millions opposed to austerity, imperial war and social injustice.

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MIDDLE EAST

Disasters in Syria and Yemen

DAVID FINKEL ·

Against the Current: What does the recently announced "cease fire" in Syria mean, and what are the chances it will hold?

Gilbert Achcar: Please note, first of all, that it is not officially called a cease-fire but rather a "cessation of hostilities." The main difference is that Russia and the Syrian regime, and the US-led coalition, will continue to fire on so-called terrorist forces, supposedly meaning ISIS and the Nusra Front.

For Russia and the Assad regime, this can be seized as a pretext for targeting other groups in the opposition, which is what the opposition has been denouncing. This shows you how fragile this whole agreement is. If it's more or less holding right now, it's because all parties need to take a deep breath after the intensive battles of the past few weeks.

However, the continuation of that will depend on the resumption of political negotiations. Nothing has emerged up to now that would lead to any optimism in that respect. We shall see, probably in the next few days rather than weeks: if the "cessation of hostilities" collapses, it will bode ill for the whole process.

ATC: Do you see any possible track toward ending the war?

GA: This can only happen if there's a major change in the position of the Syrian regime. The minimum that might be seen by the opposition as the basis of agreement would be a transitional government, with Bashar al-Assad stepping down — any transitional set-up that would be presided over by Assad would be a non-starter.

The United States has been waffling on this whole question — sometimes saying Assad must step

down, other times talking about him staying in place during a transition period. If Obama and Kerry try to impose on the opposition an agreement with Assad remaining in position, it's bound to fail, all the more because U.S. leverage is limited for having done nothing to stop Russia, let alone Iran, from intervening massively on the side of the regime.

The United States has consistently vetoed the main means that the opposition needed from the start and still needs, i.e. anti-aircraft weapons. The major leverage Washington could have now would be to promise to lift this veto! But that would be a complete change of strategy on Washington's part, going back to when parts of the Obama administration advocated enabling the opposition to become a real threat to the regime. This policy was not accepted by Obama.

There was a basic contradiction in Obama's position, when he said in 2012 that he wanted a "Yemen solution" for Syria, by which he meant the agreement that ended the 2011 uprising in Yemen, with a coalition government formed and the president stepping down while keeping main instruments of power in his hands.

That was what the whole Obama administration wanted in Syria: none of them was in favor of toppling the Assad regime. But Obama thought he could get his "Yemen solution" by refraining from giving the opposition the means to fight effectively, fearing that the situation might get out of control and lead to state collapse.

The result, however, has been that the regime felt free to use all its means in destroying the country and massacring the people, believing that it could thus win eventually. And yet it has been twice close

to a major defeat. But each time, it has been rescued by a massive involvement of its patrons, first by Iran in 2013 and then Russia since last fall, with Washington passively contemplating, if not acquiescing.

ATC: At the present moment, how would you describe U.S. strategic policy — or paralysis, as the case may be — with regard to both Syria and now Libya?

GA: Barack Obama was elected in part on the argument that he had opposed George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq. He came in with a view that appeared to be catering to the antiwar sentiment, although he kept some ambiguity in making a distinction between the "good war" in Afghanistan and the "bad" or "stupid war" in Iraq. He actually organized a "surge" in Afghanistan that proved such a total failure.

Obama took part very reluctantly in the intervention in Libya in 2011. He thought he could operate by some kind of remote control as he was quite reluctant to put "boots on the ground," and the Libyan insurgents themselves were clearly opposed to any such perspective. The result, here again, has been dismal failure.

So there you are — an administration that gives the image of a weak and paralyzed United States, which annoys much of the U.S. imperial establishment, especially due to the sharp contrast with the interventionist boldness of Putin's Russia.

ATC: Why do you think we hear so little about the terrible war in Yemen, and how do you read that situation?

GA: You don't hear much because, first of all, the poorer a country is the less you hear about it. That's why millions of people in Central Africa can die from war or famine with hardly any notice. It's never the scale of the tragedy that dictates media attention, but the country's strategic importance.

Syria became a major issue rather recently, and the key determinant has been the impact of the refugee crisis. When big waves of refugees began reaching

the European Union, the panic started in Western capitals. The Russian military intervention took advantage of this Western panic, thus contributing to giving the Syrian crisis such a global dimension.

On the other hand, the situation in Yemen is quite complex. Basically, you have the former president Saleh, the one who was brought down by the 2011 uprising, attempting a comeback using the resources of power that he had maintained and allying with one religious fundamentalist movement (the Houthis, repressed by Saleh when he was in power) from the sect to which he himself belongs, which is related to Shia Islam. Hence Iran's support of this alliance.

The "legitimate" regime of president Hadi, who was elected in 2012, is fighting back, with the Saudis and their allies intervening on behalf of this government. In sum, it is as if Morsi, the 2012-elected president in Egypt, was fighting back against the coup led by Sisi. The Saudi-led bombing is causing a lot of civilian damage, however, which is the inevitable result of using air force against densely populated areas.

It is a criminal intervention, which must be condemned. But to condemn it while saying nothing about Russia's bombing of Syria and Iran's heavy involvement in that same country — which are equally destructive and murderous, and actually much more so — amounts to using a double standard.

There's no way to predict the outcome of these ongoing conflicts. No one can say how any of them will end, and insofar as they're stalemated they can go on for a very long time. Western governments, with John Kerry leading the chorus, are trying to foster negotiated agreements everywhere — Libya, Syria, Yemen, even Egypt — so as to stop the descent into mayhem and try to stabilize the region again.

ATC: The scale of the refugee crisis has become overwhelming. What do you see as its longterm implications both for the Middle East and for Europe? (NOTE: This conversa-

tion preceded the announcement of a horrific deal in progress between the Turkish regime and the European Union to force refugees who have reached Greece back to Turkey.)

GA: The country where I am based in Europe, Britain, like the United States, has taken in a very small number of refugees compared to countries like Sweden relative to its population, or Germany. This is utterly indecent and shameful.

The fact is that Europe and, above all, the United States bear a major responsibility for all the tragedies that are producing the recent refugee waves, whether Afghanistan and Iraq, which many of them invaded, or Syria where they have let the ongoing catastrophe unfold. It is the moral duty of these countries to welcome the refugees and to stop these wars.

The European Union members engaged in a "beggar-thy-neighbor" attitude on the issue of the refugees, especially the countries where the refugees first arrive coming from Turkey. Several EU governments refuse the principle of population-proportional quotas for accepting refugees. It shows again the limitations of an institution like

the EU, when faced with an economic crisis that has already created huge strains on the euro (common currency) and provoked a potential British exit.

ATC: Tell us a little about what to expect in your new book.

GA: It will be coming out in May. The main title *Morbid Symptoms* [1] is taken from the famous quote by Gramsci about when the old order is dying and the new one cannot be born, and it applies to the situation in the Arab countries described by the book's subtitle: *Relapse in the Arab Uprising*.

It is basically an analysis of the present stage of the regional situation, against the background that I analyzed in *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* [2].

I discuss the counterrevolution taking place since 2013 within what I have called from the start a long-term revolutionary process, which will see a lot more ups and downs over the course of decades. The book focuses on two especially salient cases, Syria and Egypt, which are of central importance, but it also gives an overview of the broader regional situation.

Against the Current

USA

Politics of the New Abnormal

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

After New York, conventional punditry is announcing that the nomination race is "over." But for Sanders' activist supporters the fight remains very much on, as they organize to carry "the political revolution" all the way to Philadelphia, both inside and on the streets outside the Democratic convention — and beyond. This is a movement about issues that vastly transcend one primary season.

The leading Republican candidate, a billionaire driven by ego more than ideology, is running as a maverick pseudo-populist anti-immigrant racist and economic nationalist. The prospect of a Donald Trump nomination, let alone possible presidency, embarrasses the U.S. political establishment and drives global capital into near panic.

The main GOP challenger Ted Cruz, formerly a far-right fringe figure, has become the hope of the Republican "party establishment" and rightwing media, especially in the wake of the Wisconsin primary. The mainstream re-imaging of Cruz is a startling phenomenon in itself. His economic program, calling for not only a "flat tax" but returning to the gold standard, would be a formula to produce a massive global Depression — and the Republican leadership knows all this, even as they've turned toward him in their desperate "Never Trump" effort.

Although his most extreme proposals would never be enacted, the sudden mainstreaming of a character like Cruz is a rather spectacular manifestation of a new political abnormal. While some on the left are focusing on Trump as a supposedly "fascist" threat, the reality is that Cruz is a far more serious and ideological rightwing menace, posing as a "small-government constitutional conservative."

The magnitude of that lie is revealed in his pledge to "instruct the Justice Department to investigate Planned Parenthood and prosecute criminal violations" — i.e. to pursue a political witch hunt characteristic of Richard Nixon's Watergate White House.

But does the Republican spectacle signal a sharp turn to the right in the American electorate? Hardly. The popular energy and enthusiasm has poured into the campaign of the avowed democratic socialist Sanders, although the Democratic delegate count remains securely in the hands of Hillary Clinton, the dead-centrist candidate of Wall Street and finance capital — especially when her super-delegate institutional support is factored in.

The African-American vote — based on "pragmatic" calculations explored by Malik Miah in this issue — has been her security blanket, especially in the South where Black people's rights and lives are under severe attacks from rightwing state legislatures. She's also the predetermined favorite of much of the entrenched labor leadership, despite serious dissent within the membership of many unions.

Clinton, however, inspires hardly anyone. Her hegemony over the party machine is based mainly on seniority, the party's inertia and the near-absence of leadership on its left-liberal wing, a vacuum that the political independent Sanders has effectively filled.

Blood and Cynicism

Many issues that deserve attention remain entirely ignored. For example, there's plenty of jabber about who knows how to destroy ISIS, but the made-in-USA human rights catastrophe in Honduras won't be an election issue. That includes the fact that Hillary Clinton's hands are dripping with the blood of Berta Cáceres, the indigenous and environmen-

tal leader who was gunned down on March 3, and many other activists murdered since the 2009 military coup.

That coup, blessed and endorsed by the Obama administration during Clinton's Secretary of State tenure, returned this Central American country to the rule of death squads, drug gangs and multinational corporations. Thousands of its young people have fled through Mexico to the U.S. border, where they've been interned and deported — frequently to be killed on their return to Honduras (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/20/minors-honduras-killed_n_5694986.html).

While the sideshow over Clinton's private email server occupies acres of media coverage, the murder of Cáceres was one or two days' third-tier news and Clinton's responsibility for the Honduran tragedy unmentioned by anyone (Bernie Sanders included), certainly not by the Republicans. It will not be discussed as the Democrats celebrate "coming together" following the primaries.

Clinton is actually a rather vulnerable and far from exciting candidate, at a time when the party's young and working class voting base is hurting, angry and eager for real change. Her election in November is not certain but probable, primarily due to the fact of her being — barring some unpredictable implosion or an unexpected outcome of the Republican convention — the only solidly "reliable" bourgeois politician in the presidential field. Her general election campaign can be expected to swing well to the right as she cynically seeks mainstream Republican votes.

Even if the Republican leadership should manage to dump Trump, and either elevate Cruz or pull an emergency relief-pitcher candidate from the bullpen at their Cleveland convention, the resulting internal explosion would likely doom them in November 2016.

None of this means that the Republican Party is "finished" as some superficial pundits proclaim. It will retain control of the rigged-and-gerrymandered House of Representatives; it will still hold a

small majority or large minority in the Senate; it controls the bulk of state houses, where the most brutal anti-choice, voter suppression and reactionary economic and social policies are running amok. Above all, the capitalist ruling class needs the Republican Party and will not let it die, whatever spectacular tea-smoking dysfunction it may present at a given moment.

What Future for Sanders' Movement?

For those of us on the socialist left, the biggest issue is what will come from the passion and commitment of millions of voters and tens of thousands of activists who are feeling the Bern. It's clear that there's a powerful desire and commitment among grassroots organizers to keep the movement going not just through, but beyond, the Democratic convention and November election.

The April 1 meeting of Labor for Bernie (www.laborforbernie.org) at the Labor Notes conference, for example, was a lively event where a couple hundred participants discussed both short-term election tactics and longer-range strategic perspectives.

Breaking through the fundamental contradiction between the potential of this movement, and the political structure within which it's currently ensnared, could set the course of U.S. politics for a generation. If as we've stated capital needs the Republican Party, it equally needs the Democratic Party and absolutely will not allow it to become the vehicle for anything resembling "democratic socialism," let alone the incubator of revived militant labor or social movements.

We'd be more than thrilled to see Bernie Sanders' campaign carry forward as an independent candidacy. Sanders himself from the beginning ruled out that option, and we anticipate that he will likely join the "party unity" chorus for defeating the rightwing menace.

That menace is real, but the tragic truth is that the Democrats' "unity" means channeling the "political revolution" into the cynical triangulation that

shoves the needs of working people, immigrant rights, Black Lives Matter — and everything else that matters too — to the back of the Clinton campaign bus, in exchange for some meaningless convention platform verbiage and empty promises.

So-called "free trade" is one intensely heated issue where it's important for the Sanders movement not to be strait-jacketed by the Democrats. Indeed, one of the most important political fights looming beyond 2016 is whether tens of millions of white working class folks gravitate to the reactionary, racist economic nationalism of Donald Trump or can be won to a new progressive, pro-labor and emancipatory politics. The Democratic Party, a political instrument that answers to the demands of corporate power, never can or will incubate that kind of program.

If there's one concrete positive result from the primary season — with high working-class voter turnouts for both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump — it's been widespread popular revulsion against the cancer of global "free trade" agreements.

While Trump demagogically and falsely proclaims that "America has stopped winning" because "our trade negotiators are incompetent," Sanders has correctly pointed out that the real problem is how these deals are secretly (and quite competently) worked out by and for multinational corporations. Sanders could be stronger in emphasizing how this kind of "free trade" hurts workers and destroys health, safety and environmental standards in all countries, but the basic point has come through.

It will be very difficult this year — impossible, we dare hope — for the Obama White House and "bi-partisan" Congressional leadership to ram through the appalling Trans Pacific Partnership. (Beware the treachery of a post-election lame-duck session.) In any case, the kind of grassroots pressure that finally compelled the Obama administration to reject the ecocidal Keystone XL Pipeline project will be needed to stop the TPP from being enacted — if not

in the final days of the current administration, then the early phase of the next one.

Is there a way forward? What Sanders has accomplished, astonishingly — yet tellingly, coming from outside the Democratic apparatus — is to show how his version of a socialist message inspires people who are experiencing the sharp end of the stick of neoliberal capitalism. Many thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of them may decide for themselves that they're socialists too, and begin drawing the appropriate conclusions.

That poses the most profound opportunity and challenge for the organized socialist movement in the United States, as poorly organized and fragmented as our forces have been for many decades now. How the U.S. socialist left responds and reorganizes itself will be the focus of many strategic discussions way beyond the 2016 elections, and far beyond the scope of the present editorial — but Against the Current certainly intends to participate in the process.

Socialism entails much more than saving social security and making billionaires pay taxes. It requires a political and social revolution to change the fundamental structures of production and property, and to get at the roots of racial oppression and patriarchy. That's a set of questions for a necessary extensive discussion that will unfold way beyond the election cycle.

Right here and now, the urgent necessity for the army of Sanders supporters must be not to give up the fight. The results of the primaries and the delegate count are important, but not decisive in shaping the future. Don't take the dead-end corporate politics of Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party as "the best we can do."

If there's a local, union or citywide campaign organization that can stay together as a formation for social justice struggles, so much the better. Have a good look at Jill Stein's campaign (www.jill2016.com) and the Green Party. Stay on message against the TPP. Defend our immigrant communities against raids, deportations and anti-

Muslim bigotry. Build support for Black Lives Matter and the struggle to protect voting rights against voter suppression laws.

Mass action can get results, whether it's at home in the progress of the Fight for \$15 campaign — or abroad, where street protests forced out the prime minister of Iceland over the Panama Papers revelations of offshore accounts and monstrous tax evasion by the global one-tenth of one percent. And

could there be any clearer demonstration of the rigged system that Bernie Sanders is talking about?

The "normal" pattern of the U.S. political cycle is that election years derail social movements, draining their energies into whatever looks like the lesser evil. Perhaps this most abnormal of elections will prove to be an exception.

Against the Current

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



FRANCE

What's Next for Nuit Debout?

STATHIS KOUVELAKIS · 31 May 2016

Stathis Kouvelakis, a member of Greece's Popular Unity, who was active in the 1980s as a member in France's Communist Party (PCF) and later the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire and Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, has been following the situation in France closely. Here, he speaks with Révolution Permanente editor Emmanuel Barot and columnist Damien Bernard about the "authoritarian statism" of France's government, the competing tactics and ideologies of the movement against the proposed Labor Law, and what lessons can be drawn from the experience of Syriza in Greece.

The preceding period was marked by the government's massive authoritarian offensive, particularly after the November 13 attacks and the introduction of an extended state of emergency.

Today we have entered into a new phase: a fresh episode of class struggle sparked by the bill for the Labor Law, with powerful mobilizations backed by a largely favorable public opinion. How would you characterize this radical change of atmosphere?

In reality, the government's securitarian offensive and the state of emergency in place since last November represent nothing more than the next threshold in a process of hardening authoritarianism that had begun already long prior to this. In that sense, the Sarkozy period marked a turning point, even if elements of this had already existed beforehand.

Two different terrains served as Sarkozy's laboratory: on the one hand, what we in France call the "banlieue question," namely the securitarian and

authoritarian management of populations that are heavily stigmatized and targeted by state racism. On the other hand, the so-called anti-terrorist laws, which go back at least as far as September 11, 2001 — and in reality, even before that, with the first initiatives dating back to Alain Peyrefitte's late-1970s "anti-troublemaker" laws.

Such laws put in place an expanded repressive surveillance mechanism in all advanced Western capitalist countries. This "authoritarian statism" — as Nicos Poulantzas defined it — thus corresponds to phenomena with deep roots, and without doubt figures like Nicolas Sarkozy and Manuel Valls — or (past interior ministers) Charles Pasqua and Jean-Pierre Chevènement before them — only incarnate these bigger tendencies which are now at work.

These mechanisms' implementation was facilitated by the relative listlessness of social movements in France since 2010 and the defeat, that same year, of the movement against the pension reform. Evidently, these mechanisms sought to preemptively neutralize popular mobilization.

But what is happening now represents a setback for the logic of this securitarian and authoritarian turn, precisely because this turn is premised on the possibility of preemptively heading off popular resistance and stopping it passing a certain threshold of visibility and condensation.

The very fact that the mobilization against the Labor Law has broken through these thresholds is already a first defeat for these policies, and contributes to driving a political crisis — a crisis of representation that already existed in latent form, but is now accelerating before our very eyes.

At the short-term level, I think the Hollande administration thought that they could get just about anything through, as we saw with the proclamation

of the state of emergency after the attacks. This was a real leap forward, translating into not only authoritarian policies but also harsh neoliberal reforms, as symbolized by the Labor Law (also known as the El Khomri bill). In fact, we could speak of a new political form of the neoliberal straitjacket.

On one side is the state of emergency. On the other side we have the boundless individualization of labor power and of the mechanisms of professional relations, with the complete dismantling of some of the guarantees that still existed in terms of collective bargaining. The two go hand-in-hand. An authoritarian neoliberal regime is now emerging, although it is far from certain that it will stabilize itself.

Indeed, this onslaught by the government and the state authorities has also revealed how far they have been weakened — the fact that François Hollande, the government, the Socialist Party (PS), and representative politics in France more broadly are all simultaneously more and more out of step with French society. Today what we see in France is this separation coming to light. So we are seeing an extremely important turning point in the existing power relations, opening up perspectives that effectively didn't exist even three months ago.

In your 2007 book *La France en révolte* you used the term "hegemonic instability" to characterize the political situation and the crisis reflected by Sarkozyism. And the current situation confirms that this also applies in the longer term.

But as instability becomes entrenched, conversely the structures of the republican system and the state itself are being reinforced. How far do you think that the system itself is being weakened? How far would you go in diagnosing a crisis of the state apparatus?

I would say that we're seeing a deepening of the preexisting crisis of political representation, but that this has not yet become a "crisis of the state" — a generalized crisis of a type with the one we've seen in Greece since 2011. In that case, not only has

the political system collapsed, but the whole system of class domination has been profoundly shaken, giving rise to what Gramsci called an "organic crisis" or, in Lenin's terms, a "national crisis."

In France we are still not there yet, but we would need a real assessment of Sarkozyism in order to deepen our analysis on that score. In my book I defined Sarkozyism as an "authoritarian populism," an expression I took from Stuart Hall. It was a project very clearly inspired by Thatcherism and US neoconservatism.

Faced with the conjunction of the 2005 vote against the European Constitutional Treaty, the banlieue revolt, and the movement against the Contrat Première Embauche (the CPE, a neoliberal labor law aimed at young workers) which had forced the De Villepin government to bite the dust, Sarkozy's victory expressed a systemic counteroffensive. His victory in the 2007 presidential elections signaled a defeat for the social movements of that period and revealed the political impotence of the Left, and more particularly of the radical left.

However, the assessment of Sarkozyism as a project should also be nuanced. Sarkozy incontestably succeeded in doing part of what he wanted to achieve. That is, he succeeded in remodeling the dominant discourse, both in largely legitimizing the securitarian-authoritarian turn, and above all in pushing back the limits of what can be said in the space of mainstream politics.

He forced a certain number of themes like national identity onto the agenda, and increased the extent of state racism, accentuating its — obviously preexisting — Islamophobic aspect. He banalized themes that had previously been the prerogative of the far right and of the most reactionary wing of his own camp. He thus legitimized something new: a discourse of confrontation, overtly proclaimed as such, even at the highest level of the state. This was without doubt a break even with the Chirac period, for example.

A "friend-enemy" distinction, as Carl Schmitt would have said.

Exactly. Sarkozy said: there's an enemy, and it's an enemy within that we have to confront. Some even went as far as to say that this was a civil-war discourse. Perhaps that was exaggerated, but in Sarkozy there was a symbolic and discursive violence preparing the ground for something resembling a form of low-intensity civil war, reinforcing the fully concrete violence of the repressive apparatuses that were already in operation.

I think that in this regard Sarkozy won a decisive battle, and that in that sense there were elements of hegemonic stabilization, or of resolution of the hegemonic instability that had previously existed. Conversely, he did not succeed in doing something that the French bourgeoisie has not succeeded in doing since at least the end of Gaullism. That is, he did not succeed in constructing a political apparatus that could allow the stabilization of a system of representation solid enough to put the institutional and political system under lock and key.

Sarkozy, or rather Sarkozyism, partly succeeded, but Sarkozy himself was defeated in the 2012 presidential election and his party, the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), proved rather fragile as a political machine. The recomposition to which Sarkozy gave impulse showed its limits — and we can clearly see as much today, with the proliferation of primary contests on the Right and the setbacks to Sarkozy's own attempted comeback.

In this context, an old duffer like (mid-1990s prime minister, now possible presidential candidate) Alain Juppé can appear on the scene as the "man of providence" for the Right. At the other pole, the Socialist Party has been profoundly weakened, and of course the National Front is profiting from the very great instability and brokenness of France's two-party system.

So what we have is continual instability, and in principle this opens up possibilities for oppositional forces. But nonetheless we have to take account of the fact that some of the fundamentals have decomposed. And in my view the radical left, the anti-capitalist left, is far from having seriously drawn up

a balance sheet of Sarkozyism. That weighs down heavily on the current situation.

You have referred to Poulantzas's definition of authoritarian statism. There is another approach that analyzes the current structural transformation in terms of a reinforcement of Bonapartist tendencies.

If these tendencies are borne by the capitalist state in general, they also have a long history in the specific case of authoritarian French republicanism. Do you think this theoretical definition in terms of Bonapartist elements or tendencies is compatible with the concept of authoritarian statism?

On that point, we have to go back to Gramsci. He spoke of a "Bonapartism without Bonaparte," in the sense that in a situation of political crisis we see a retreat in the role of representative institutions and a reinforcement of the executive, with the establishment of direct links between segments of the dominant classes and the state personnel who concretely manage the state and implement policies. Traditional — essentially, party-based — mediation functions are thus short-circuited, and we enter into a very deep crisis of political representation.

I think that this notion of Bonapartism without Bonaparte better suits the current situation. Firstly, because there is indeed no Bonaparte. The least we could say of François Hollande is that he is a feeble, pathetic figure. Of course, his actions are extremely harmful and even dangerous, but he himself lacks any of the characteristics of a charismatic figure arriving on the scene to offer a way out of the crisis of political representation.

The concept of authoritarian statism also adds something, here, in that it places emphasis on the material transformations of state apparatuses, and not only the development of superstructures, the crisis of political representation, and the manner of its resolution. The media apparatus in part fulfills not only the role of spreading the dominant discourse, but also the role of reorganizing the political terrain. That is something the classic parties of

the dominant classes are no longer able to do, given that they are extremely weakened and discredited.

We clearly see this in Latin American countries where the media are truly the political nerve center of the dominant power bloc — much more so than the greatly weakened bourgeois political parties — and also in Italy with Berlusconi. Yet this is also true of France, with Sarkozyism and with what's now happening as oligarchs with a multiplicity of ties to the state and political personnel take control of the most important media.

But authoritarian statism also corresponds to what Poulantzas called "the politicization of the top administration": the fact that there is a very great continuity in state policies, effectively guaranteed in spite of the alternation of different governments, which is of very limited significance and can become increasingly rapid on account of the current instability.

What ensures the perennial continuation of the ruling classes' policy is the body of top functionaries, which increasingly assumes the role of the "party of the bourgeoisie." This "party" stands at the summit of the state, and not only there, on account of its proliferation of ties with the dominant fractions of capital, and in particular finance.

Let's turn to the current mobilization. Do you think that the Labor Law marks a threshold that Sarkozy could not himself reach; that it's a new phase in challenging many of the conquests of the workers' movement, even if it was somewhat mishandled? And given all this, what is your view of the mobilizations, Nuit Debout, etc., now that we're past the first round of mobilization, and have reached a second phase correlating to the beginning of the parliamentary debate?

Managing labor power — "factory legislation," as Marx described in *Capital* — has always been at the center of neoliberal policies. Sarkozy inflicted defeats upon some of the most advanced centers of worker resistance: we saw how he imposed a mini-

mum service level on the national rail and on public transport, the combative sector par excellence since the end of the 1980s. He pushed through flexibilization, dismantling or undermining what remained of the Aubry laws (centered on the thirty-five-hour week).

But without doubt the El Khomri bill marks the breaking of a further threshold, because it means the unlimited individualization of work relations, weakening the law in favor of the contract. This is what the famous "inversion of the hierarchy of norms" means: the fact that the company and company agreements now become central, because they are currently the terrain most favorable to capital.

But also because the logic of this law itself bears the will to weaken and recompose the trade union terrain. The idea — perfectly integrated into the bosses' and government strategy — is to do everything they can to favor the moderate French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT), a force that has made a specialty of managing this type of organization of labor relations as consensually as possible and at the company level. Hence the relative advance of its implantation in the private sector.

The resistance to this extremely brutal offensive has come from two sides, as an extension of the prior 2006 anti-CPE and 2010 anti-pensions reform movements. On the one hand it has come from wage laborers, and particularly in the upsurge of combativity from below, for example in the General Confederation of Labor (CGT). At that confederation's recent fifty-first congress we saw the combativity of the grassroots, but this upsurge is diffuse and is currently struggling to crystallize in a particular sector in a way that could act as a locomotive able to pull along other sectors.

This is one of the main things at stake in the current period: seeing which sector could play this locomotive role. In many previous cycles of mobilization it was the rail workers who were in the front rank, whereas in 2010 it was mainly chemical plant workers — and particularly those at oil refineries. Indeed, it was the CGT's chemicals federation that

made use of some rather tough means of mobilization.

On the other hand, the reaction has come from the youth, in which sense we have a certain continuity with the movements over the CPE and pensions. The high-school and student youth are already fully conscious of what's awaiting them, but added to that, the students also have one foot in life as wage earners, and a whole chunk of them is integrated into the workforce in the broad sense. This is now totally established fact, and indeed a banalized one.

This opens up new possibilities for a convergence between workers and youth, potentially in a more advanced way than was the case in the past. Although mass participation is lower than in previous cycles, the convergence between workers is now perhaps more advanced given the forms the movement has taken in high schools, university faculties (with all the limits we know already), and also the Nuit Debout movement, of which youth are the active core, even though the movement also goes beyond that.

There, young workers as well as increasingly precarious high-school and student youth have found a means of experimenting with what are for France new types of practices of collective action.

These last two months were punctuated by eleven days of protests in which the youth were often left isolated on the front line, and suffered repression from the government and its police. How would you evaluate the role of the trade union leaderships' policies from this perspective, for example their routinist leapfrogging "days of action?"

How would you analyze the fact that the labor movement has not more globally denounced the repression of the movement in general and the youth in particular? Particularly given that there is a wide openness and receptivity over this question, which could help build precisely this alliance you mention between wage earners, youth, and Nuit Debout?

Since the beginning of the movement the authorities have been following an iron-fist policy targeting not only the youth but also the trade union movement and more particularly its most mobilized sectors. It is no chance thing that the CGT is the most heavily stigmatized union, and the one facing most calls to fall back into line.

Also specifically targeted are the concrete efforts to reach a unity between young people and workers on the ground: we have seen how the students were beaten by police at Saint Lazare station, or at the port of Gennevilliers, when they tried to join together with mobilized groups of workers.

But of course there is also an over-repression of the student and high-school youth, which has the specific intention of driving a wedge between the youth and the trade union movement. And it is important that the trade union movement does not fall into this trap.

Two elements need considering in this regard: on the one hand the trade union movement's traditional reticence to appear to be allied to sectors that are either uncontrollable or judged as such. On the other hand, there is a real problem that we can't just look away from. Given the current state of activist forces among the youth, there is a certain echo for strategies or tactics which, to simplify things, we could call black bloc tactics, and what I consider the totally illusory belief that by heightening this level of confrontation you will produce radicalizing effects.

In reality, with this type of tactics you only legitimize police repression, or serve up a platter of pretexts that justify it before public opinion. This can lead to a minoritarian effect, discouraging wider mass participation in the mobilizations. I think that these tactics are utterly sterile and that the movement would do well to protect itself from them, preventing them from influencing how demonstrations unfold.

As for the trade union movement and its practices, the failure of spaced-out days of action has already been fully demonstrated, as it was in both 2003

and 2010. The 2006 movement against the CPE succeeded despite this attitude on the part of the unions, for there was also a constant and mass mobilization of the youth against a measure that targeted them particularly. But the Labor Law's target is much wider.

Today no one can count on the youth to pull their chestnuts out of the fire on their behalf, as the unions did during the anti-CPE struggle. We have to shift into a higher gear. There is a push in this direction in the unions, as was visible in the CGT for example at its recent congress.

Certainly the appeal published at the end of that congress was not fully satisfactory, reflecting an internal balance notably reflecting some of the major federations' resistance toward renewable strike mandates and the generalization of the movement. The negative thing is that the rail workers' union seems to have accepted this logic, at least up till this point. Nonetheless, this appeal marked a shift: to my knowledge it is the first time that the CGT has explicitly posed the question of renewable strike mandates at this level.

That is not at all something already won or decided, but the possibility does exist, and at the moment we can see sections of the CGT seeking unity with the youth movement, and particularly with Nuit Debout. The fact that CGT general secretary Philippe Martinez came and spoke at the Place de la République — even if his intervention wasn't really up to what the situation demands — is nonetheless a step in the right direction.

We should also not lose sight of the fact that Martinez is right when he says that the current mood in workplaces and in the big service industries does not favor unlimited strike action. That said, this is indeed the direction that we have to head toward. The most combative sectors urgently have to set themselves this task.

To return to the question of repression and the black-bloc logic, there is a powerful discursive construction happening at a mass level, a media level. Whether or not there

are black bloc-ers or something equivalent, this is the way the mobilization is described in the media. And repression is being carried out against the youth and the workers who are with them, even when there is no strategy of confrontation of this type.

The black-bloc logic is thus a limitation of the current mobilization, but it is also symptomatic of a lack of strategy, the youth movement's longer-term loss of bearings and of cadres, and the weakness of the radical and revolutionary organizations therein. Given what the movement is faced with, the cost of these weaknesses is that these currents and their minoritarian strategies will sink roots.

I agree with this analysis. This is both a symptom and the result of a magnifying-glass effect produced by the media in order to justify the repression. That said, this logic does exist — we cannot minimize or hide it, because it has real negative effects.

In the Paris region the activities of the Mouvement Inter Luttes Indépendant (a black-bloc style anarchist student group) ultimately played a very negative role in the high-school students' mobilizations. Over a certain period this current managed to pull a far from negligible section of the mobilized high-school students along with its logic, and the result was that it led to a drop in the high-school students' mobilization.

This latter is now being relaunched, but on a new footing, with the constitution of the National Coordination of High Schools. I think that this is an internal problem of the movement's and, I agree, above all a symptom of something wider. So activist and revolutionary forces have to rebuild among the youth, and it is their responsibility not to leave the field open to this entirely sterile type of logic.

What is your vision for Nuit Debout? It would be good set this phenomenon in perspective with the indignados in Spain, Occupy Wall Street, etc., but also with what has happened in Greece.

Indeed, I believe that Nuit Debout belongs to this cycle of mobilizations, through the form that this collective action takes — namely, the occupation of a space, a spatial form of politics. Over the recent period we saw the spatial forms of collective action coming into the foreground in all the cases you mention, to which we must add the Gezi Park movement in Turkey. What we saw in all these mobilizations, including in Nuit Debout, is the educated youth making up the active core, even if in certain cases there was much wider participation.

In the Greek case — the example I know best — the squares movement of spring 2011 was much more mass in character, but also evidently more "plebeian." The participation of wide social layers also reflected the fact that Greek society had already suffered the massive backlash from the implementation of memorandum policies.

Within one year these policies had already led to enormous setbacks: wage cuts, brutally severe budgets, and the very rapid pauperization of whole sectors of society. Hence the fact that there was a sharpness of anger which does not exist as such in the mobilization in France.

Certainly in the Place de la République there are real grievances and a real will for fightback, but it is still relatively tranquil as compared to the volcanic boiling-over, the truly explosive popular rage that existed in Greece. There was a violence — or more precisely, a counter-violence — in the popular forms of expression, I'm not talking here of black bloc practices but of genuine spontaneous expressions of popular anger — such as we haven't seen in France.

We should remember that in Greece the occupation wasn't just in any old square: Syntagma Square is the central square in Athens, situated right in front of the parliament. There was a mass will — not least in the spatial setting itself — to confront parliament directly. An extremely strong anti-parliamentarism emerged, along with a radical and total rejection of a political representation system long dominated —

as we know — by the two-party control established by the Right and Pasok alternating in government.

The slogans picked up by the crowd violently condemned the thieving and corrupt politicians responsible for placing the country under the protectorate of the troika and the memorandum regime. By comparison the French mobilization remains relatively measured.

Conversely, the most advanced element I see in Nuit Debout is an anti-boss or even anticapitalist — or at least, "anti-capital" — discourse. It is clear that what is being challenged in a mass way — in the general assemblies, the discussions and debates — is capital's power in all sectors of social life.

Given the Labor Law this opposition is evidently largely focused on capital's power at the level of the workplace, the arbitrary power of the bosses, the crushing of workers in their daily work, and the suffering that results.

But this also goes further, and touches on a lot of things. For example, the texts from the ecology commission seem to me to be very sharply anticapitalist, pointing to capital, the big companies, and the structures in their service as primarily responsible for the destruction of the environment and of nature. In this sense I think that new elements of radicalism have emerged even compared to the alter-globalization demonstrations of the previous cycle, which this movement has proven to have major points of commonality with.

What the movements also have in common — and this can only pose a great number of problems — is that they carry the temptation, and thus the risk, of getting bogged down in proceduralism and interminable debates on the mechanisms of decision-making, and in the fact of speech and its "liberation" taking on a self-referential dimension, becoming an end in itself. This can thus come to substitute for the search for a properly political activity that sets itself concrete objectives and thus equips itself with the means to achieve them.

This is a very abstract way of posing the question of democracy, disconnecting it from class conflict and its extension.

Exactly. Or simply in seeking a discussion that doesn't lead to decisions directed toward action: only toward elaborating the best procedures, the best frameworks for deliberation, or democracy becoming the synonym of an interminable self-referential discussion cut off from the real world. This temptation also existed in Greece, in the general assemblies that took place on the Syntagma Square and elsewhere.

But there it was effectively overridden by the dynamic of the situation, and what was playing out right in front of it; not only the fact of the vote on the memorandum and the troika establishing its protectorate over the country, but also the frequency of extremely powerful strike movements. This provided a counterweight to these proceduralist temptations and to a "citizen engagement" disconnected from any genuine political content.

You were one of the first to note — in mid-November — the death of the Front de gauche. Even if now the mobilization is far from over and a second round is underway, all this will also have effects on the recomposition of the "Left of the Left," meaning the far left. What are prospects for the Left going forward, especially in the 2017 presidential elections?

The landscape of the radical and anticapitalist left in France is very problematic on account of the failure of the two main bets that were made in the recent period. The first was that of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), the project launched by the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR).

This organization was the political force driving the radical left in the 2000s, particularly thanks to Olivier Besancenot's two presidential campaigns in 2002 and 2007 and what had crystallized around that moment.

The second failure was that of the Front de gauche, which never managed to be anything other than a cartel of organizations and a top-down electoral alliance. It was never able to construct itself as a real tool for intervening in mobilizations and in struggles, allowing a real political recomposition, and working to rebuild a political space. In my view the Front de gauche was already moribund even before the November attacks — the municipal and regional elections had already proven that the PCF was persevering in its role as an auxiliary to the Socialist Party.

But for me the symbolic coup de grâce was when all the PCF members of parliament (MPs) in the National Assembly voted in favor of the state of emergency, participating in the farcical national unity that was then coming into force.

It is too soon to say what turn things will take, but there is one thing that we can be certain of: the social movement that is now underway signals a real turning point, which will have a major impact on the political terrain. That is a lesson we can take from all the comparable movements that have taken place elsewhere.

That was true even in the least favorable case, in the United States, where Occupy appeared rather limited, dominated by a rather anti-political or libertarian logic in a country where there is no autonomous political expression of the workers' movement, and where there never has been one at any significant level.

Even there it had a certain impact as we see with the Bernie Sanders campaign; it was mediated, indirect, but it was extremely important by US standards. And as we know, in southern Europe the social movements gave rise to extremely important political upheavals. But these latter do not just happen spontaneously. There were actors who took initiatives and who were able to produce results that had not previously been foreseeable, corresponding to possibilities that had not previously existed.

The situation in France at the moment is opening up new possibilities. On the one hand, because the

Socialist Party is very much weakened: in my view this movement against the El Khomri bill marks the definitive rupture between the Socialist Party and what remained of its social base and support. We are probably now — and only now — seeing something like a Pasokification of the Socialist Party, or in any case decomposition phenomena that we can't see it escaping from.

It follows from this that the left-wing forces who want to rival the Socialist Party are today faced with a major challenge. These forces certainly do exist on the far left, on condition that they break out of a logic of groupuscules and sectarianism. Moreover, they also exist in some of the currents or components of the now defunct Front de gauche, albeit on condition that they break with any logic of sub-alternity toward the Socialist Party and government, and on condition that they understand what is happening in the streets, in the mobilizations, and set themselves to reflecting seriously on an alternative.

I also believe at a more programmatic level that this is the challenge we're confronted with at the current moment: we cannot settle for an anti-neoliberal platform listing a set of immediate demands — in reality, a trade unionist-like program. What we need is a real political alternative, identifying the points knotting together the current situation and the class adversary's own strategy.

That means, for example, that we must absolutely aim at the end of presidentialism and of the Fifth Republic, but also at the dismantling of the European Union, which is capital's genuine war machine at the continent-wide scale. Without a rupture with the EU we will never arrive at any solution, as the disaster of Syriza in Greece definitively confirmed.

This perspective also demands a real vision of social relations, in a logic liberated from the grip of capital. This must simultaneously be a concrete and realistic logic, based on transitional but well-defined targets. By now we are far from the stage

where defending public services or proposing their extension would be sufficient.

That wouldn't at all correspond to the significance of what is happening: either in terms of the forms of contestation that have emerged in the most advanced sections of the movement, or in terms of the forms with which capital has spectacularly extended its grip on social relations as a whole.

In terms of the alternative, there are two big experiences in recent years symptomatic of the great dangers in relying on popular mobilizations to produce a political outcome. Namely, Podemos (in all its particularities) and what's become of its political apparatus in the recent period; and of course the experience of Syriza, its capitulation and the failure of its political project, which was as rapid as the initial hopes were intense.

Our goal must be not to reproduce the same type of strategic illusions only once again to crash straight into the wall. In your view, what "antibodies" are worth emphasizing, in this regard?

For my part I draw three lessons from Syriza's failure.

The first the most obvious one — is that any even modestly anti-neoliberal politics (and, even more so, any anticapitalist politics) in the current moment that rejects rupture with the European Union and does not provide itself the means to bring this rupture to its full conclusion is condemned to failure.

This rupture is not at all synonymous with a retreat into national borders as some people stubbornly insist. After all, if there is not a breach opening up somewhere, in one of the links in the chain, that is at the level of a national social formation, there cannot be any expansion of this rupture at an international level.

The second lesson is that purely parliamentary strategies are insufficient and can similarly only lead to defeat. From 2012, even before it reached power, Syriza turned its approach and its practices

toward a purely parliamentary perspective, and not one that walked with both feet. It did not have a perspective of simultaneously both driving mobilizations that could raise the intensity of social confrontation, and obtaining electoral victories allowing it to conquer governmental power.

Indeed, entering government is senseless unless it allows us to go further in this confrontation, taking in hand some of the levers essential to deepening the political crisis and opening up new spaces for this popular mobilization. From this point of view Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his "citizens' revolution" — working only by way of the ballot box — is completely out of step not only with certain fundamental theoretical lessons of the past, but also with very recent situations.

A really classic reformist fantasy.

Yes, it's a really classic fantasy, but what the Mélenchon case also reveals is a very superficial approach to the very experiences that he claims to take as his reference points. Namely, his invocation of the citizens' revolution, particularly in Latin America, where anti-neoliberal or progressive forces have been able to win successive electoral victories.

Certainly there have indeed been victories at the ballot box, but in all these cases even to produce these limited results there also had to be sometimes insurrectionary popular struggles. In Venezuela it was the 1989 caracazo and its hundreds of dead that made possible the Chavista experience, and similarly in Bolivia there had to be a true popular insurrection, with people dying, before Evo Morales arrived in power — with all the limits that experience may have.

The third conclusion I'd draw concerns the party form properly speaking. What I saw in Syriza — and we are seeing something entirely similar with Podemos — is that even before coming to power and taking over ministerial seats, at the moment when the prospect of winning an election or enjoying a strong electoral advance first emerged, these

parties underwent a process of preemptive statification.

Once again, Nicos Poulantzas saw this possibility very clearly in his last texts, when he said that this statification was the main risk facing a strategy of war of position and conquering state power precisely through this combination of social movements and electoral majorities.

This statification concretely expresses itself in the fact of these parties becoming more and more centralized, with the leadership becoming autonomous of the base and adopting a "caudillista" outlook and with militants having less and less importance in the concrete process of decision-making.

These parties more and more conceive themselves as apparatuses for managing power, and not apparatuses for producing a mass politics in interaction with social movements and popular mobilizations. We have seen these tendencies at work in Syriza, and particularly since 2012.

That is not to say that they had not existed before then, but they reached an entirely new extent starting from that moment, when Syriza found itself at the gates of government power. And in the Podemos case it's happening even faster.

Without doubt, that is because Podemos does not come from a process of recomposition in the workers' movement and is based on much weaker organizational structures, which are thus all the more subject to this tendency toward statification. In order to counteract that we have to experiment with political and organizational forms; forms which would not allow the magic-wand abolition of these tendencies — which in my view are absolutely inherent to the very conditions of the political field such as it exists in our countries — but could contain them and stop them predominating.

There is a question of movements being rooted in the working class, but also of what politics you are standing for therein.

Indeed, for these processes of preemptive statification existed already in the 1970s in those

Communist parties that were posed with the question of reaching governmental power by electoral means, namely in France and Italy. These were parties with truly mass roots, and which were hegemonic in the workers' movement.

But that did not at all stop the PCF from adopting the "common program," sealing its alliance with the Socialist Party, or the Italian Communist Party (PCI) of the "historic compromise" period sinking into the mold of this stratification. Indeed, these were the realities facing Poulantzas when he elaborated his analyses, conscious of the risk that the Communist Parties might largely follow — even in their very organizational structure — the same course of development as the labor and social-democratic parties of the previous period.

I think that we have to conceive the terrain of organizational and party construction as a field of experimentation, but also, of course, as a field of confrontation and struggle allowing new political forms to emerge. I repeat, in my view such forms could not abolish these tendencies, which are entirely structural in nature. Any mass political construction operating in the context of a political terrain remaining structured by the electoral field, the relations of representation, and parliamentary institutions, will find itself confronted with problems and thus tendencies of this type.

But I agree when you speak of antibodies. I think that's what we must work for in terms of strategic approaches, organizational forms, and a deep-rootedness in society, the working class, and subaltern social groups as they are today, and not as they were structured in the past.

Following one of Frédéric Lordon's first interventions at Nuit Debout someone asked him whether he was a revolutionary or a reformist, and his response — in sum — was that the question was not relevant. How would you reply to that question?

I think that the question is certainly a meaningful one, but we also have to make clear what we mean by the word "reformist" in the current context. For

not only does the perspective of revolution today seem historically defeated after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of what has been called the "short twentieth century"; the reformist perspective also seems defeated.

Today's social-democratic parties are social-liberal parties that manage neoliberalism, and they do not at all propose a real social pact. If in the three or four decades after World War II social democrats promoted advances or gains favoring the world of labor, even within a capitalist framework, that is no longer true. Today reformism is also in crisis.

But I think that we have to go further: in fact, I would invert the traditional way of formulating the problem. In the capitalist system there will always be reformism; there will always be fractions and even organized currents among subaltern groups who believe in the possibility of improving things within the framework of the existing system. But for that reformism to exist there also has to be a credible revolutionary perspective.

In other words, I think that the reformist perspective is derived from the existence of a revolutionary perspective. The fact that across a whole historical period there was a concrete possibility of a post-capitalist future — a perspective of overthrowing the system, founded on the power relations emerging from the October Revolution and the anti-colonial revolutions — is the reason why there was a reformism saying: while not going that far, we can nonetheless achieve a certain number of things without upsetting the system.

Today, on the contrary, we have a situation where — as Fredric Jameson put it — "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." This has become the common sense of our era; ultimately, this is what obstructs — or more precisely, renders unthinkable — both the revolutionary perspective and any truly reformist perspective. What we need today are fresh experiences of victory for the subaltern classes, which will allow us to pose in concrete, effective terms both the revolutionary and reformist hypotheses.

16 May 2016

Jacobin

NEWS

News from around the world



PAKISTAN

Awami Workers Party condemns brutal attack on trans activist

FAROOQ TARIQ · 27 May 2016

The attack, another in a series of recent murderous assaults on transgender individuals in the country, is a sign of increasing violence against sexual minorities by rightwing groups in Pakistan. The attack represents an attempt by the proponents of violent patriarchy and conservative morality to suppress the voices of transgender activists who are trying to work for the uplift of their oppressed community. It is an utter shame that while such attacks are happening with impunity in Peshawar, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police is busy with pursuing obscenity cases against the same trans activists who are fighting for their very right to exist.

The AWP calls on the authorities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the immediate arrest and prosecution of the culprits responsible and to make arrangements to ensure the protection of the transgender community from these mortal militant threats to their lives.

Beyond this, discrimination and prejudice against transgenders is widespread and deeply embedded in our society and has to be combated on a social, cultural and political level. Progressives of all stripes need to make the protection and organization of the threatened trans community a political, ethical and moral priority and place it at the center of their platform of gender justice. If we are to restore humanity to this broken society it must begin with ensuring the right to life of those most at risk from and bearing the brunt of violence and persecution.

PAKISTAN

Struggle of Okara peasants led by women continues

23 May 2016

Police repression not only takes place in Okara but in Punjab. Police followed the activists in Lahore and kept the Awami Worker's Party office , where they were gathering under siege for hours. They tried to convince the protestors to call of the protest but they refused.

Finally, after AWP General Secretary Farooq Tariq's negotiation with police, the AWP and women Mazareen managed to take out the rally.

Despite being surrounded by heavy police numbers armed with riot gear, the mazareen took out a huge rally demanding their rights and protesting against the actions of local police who had arrested 60 peasants (50 women and 10 men) on that day alone.

The repression is continuing - 3 vans of women were arrested returning to Okara after the successful march and rally. Solidarity is needed.

All power and wealth to the people!

MEXICO

Defending Democracy in the Coyoacán Borough of Mexico City

23 May 2016

This requirement has been fulfilled in the appropriate way and in a timely fashion by school authorities, but this has all been in vain, since it is clearly Maldonado's aim to use any means to keep the school closed.

The reason behind this seemingly inexplicable measure is that the head of the school, Marcos Fuentes Franco, is an active leader of community movements in the Pedregales area of the Coyoacán Borough; these movements oppose the privatization of the public space belonging to a former asphalt plant that has been proposed as the site for a huge real estate development called "City of the

Future." Fuentes has also been a leader in the defense of local water resources and an Art Center, and has headed up a community movement to prevent indiscriminate charges for property taxes.

The political motivation of this arbitrary move is clear: it is an attempt to intimidate a leader opposed to borough authorities' neoliberal, antidemocratic practices.

A petition has been launched to demand that borough head Valentín Maldonado cease his persecution of Marcos Fuentes and that the Institute Cultural y Educativo Coapa (Coapa Cultural and Educational Institute) be immediately reopened.

EGYPT

Arrests and censorship: no to the anti-democratic offensive in Egypt!

NPA-L'ANTICAPITALISTE (NPA-A) · 16 May 2016

The government memo accidentally revealed to the press proves the regime's intention to fight against all forms of dissent and democratic demands. The wall of silence that the Sissi government is trying to impose on the press is one of the most obvious manifestations.

The gravity of the situation requires our internationalist solidarity. We strongly denounce the

agreements, particularly military ones, between France and Egypt, promoting the military dictatorship in place.

We demand the release of all the political prisoners and reaffirm our full support for the Egyptian people's struggle for democracy.

Montreuil,

May 9, 2016

EGYPT

Suffocating to death – save Egyptian prisoners!

16 May 2016

Former prisoners have talked in detail about the deteriorating conditions of prisons in Egypt and how the Prison Authority stacks prisoners in tiny cells as a measure of discipline: cells that can only contain 20 people are loaded with double this number!

In some prison cells, there isn't any ventilation except for a tiny window near the ceiling. Prisoners have to take turn standing or sleeping because of the suffocating conditions!

Many suffer respiratory failure because of the lack of proper ventilation.

A former prisoner recalls his imprisonment saying that they had to remain naked in order to feel a breeze and that they took turns showering "every five minutes" in order to cool down.

Several human rights organisations have tried to bring in fans to help elevate the heat, but the Prison Authority has blocked their efforts.

As for their families, they jump through hoops in order to see their imprisoned relatives: they wait for hours in the sun, only to walk for miles in this

heat to access the prison building itself. Sometimes the visiting days change suddenly as per the direction of the Prison Authority. Many are not allowed to bring the prisoners food, clothes and medication.

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) has condemned the current conditions of Egyptian prisons, branding them, "Prisons of the Middle Ages"! They detailed the Prison Authority's transgressions including: lack of proper medical care, the absence of ventilation, lack of appropriate clothes and food.

EIPR has also condemned the lack of actual monitoring over the Prison Authority and demanded that the current constitution, that protects the rights of prisoners, be heeded.

Egyptian prisoners are slowly dying in their prison cells!

Save Egyptian prisoners NOW!

#IwantToBreathe

#SuffocatingPrisoner

#WeAreSuffocating

16 May 2016

PAKISTAN

Court allows jailed AWP leader to contest by-polls

9 May 2016

On Saturday, the returning officer had rejected nomination papers of the AWP candidate on the grounds that a convicted person serving jail term could not contest byelections.

The by-polls are scheduled to be held on May 28. An antiterrorism court had sentenced Baba Jan along with 16 others to life imprisonment in connection with the Hunza riots case in Sept 2014.

On Tuesday, the AWP had moved the GB Chief Court against the returning officer's decision.

The two-member division bench comprised Justice Wazir Shakil and Justice Haq Nawaz. The judgment said as the decision of the ATC had been challenged in the chief court, thereby the appellant could not be considered a convict under article 63-H of the constitution of Pakistan. From jail, the AWP leader contested GBLA elections on Jun 8, 2015, obtaining the second largest number of votes.-Correspondent

6 May 2016

Source Dawn.

PUERTO RICO

Solidarity from Puerto Rico to San Francisco

RAFAEL BERNABE · 3 May 2016

Although we are separated by thousands of miles, land and sea, our struggles are the same. We applaud your courageous efforts in closing the ports of your city, calling attention to the situation of workers in San Francisco and all over the United States. Your call is our call: for \$15 an hour minimum wage, an end to racist policing, the expansion of voters rights and quality education for all, as a human right.

Since 2010, the PPT has established itself as an electoral party of social movements, dedicated to defending the rights and interests of Puerto Rico's working class, the decolonisation of our island-nation, and the fight against neoliberal austerity. This year, our battle is two-fold. First, our electoral campaign is dedicated to challenging the two-party system that for nearly 50 years has kept our people chained to economic dependency, under schemes of unsustainable development and corrupt politics. Secondly, we reject the prescriptions that the Republican-controlled Congress has been preparing in order to solve the infamous debt crisis which beleaguers Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), currently in draft, proposes that a Washington-appointed governing board (Junta) take control over all the island's public financial and fiscal affairs, in order to pay for an unsustainable and unjust debt that has not even been audited. It proposes that minimum wage should be reduced to below the federal standard, to \$4.25 per hour for people under 25 years of age; deregulation of environmental standards;

privatization of public lands and beaches and our Electric Power Authority. With not a single elected official having word on the proposed board, we denounce the plan as anti-democratic and catastrophic for the people of Puerto Rico.

Today, in San Juan, we join all of our country's trade unions, together with social movements, poor communities and environmental organizations marching in front of Puerto Rico's Capitol building to protest PROMESA and all austerity policies.

We salute also the people of Puerto Rico who are found among your ranks, and all those who were forced to leave their country in search of better job opportunities. We hope that in the labour movement of the United States, their call for social justice is heard.

Finally, we appeal to the working people of the United States to join us in demanding that President Barack Obama release our political prisoner Oscar López Rivera, who has served 34 years behind bars without ever being properly accused and tried, and whose only crime was to support the independence of his country. [1]

To this end, we wish you a very happy yet combatant International Workers' Day with hopes that the future will see the strengthening of ties and solidarity among our labour organizations.

Un abrazo solidario,

Rafael Bernabe

Gubernatorial Candidate for the Working People's Party, 2016

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Source abrepaso.