

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV464 September 2013

TUNISIA

Legitimacy crisis and popular mobilization

JAPAN:

Politics and struggle after the tsunami

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ITALY

Send in the clowns

DAVE KELLAWAY ·

Former prime minister Berlusconi has been twice convicted of fraud by the highest court in the land. He has called his plight the result of a coup d'etat by a left-dominated judiciary and has organised the collective pre-resignation of all his MPs if the Senate committee on the 4th October decides to ban him from political office. He claims not to have slept for 55 nights and lost 11 kilos – the latter claim disputed by a journalist who managed to see him close up. If they carry out their threat it means the coalition government falls and new elections will take place.

Napolitano, the president, who did everything to set up a government between the PD (Democrat Party) and Berlusconi's PDL (People's Liberty Party), thereby giving the former a new lease of political life, has published a note saying this unprecedented move by Berlusconi is damaging to Italian political institutions.

Letta, the current PD prime minister, last week talked of taking his government through the whole of 2014 and was backed by Napolitano. He enthused about Merkel's victory in Germany, how it was good for Europe and also as an example for Italians who can make their coalition government work well. Letta has to cobble together an agreement about a new budget when the PDL does not want any tax on houses (the IMU) and the PD does not want a rise in VAT. The problem is that unless cuts are made the deficit risks breaching the 3% of GDP EC imposed rule that the Italian government is fully signed up to. Even without that other economists estimate there are deeper structural debts to be dealt with requiring even more austerity.

Here in Italy people are not even seeing the slight signs of economic recovery that are evident in Britain. There is negative growth for 2013 and around 0.7 forecast for 2014. A recent official report said there were 5 million Italians living in absolute poverty where they lack a basic necessity such as being able to eat meat. Nine million are in relative poverty and unemployment is officially nearly 13% and over 30% for young people. Tens of thousands of small businesses or independent traders have gone bust and are experiencing the sort of insecurity that only sectors of the working class previously experienced.

The political class and mass media are also furiously debating the shambles around the takeover of the privatised Italian Telecom by Spanish Telefonica. It was originally privatised at a knockdown price while it was making good money and then was sold on several times to various Italian business interests. Letta was intensely relaxed about it all saying this is the market. Unions like the CGIL and some PD MPs have adopted a nationalist approach as though Spanish capitalists are any different from Italian ones when it comes to cutting wages, jobs or worsening conditions for working people. They have even complained that Telefonica want to get their hands on the Telecom-owned 'jewels' in Latin America – in Brazil or Argentina where it owns telecom companies. Presumably it okay for Italians to own part of the telecommunications in Latin American countries but not for Spanish companies to take over Italian ones. Of course we now have debates about how Spanish control would affect the Italian security services use of the network. The interests of working people, whether working for Telecom or Telefonica, are not really on the agenda. Just like something I saw in a television debate where the PD representative thoroughly agreed with a statement from the Sole 24 Ore journalist (a

bit like our Economist) about how the problem in Italy was how to reduce taxes and reduce labour costs and to make reforms in institutions, law and infrastructure so that business can work.

Whatever happens with the government in this latest crisis and how soon there are new elections is less important than whether there are any political forces offering a solution in the interests of working people.

One hesitates to define the PD as a left party representing in any way at all the interests of working people. It collaborated with the vicious austerity government of Monti and has formed a coalition with Berlusconi's party despite declaring up to the last that it was not going to do so. This government is paralysed and has not brought in any significant measures. It cannot agree on taxes, it is split on what to do about Berlusconi legal position, it has different views on state financing of political parties and it is a long way from changing the electoral system to avoid the same stalemate emerging from the next elections. Since Bersani's resignation following his failure to get the party to unite around an agreed candidate for president, the leadership was temporarily assigned to an old trade union bureaucrat, Epiphani and Letta was given the premiership. But the party is split into warring factions. Matteo Renzi, the mayor of Florence, and the so-called rottamatore – literally someone who scraps old cars – wants to renew the party by throwing out the old guard. He is likely to win both the primary for leader and the congress. The last national meeting a week ago could not even agree on the date for the congress but did decide on early December for the primary election. No real politics was discussed but much of the current leadership manoeuvred through the debate on dates to prevent or rather delay Renzi's coronation. Renzi is an Italian Blair who warmly embraces neo-liberal policies, he recently said that focussing on equality was a problem in Italy because it pushed out merit (!). He uses some of the modern, even radical language about liquid parties, new structures and better communications to put forward a more presidential

type of party built around him. Renzi aspires to a PD majority government without any allies to his left although most people think he would be happy to ally with other centre right forces. An anti-Renzi candidate, Cuperlo, does exist but it hard to see him as representing a very strong left wing alternative – like Bersani he merely verbally emphasises a more traditional relationship to the PD's historical base in the trade unions and among working people.

Nikki Vendola's SEL (Socialism, Ecology and Liberty) is the nearest project to the left of the PD but is locked into a debilitating alliance/competition with it. The SEL owes its parliamentary group entirely to an electoral alliance with the PD which meant in practice (rather than on paper) it could not put forward a political perspective independent of some sort of PD led government. During the electoral campaign Vendola even talked about ministers. It drew the line at supporting the current coalition but would be happy with some repeat of a left of centre government. Nothing has been learned from the disaster of the left of centre Prodi government which destroyed Rifondazione, a left split from the PD of the time. Renzi is unlikely to offer Vendola the same electoral berth again, which would put the SEL parliamentary group at risk. A few weeks ago he appeared to welcome some of the modernising aspects of Renzi whereas this week he criticised the latter's position on equality as being "from someone who does not seem to live in the real world of Italy today". Vendola has also been the governor of the big Puglia region and has not carried out any policies that would distinguish him from a PD led region. However he and his party will be looking to regroup with any forces that might emerge from the PD when Renzi wins or with other soft left forces. The problem is that the weak left currents in the PD talk a good game but like the apparatus and their posts in the institutions. Other forces external to the PD still essentially look to tie themselves to the PD train in some way in a similar way that critical left forces in Britain try to reclaim Labour or push it to the left.

Another political project is forming around figures like Landini, the leader of the most radical trade union, the FIOM and Rodota who is a well known and respected as a constitutional and human rights expert. It fits generally within the framework of the Ingroia electoral campaign and the intellectuals who signed the ALBA declaration. Their initiative is around defence of the Italian constitution in the face of attempts by both the PDL and PD to modify it in a less progressive direction – opening the door to a more presidential system. Unlike in Britain this written constitution reflects the context and relationship of class forces coming out of the liberation from Fascism. It enshrines things like the right to work and many other democratic rights. They also reject the way the Troika imposed balanced budget has been accepted into the constitution. A big demonstration has been called for the 12th October which is drawing wide support. However they pitch the event very much in terms of forming a new movement or association rather than a party and indeed no political forces have been allowed to join the declaration or to speak at the demonstration. Although there is some reference to austerity it is hardly the main focus of the project and it tends to promote a certain illusion in power of the constitution which had not prevented a whole series anti-working class policies over the last decade or so. Nevertheless it is a positive initiative that the radical and active left are supporting.

A more radical anti-capitalist political project is developing from the trade union and political radical left called Ross@. Its main spokesperson is Cremaschi who is a well known radical trade unionist. They have already held a national meeting and it may succeed in regrouping some of the radical left that was involved in the Rifondazione project. The PRC (the group led by Ferrero who still has the Rifondazione brand) is involved to various degrees as well as smaller groups such as Sinistra Anticapitalist (Anti-capitalist left) which is one half of what used to be Sinistra Critica. This force clearly places itself like Left Unity in Britain as a group building a political alternative to the PD rather

than as a pressure group of some sort trying to push the PD to the left. Ross@ is building the demonstrations on the 12th and 13th of October, the first organised by the left trade union forces against austerity and the second by the social movements.

Alongside the forces described above there are the social movement currents who are relatively well embedded in Italy through the history of the social centres – a sort of radical community base for politics and culture. There have been some well publicised and supported occupations and expulsions of community based groups of this sort – Communia in Rome was a recent example of this but there are groups in most big cities. Some forces on the radical left such as the other half of what was Sinistra Critica think that, given the massive defeats suffered by the labour movement, that now is the time to talk about a total reforming of a movement and to de-prioritise initiatives like Ross@ where according to them the same old groups are reforming with the same old structures.

Apart from these political projects there are examples of very militant resistance in Italy but it is isolated and does not constitute a national fightback against austerity. The NO-TAV movement against the high speed train link in the Val de Susa is an immense movement of local people defending their community against both PD and PDL support for the mega project through their valley. Trade unionists are mobilised mostly in defensive struggles to save factories in the aluminium (Alcoa), Iron (Ilva) and white goods sector (Indesit). Vicious legal and repressive measures have been used against workers and activists as the ruling class use the crisis to continue to change the relationship of forces against working people. NO-TAV activists have been smeared with the terrorist tag as the building project suffers regular sabotage. The government has worked with bosses like Fiat's Marchionne to prevent workers rights to be represented by whichever union they choose. It is aimed at sidelining the more militant FIOM union. A victory has been won after 3 years with the Italian courts condemning

Marchionne and vindicating the FIOM. With the unprecedented threat of mass resignation and the likely fall of the government sooner or later the political situation is far from stable. Politicians mostly from the right are scapegoating immigrants and even racially abusing a PD woman minister who is black.

Although the labour movement and the social movements are on the back foot the situation could change quite rapidly and further political recomposition is likely.

*First published on the **Left Unity** site.*

TUNISIA

A groundswell against the Muslim Brotherhood

FATHI CHAMKHI ·

A trial of strength is taking place between, on the one hand, the government coalition (Troika), dominated by the Islamist party Ennahdha [7], which has a majority in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) , and on the other, the National Salvation Front [8].

More than two and a half years after the revolutionary uprising that ousted Ben Ali from power, including nearly two years of Islamist government, all the signals are on red: the working classes are bearing the brunt of the effects of the crisis, youth has the feeling of having been "taken for a ride", while bosses are threatening to shut up shop. Tunisia is in a bad way. Are the Islamists the only ones responsible for the current situation? Would their departure from power be enough to "correct the course of the revolution"?

Islamists tested by being in government

The victory of the Islamists in the elections to the NCA in October 2011 surprised no one. Their widely remarked absence during the revolutionary uprising did not weaken their audience among broad layers of the population, because of their reassuring religious discourse, their charity work in poor neighbourhoods [9], their promises to fight corruption and moralize politics.

There was also the absence of a progressive, even revolutionary force, able to counterbalance the influence of the Islamists. Only the trade union confederation (UGTT) was capable of combating the illusions that the working classes had in Ennahdha's promises of a better life and acting as a catalyst for the revolutionary process. The leadership of the UGTT was rather occupied looking for a broad political consensus, which would hasten the return of

stability. The aim was above all to reassure foreign investors and European tour operators, to avoid plant closures and a drop in tourism, both major providers of jobs in Tunisia.

The elections did not only result in empowering the Islamists, they were also instrumental in making possible the neutralization of the masses as direct agents of social change in Tunisia and the transfer of political power to the NCA, which in turn passed it to the government of the Troika. The current deadlock of the NCA is an opportunity for the working classes to regain their power to unblock the revolutionary process and to work for change which goes in the direction of their own class interests.

The popular mandate was a double-edged sword for the Islamists: it gave them the legitimacy to govern, while at the same time demanding of them concrete and immediate results in terms of improving the living conditions of the majority of the population. The extent and severity of the social crisis, the demands and expectations that resulted from it, pushed the masses to consider, rightly, that they were entitled to the fruits of their victory against the dictator. Faced with this situation, the Troika did not have many options:

- Continue the revolutionary process, setting the absolute priority on urgent economic and social demands, thanks in particular to the mobilization of financial resources from the state. To embark on this path would have meant also challenging the dominant economic and social policy. But it was the only way that could make possible a rapid and vigorous recovery of economic activity and a return to calm. It is still valid and relevant.
- Or, on the contrary, turn their backs on the people, as Ben Ali had done before, by serving the in-

terests of the wealthy local minority, the multinationals and rich foreign creditors.

The ruling coalition, dominated by the Islamists, contrary to its election commitments and all its fine speeches, was the new watchdog of neocolonial interests in Tunisia. The Islamists tried to hide their treachery, trying to demonize revolutionary organizations and activists, criminalizing social protest movements and deflecting the discussion of economic and social problems to questions of identity, encouraging the formation of fanatical and violent religious groups.

The manoeuvre of the Islamists was successful during their first year in power. But the deteriorating economic and social situation and the political violence of Islamist groups and militias eventually turned public opinion against them. The revolution gave power to the Islamists on a silver platter; and then they used this power to try and strangle the revolution. Their treachery, and especially the deteriorating economic and social situation under their government, has been accelerating their fall. The current protest movement is driving them to the wall. The determination to drive them from power is gaining ground quickly.

Unlike Ennahdha, which fared better during its first year in power, the other two parties of the Troika (the CPR and Ettakatol), which served as a cover for the Islamists, saw their support eroding quickly. Today, they are empty shells clinging to power like moths drawn to a flame.

Hastening the departure of this gang that is in power will no doubt have beneficial effects on the revolutionary process, provided, of course, that we remain extremely vigilant; the fall of a counter-revolutionary government is undoubtedly an opportunity to be seized by the revolutionary movement, but it still needs to be able to do it! It is obvious that when the battle is engaged and the enemy is destroying everything, we should under no circumstances shrink from the fight, otherwise defeat is certain!

What are the alternatives to the Islamists

After several months of crisis [10], different positions are crystallizing around the question of the institutions that emerged from the 2011 elections, including the NCA and the government, but also the refusal of a retrograde constitution, of political appointments to key positions in the administration and in public enterprises, as well as the demand for the dissolution of violent and even terrorist Islamist organizations and militias.

On the other hand, the central issue of economic and social policy is only being posed in a subsidiary manner. It should be noted that long before the arrival of the Islamists in power, an idea was widely accepted: that the current task was to carry out the "democratic transition", strictly limited to its political aspects. Everything concerning economic and social policy was relegated to the next stage, even going so far as to describe any economic or social demand as premature, if not counter-productive, which could even endanger the democratic transition.

Worse, the two main political parties that confront each other today - namely Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes - are in agreement on continuing and indeed deepening the economic and social policies of the former regime. This agreement has been translated into action:

- Firstly, under the government (March-December 2011) of Essebsi, the founder and leader of Nidaa Tounes, who defended and maintained the policy and commitments of the former dictator vis-à-vis imperialism and neocolonialism. This was formulated particularly in the "Jasmine Plan" in the framework of the "Deauville Partnership" [11](on 26 and 27 May 2011);

- Then, under the government of the Troika, which has continued in the same direction, relying especially on loans provided mainly by the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the French government. This approach has been embodied in particular by strengthening the "partnership" imposed

by the EU in the framework of the "Enlarged and Deepened Economic Free Trade Zone" and the signing on 7 June 2013, of a new programme of structural adjustment with the IMF.

Of course, in their speeches, everyone stresses the importance of economic and social demands, as well as the importance of addressing the issue of regional disparities that oppose the relatively prosperous coastal niches, especially around Tunis, Nabeul-Hammamet, Sousse-Monastir and Sfax, on the one hand, and the rest of the country, ravaged by unemployment and poverty, on the other.

Therein lies the whole problem of the Tunisian revolution. Imperialist forces, through their local servants, old and new, have so far managed to "contain" the revolutionary process within a political reform of government. While at the same time they attempt to deepen and broaden the neoliberal capitalist restructuring and strengthen the neocolonial grip on the country.

The demands formulated by the NSF to get out of the current crisis are:

- The dissolution of the NCA and the formation of a "High Authority for National Salvation", representing political parties, associations and experts in constitutional law, which will commission a "committee of experts" to finish writing the Constitution, and another authority for the organization and supervision of elections;
- The dissolution of the government and the creation of a "government of national salvation", comprising a limited number of ministers and chaired by an independent personality;
- The cancellation of "political appointments";
- The dissolution of violent Islamist organizations and militias.

These demands have received the very important support of the UGTT trade union confederation, but also of the employers' organization UTICA. Both say that they are ready, in case of a refusal of the Troika to comply, to use pressure tactics, such

as, for the UGTT, a general strike, and on the part of the UTICA, an administrative boycott of returns concerning social funds or taxes.

The arc of forces opposed to the Troika is quite broad, since it comprises, besides the Popular Front and the NSF, the UGTT, democratic and progressive organizations, the employers' organization UTICA and a significant sector of the population [12]. All of them have been demanding for more than a month that the Islamists and their allies leave the government. This cause is just and necessary. The Islamists have proved themselves to be zealous servants of neocolonial interests. It is not excluded that their policy has irritated some of the local bourgeoisie, especially those who work for the local market. Need we recall the discontent of the UTICA, in 1995, when Ben Ali accepted the free trade zone with the European Union? It was said at that time that one-third of the country's industrial base was condemned in advance. Not to mention the adverse impact on the living conditions of the popular masses, making worse a situation that was already dramatic enough.

Moreover, to remain in power, the Islamists drape themselves in a religious discourse that is as retrograde as it is radical, in order to confuse the issue, neutralize the popular neighbourhoods and divide the working class. In addition, they utilize for their project fascistic and terrorist Islamist organizations, which have already been responsible for many political crimes. The Popular Front was right when it took the initiative of calling for civil disobedience against their government. For the moment, it is at the head of a vast movement with a very broad representation at the base of society.

The NSF has been built around the political initiative of the Popular Front, which has enabled the Popular Front to break the bipolarization that existed between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, to come out of its isolation and no longer be lagging behind events. A notable fact: this is the first time that a political coalition has managed to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people in the street; this was the case on August 6, where the number of pro-

testers certainly approached half a million. Until then, only the UGTT could mobilize massively, but never as much as that. The Popular Front has demonstrated over the last month that it is a real "activist body", not only in Tunis but in all the regions of the country. In contrast, Nidaa Tounes has appeared as an "electoral body" - voting intentions without militant content.

The discourse adopted by the Popular Front, moderate but firm and well adapted to the reality the Tunisian people at the present moment, is now bearing fruit, which tends to significantly weaken the influence of the Islamist discourse over the popular masses. If the Ennahdha government falls, it will undoubtedly be perceived as the victory of the Popular Front. But this should not overshadow the many failures of the Popular Front. Weaknesses exist, particularly in the construction and organization of the Front. Despite a good start, especially thanks to the initiative of regional activists, the construction and the organizational implantation of the Front, across Tunisia, has remained quite fragile. The leadership of the Popular Front (the Council of General Secretaries) and the (recently created) Executive Committee are, after all, apart from some regional coordinating committees, the only bodies which function regularly. The many independent activists who form the backbone of the Popular Front have difficulty making their voices heard in such an organization.

There is also the risk, real, of letting ourselves be drawn into the logic of the dominant system, under the pretext of realism, even of a so-called inevitability of the neoliberal capitalist ruling order. Tactical issues are one thing, and the accommodations and concessions to which the Popular Front may be required to submit under the pressure of Nidaa Tounes and the UTICA, and which are likely to deflect the Popular Front from its revolutionary goal, are another. Some components of the Popular Front could be tempted, under the guise of pragmatism, to make concessions or accommodations that can be counter-revolutionary. These temptations tend to become stronger at a time when the noose

is increasingly tightening around the Islamists, who are retreating under the pressure of mobilization. They may be on the verge of giving in over the government to reorganize their defence around the NCA, from where they hope to set off for the conquest of power in the next elections, which will be held, probably, in a few months.

Now the problem is situated beyond the Troika, at the level of the "government of national salvation", which could be established in the coming weeks. What programme will it have? What are the priorities? What are the urgent measures?

The question concerning the structure, the composition and the urgent political, economic and social tasks of the "government of national salvation" has been discussed at length in the leadership of the Popular Front. The Popular Front has agreed on a plan to stop economic and social hostilities against the popular classes, in particular by imposing the suspension of the structural adjustment programme, freezing the prices of essential commodities, a moratorium on payment of the external public debt, a tax on large fortunes and the taxation of the profits of multinationals, etc. These are the main lines of the economic and social policies of the Popular Front.

It remains to discuss this orientation and these measures within the NSF, and with the UGTT and the UTICA. Therein lies the real political issue at the moment. Faced with its current partners, whose interests and strategic programme are diametrically opposed, the Popular Front will work hard to set a course toward radical social change. In fact, it is carrying on its shoulders the inexperience and the unpreparedness of the Left, of the progressive and revolutionary elements, faced with the multiple questions of economic and social policy, and especially their shortcomings in the formulation of appropriate measures, based on sufficient knowledge of the questions that are posed and the objectives that we must attain.

Furthermore, the dominant ideology, the enormous political pressure exerted by the very numerous

right-wing parties, the serious nature of the economic and social situation, and especially the strong dependence of Tunisia on the outside world (exports, tourism, debt, foreign investment) and the presence of a strong neo-colonial economy also complicate the task of the Popular Front, which is not immune to mistakes. Of course, to avoid making mistakes, all you have to do is to stand well back from the fields of struggle, observe and criticize those who are struggling to maintain hope and confidence in victory. Some people in Tunisia are discovering a vocation as givers of lessons in good revolutionary conduct to those who are trying, through struggle, to eliminate the obstacles and avoid the pitfalls that stand in the way of the revolution.

Our task is not easy; the enemies of the revolution are many and powerful. The allies of today may at any moment turn against us, and we are quite aware of this. It is not easy to stay mobilized for months, especially when we lack means in the face of a highly equipped enemy. But despite all this, we are standing firm and we are moving forward. Our cause is just and we believe in victory.

Lastly, the coming days are likely to be very tense. Anything is possible. We are doing everything to ensure that the outcome of the battle goes in the right direction, in the direction of the interests of the majority of the Tunisian people.

Tunis, 31 August 2013

TUNISIA

Legitimacy crisis and popular mobilization

DOMINIQUE LEROUGE ·

In the same way, the Front populaire [Popular Front] has already become the third biggest political force in the country. But it does not yet in itself represent a credible alternative to the two dominant political forces, the Islamist (and neoliberal) Ennahdha, and the neoliberal Nidaa Tunes party.

The result is a situation of great complexity accompanied by tensions inside the Tunisian left groups which came together less than a year ago to form the Front populaire.

It remains to be seen how the policies followed by the Front populaire and its components will facilitate the mobilisations. To a great extent that will decide the fate of the continuation of the revolutionary process begun in December 2010.

The "clearing out" of Ennahdha

In an interview on July 18, 2013 [1] Ahlem Belhadj, a member of the Ligue de la gauche ouvrière (LGO – Workers' Left League) and the Front populaire, summed up the situation as follows: "The current government no longer has any legitimacy. Legitimacy cannot result solely from having won the elections in October 2011. The Assembly was elected to realise objectives and for a very determined period. The objectives have not been realised, and the period is over. Increasingly, there is a climate of insecurity and the economic situation gets worse every day. The government has failed totally at the economic and social level. It is directly involved in the development of violence going as far as political assassination. Some youths have been arrested over a rap song. A member of Femen has been arrested after having done absolutely nothing... What legitimacy are we talking of? A rev-

olutionary process is underway, and the sole legitimacy is revolutionary legitimacy", Belhadj concluded.

In nine months, the question of the "clearing out" of the Islamist government has been at the centre of political debate on four occasions:

1. The repression of the uprising in Siliana (late November 2012), followed by the attack on the UGTT headquarters by Islamist militias (December 4, 2012);
2. The assassination of the Front populaire leader Chokri Belaïd (February 6, 2013);
3. The overthrow of Egypt's Islamist president Morsi (July 3, 2013);
4. The assassination of the Front populaire leader Mohamed Brahmi (July 25): the problem of the "clearing out" of the government is henceforth posed on a mass scale as a very immediate question.

There have been a series of missed opportunities. In an interview on July 12, 2013, a Front populaire spokesperson said:

– On October 23, 2012, the theoretical date of the end of the term of the constituent national assembly, "there was no popular mobilisation, on the one hand, and the political forces which proclaimed the end of the legitimacy of the government had prepared nothing on the ground in order to demand the departure of the ruling Troika".

– "The date of December 4, 2012, the day of the attack on the UGTT headquarters in Tunis, was not in my view sufficiently exploited so as to raise certain demands such as notably the dissolution of the militias (linked to Ennahdha)".

– "On February 6, 2013, the day of the killing of the martyr Chokri Belaïd, certainly, Tunisians were in the street in their hundreds of thousands (...). But on February 8, the day of the burial of the martyr, we were not ready on the political or organisational levels to overthrow the Troika. The Prime minister went, but his government remained". [2]

There was a massive desire not to let the opportunity to get rid of the Ennahdha government pass once more. In an interview on July 31, 2013, a trades unionist and activist of the PPDU-Front Populaire points to two significant differences with the past: "After the murder of Chokri Belaïd, prime minister Jebali succeeded in demobilising the population by announcing the dissolution of his government so as to put in place a government of "technocrats". It was only a week or two later that the people realised that this initiative by Jebali was no more than a palliative to reduce the mobilisation. Also, some parties, like Joumhourî, which were initially in agreement with the Front Populaire, entered at the time into the proposals of Ennahdha. The situation is different now. The majority of Tunisians have drawn the lessons of this episode: you cannot be fooled twice in the same way.

"Today, faced with the proposals of Ennahdha, the popular movement will continue until it obtains: the dissolution of the current government; the setting up of a new government, independent of the parties, on the basis of a discussion with the Front de salut, UGTT and so on; the dissolution of the LPR (militias linked to Ennahdha); the setting up of a commission of personalities reviewing the nominations to key state posts. In the event that Ennahdha clearly accepted this and then did not implement it, I think that the mobilizations will get larger".

The positions of the three main forces

These to a great extent set the context in which the other debates take place.

1. Ennahdha is hanging on to power. As after the killing of Chokri Belaïd, the only proposal that

Ennahdha seems ready to envisage is the replacement of some ministers and the renaming of the executive as a "government of national unity". The dissolution of the national assembly is for Ennahdha the second red line which is not to be crossed.

2. UGTT is seeking a midway position. With the launch of its initiative of June 18, 2012, the UGTT sought to unite all the political and social forces to find a consensus. In line with this logic, it does not call for an end to the government, or the constituent assembly. It now draws a negative balance sheet of the two meetings which it organised for this purpose on October 16, 2012 and May 16, 2013.

During the meeting of its national administrative commission on July 29, 2013, it made a step towards opposition by crossing one of the red lines drawn by Ennahdha: it is now effectively calling for the government to be replaced by a "government of national salvation", made up of independent personalities from the different parties. The UGTT has fixed a list of tasks which the latter should undertake within a given period.

But among the delegates speaking at the said meeting, only around a third were ready to cross the second red line fixed by Ennahdha: the dissolution of the national assembly. The result is a position midway between the demands of the demonstrators and those of Ennahdha. We also find supporting this position Ettakatol (a social democratic party involved in the ruling Troika), the UTICA (employers organisation), the LTDH (Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'Homme – Tunisian Human Rights League) and so on.

3. Nidaa Tunes wants to get rid of Ennahdha, but like the latter it wishes to pursue the neoliberal policies in force since the time of Ben Ali. Essebsi does not hide his desire for a rerun of the period from March to October 2011:

– a provisional executive power comparable to the government of which he was Prime Minister,

— a provisional legislative power comparable to the "Higher body for the realisation of the objectives of the revolution".

Ahead in the polls, he hopes his coalition will win the elections, with himself being candidate to the presidency. Meanwhile he had a meeting in Paris on August 15, which was supposed to be secret, with the President of Ennahdha.

The context of the struggle for the "clearing out" of Ennahdha

Numerous elements have to be simultaneously taken into consideration. Here are some of them:

1. If the government is no longer legitimate, the emergence of an alternative power resting on the self-organisation of the people is not yet a reality.
2. The urgency of a government breaking both with the type of society that Ennahdha and neoliberalism wish to impose, necessarily authoritarian and represented both by Ennahdha and Nidaa Tunes, is more pressing than ever. But the Front populaire is not yet in a position to incarnate this alone.
3. The organisations identifying with revolution and Marxism are no longer marginal: together with other currents, they are inside the Front populaire which has become the third biggest political force in the country. But the Front populaire is heterogeneous and for now only has a limited base.
4. The Front populaire calls for the resignation of the Islamist government, but the only party capable of replacing it as a government in an electoral framework remains Nidaa Tunes.

From this complex situation emerges a series of debates focused on the type of relations the Front populaire should have with Nidaa Tunes. Advanced since October 2012, and reaffirmed in December 2012, the position of the Front populaire in this area was made clear after the killing of Chokri Belaïd. On February 22, 2013, Ahlem Belhadj summed up this orientation thus: "We begin by discussing a minimum programme and we only then see who has the capacity to implement it. Hence the

proposal of a "government of national salvation" responsible for applying the measures decided on previously by a "congress of national salvation". I think that this position can gather support. It takes the most appropriate route." [3].

In its statement of February 12, the Front populaire proposes, beyond a series of political tasks, a certain number of emergency social and economic measures to be taken by such a crisis government:

- halting the liquidation of national enterprises and the main resources of the country;
- suspending the payment of the debt and the establishment of a committee of audit on this matter;
- recovering state duties linked to tax evasion;
- installing an emergency wealth tax;
- supporting and encouraging small and medium farmers and exempting them from payment of debt;
- a price freeze to protect the purchasing power of the people and encourage consumption;
- activation of the decree concerning a ban on subcontracting (interim) and the regularisation of site workers;
- reducing unemployment and considering the establishment of an unemployment benefit;
- modifying and restructuring the industrial and agricultural minimum wage;
- reducing imports of luxury products and the spending of the public administration.

The implementation of the policy of the Front populaire

Already in February 2013, following the killing of Chokri Belaïd, a "Coordination to save Tunisia" including Nida Tunes had been set up. At the National Council of the Front populaire on June 1-2, in Sousse, it was stated that "the official decision is not to set up an electoral coalition, but to work punctually around well defined tasks." [4]

A participant at this meeting presented one of the decisions adopted thus: "Proposing to all the revolutionary, progressive and democratic forces, parties, associations, and personalities, the organisation of a congress of national salvation to define an emergency programme. Setting up a government of salvation made up of volunteers does not depend on any party to implement it." [5]

The following position, defended notably by the Wataad révolutionnaire of Jamel Lazhar, was in the minority. Abdessalem Hidouri sums it up thus: "total rejection of any alliance with Nidaa, because these are enemies in the same way as the Islamists. Even if it is possible to come together punctually in the street, it is not possible to make an agreement with Nidaa at the level of programme, at the level of a common programme or at the level of the organisation of mobilisations." [6]

Since the meeting in Sousse, the leaders of the Front populaire have repeatedly said that there was no question of an alliance between the Front populaire and the UPT. On July 11, its spokesperson specified that "divergences with the UPT, especially with the party Nida Tounès, concern its economic programme." [7]

Simultaneously, a series of meetings have taken place between the Front and various organisations, including the UPT. At the request of the UPT, such a meeting took place on June 21. Following this a permanent commission of contact and coordination was set between the two organisations. This process accelerated following the overthrow of the Egyptian president Morsi. On July 9, the Front populaire invited all the parties, associations and components of civil society who agreed with a series of objectives including:

- "the call for the dissolution of the government (...) and the establishment of a government of national salvation, formed of bodies whose mission would be to manage current affairs, prepare and organise free and democratic parliamentary and presidential elections on the basis of a democratic Constitution representing all Tunisians".

- "the dissolution of the constituent national assembly and the establishment of a commission of experts to complete the Constitution and accelerate the election of the new ISIE (Instance supérieure indépendante des élections – Higher independent election body)." [8]

The final document of the July 9 meeting called for the organisation of a national congress of salvation with all forces in agreement with these objectives. Beyond the Front populaire (including the Parti des travailleurs, PPDU, LGO, and Baath movement), the first signatories were Nidaa Tounès and two of its allies (Al-Massar and the Parti socialiste), as well as twelve other organisations including the UGET (Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie – General Union of Tunisian Students), the Union des diplômés-chômeurs (Union of Unemployed Graduates), the UNFT (Union nationale de la femme tunisienne - National Union of Tunisian Women), and the FTCT (led by Tunisians from France).

The creation of the Front de salut national (July 26)

Following the killing of a second leader of the Front populaire, less than six months after Chokri Belaïd, the Front du salut national (National Salvation Front) was created. The Front populaire leadership was happy with the content of the founding text of this body:

- * the call to the Tunisian people for "civil disobedience" seeking the dissolution of local authorities and their replacement by "popular authorities".

- * the replacement of the national assembly by a "Higher national commission of salvation, representative of the national political parties and the components of civil society". This commission would be basically responsible for fulfilling two tasks which the assembly has proved incapable of fulfilling:

1. "with the aid of experts in constitutional law, to complete within a period of two months the drawing up of the Constitution and to submit it to a referendum";

2. "to form a government of national salvation made up of a reduced number of voluntary members who will not be contesting the next elections and led by an independent national personality accepted by all parties, capable of taking emergency security, political, social and economic measures as well as the preparation of democratic, just and transparent elections." This provisional government would be in place for less than 6 months. Ennahdha sees in this text a call for the overthrow of the existing government.

The daily "La Presse" noted on August 19: "The statements of all confirm that the Front du salut is relying on the implosion of the governmental coalition and an isolation of the Islamist party." [9] Among the first signatories in addition to the Front populaire were Nidaa Tunes and various human rights and women's associations. The leaders of the Front considered that there was no objection to the presence of Nidaa Tunes among the signatories to the extent that this party said it agreed with the text of the appeal. A common press release was moreover signed on August 3 between the Front populaire and Nidaa Tunes.

Nizar Amami, LGO coordinator and member of the council of general secretaries of the Front populaire, says: "It isn't a turn by the Front towards Nidaa, but on the contrary Nidaa coming over to positions long held by the Front populaire. This policy gives the possibility for organisations situated between the Front and Nidaa to draw closer to the Front populaire. The presence of Nidaa in the Front du salut is counterbalanced by that of a series of partners, like for example the associative network Destourna or youth organisations, who would for sure have rejected finding themselves in alliance with the Front populaire alone." [10]

Following the supposedly secret meeting in Paris between the President of Nidda and that of Ennahdha, some observers think that, being forced to simultaneously flirt with everybody, Essebsi will finally implode the Union pour la Tunisie and his own party.

A period of turbulence for the left

As Ahlem Belhadj noted on July 18, "some Front activists are worried about the setting up a permanent framework of coordination between the Front and the UPT." [11] Certainly, Nidaa Tunes, like the Front populaire, states that it opposes the policies of Ennahdha based on the omnipresence of religion, attacks on liberties and women's rights, as well as the recourse to political violence. But Nidaa is undoubtedly now the main party of the bourgeoisie. Like Ennahdha, it represents continuity with the economic and social policies of Ben Ali – when he was prime minister Essebsi remained totally subject to the dictates of the IMF and repressed demonstrations. He has no intention of breaking with such an orientation.

The presence of cadres from the party of Ben Ali in Nidaa Tunes makes it an unacceptable partner for some activists. Nidaa also has material resources far superior to those of the Front. The risk exists then that the Front's voice is not heard in such a context, as has been noted by the participants in sit-ins before the national assembly.

Those who sup with the devil must use a long spoon, and it remains to be seen how long the Front's spoon is, and inside the Front that of those who want a genuine break with the Ben Ali era, notably at the economic and social level. In Tunisia as in the émigré community, activists and sympathisers of the Front populaire record nuances, doubts or disagreements with the policies it is following, since its identity has been largely based on placing an equals sign between Ennahdha and Nidaa Tunes.

LGO activist Anis Mansouri states: "The risk exists of letting the liberals take the lead, whereas they follow the same economic policy as the Islamists, and that can only lead to social and democratic regression (...). The Front de salut is a debatable formula, because it raises the prospect of a lasting strategic alliance whose sole losers would be the revolutionary left and the popular layers. So the revolutionary left should defend the conjunctural

and tactical nature of this alliance, which should not stop the Front populaire from intensifying its support for social struggles. It should end as soon as possible, with the fall of the government and the dissolution of the assembly." [12]

The opposition to the orientation followed is notably expressed by the currents which since the foundation of the Front have wished to radicalise it leftwards. Among the themes habitually advanced by them appear notably distrust towards participation in elections or in conferences of dialogue organised by the UGTT. And rejection of any actions, even punctual, with Nidaa Tunes in opposition to Islamist violence.

For the Parti Watad révolutionnaire of Jamel Lazhar, for example, the constitution of the Front de Salut national is a "domestication" of the Front populaire by Nidaa Tounes. The question of the Watad révolutionnaire remaining inside the Front populaire is now posed. Jalel Ben Brik Zoghlami sees participation in the Front de salut national as "the final act of the reformist process". He has left the LGO and called on the activists of this party to join him in forming a new organisation.

The mobilisations underway

The continuation of the revolutionary process initiated in December 2010 depends on the conjugation of a great number of factors including:

- the development of mass struggles and the strengthening of their social dimension,
- the development of self-organisation,
- the involvement of left forces in the implementation of these two aspects.

On July 26, 2013, following the killing of Mohamed Brahmi, the Front populaire called for the "organisation of sit-ins before the seat of the Constituent Assembly until its fall and the fall of the government and presidencies linked to it." [13] More than 60 deputies, fifty of them not in the Front populaire, have refused to take their seats, and the social democratic president of the assembly, whose party

is in the government, announced on August 6 the suspension of its work.

The weak point of this mobilisation at the Bardo is that the right wing of the Front du salut often succeeds in imposing its conditions: many of the boycotting deputies are linked to the Union pour la Tunisie, the Front populaire having less than ten deputies. Nidaa Tunes also has the financial resources to pay for amplification of the square and a security team. Thus the revolutionaries often find it difficult to make their voices heard.

But the key undoubtedly lies in the regions and notably those where the revolution began in December 2010. This is one of the key points the Front populaire is making.

In its July 26 press release, the Front populaire notably called for:

- organising sit-ins before the offices of regional and local government;
- installing self defence committees in the neighbourhoods, villages and cities;

In the same way, the founding text of the Front de salut national, published the same day, called for "civil disobedience", reflected in the regions by the creation of "local salvation coordinations".

Jilani Hammami of the Parti des travailleurs says: "Given the failure of the Troika government to manage the affairs of the country at all levels, the Front has decided to carry out acts of peaceful civil disobedience in all regions of the country and surround the offices of local and regional government by the organisation of sit-ins. (...) a regional, local and popular authority will be set up to manage the affairs of the country » [14]

The LGO sees in this process "a beginning of a taking of control by the revolutionary vanguards of the centres of local power in the regions as well as the nuclei of revolutionary popular power. Supporting the local and regional popular councils, guaranteeing their establishment on the ground and their rank and file representative democratic nature and

allowing a coordination between these structures not only as instruments of self-organisation of the masses in revolt will ensure the radicalisation of the popular movement and will serve as a safety valve to meet all attempts to divert it, but also as nuclei of the future revolutionary regime." [15]

Amami adds : "The key is the continuation of the mobilisations, and notably the creation of dual power in the regions. Advancing the slogan of the government of national salvation facilitates the mobilisation and creation of local committees. In the region of Sidi Bouzid, for example, the regional government as well as nearly all local government offices are paralysed. Officials can no longer enter their offices and discussions are ongoing to replace them by popular commissions. The movement in the regions is the implementation of what the Front de salut calls the "movement of disobedience." The latter seeks to "remove the delegates, the governors, the higher management of the public institutions and central administration who have been installed on the basis of their political loyalties" [16]

Popular self-organisation nonetheless is currently lacking. One of the reasons seems to be that the people only had a limited experience in 2011: rapidly, the structures emerging from the mobilisations gathered only a reduced number of persons and so were incapable of structuring themselves nationally. Thus they were never able to appear as a global political alternative.

For the activists and sympathisers of the Front populaire who express doubts or oppose the latter's orientation, the cohabitation of the Front populaire with Nidaa Tunes inside the Front du salut restrains popular mobilisation and self-organisation. Meanwhile, the prime minister sees the "Irhal" campaign launched by the Front du salut as a call for "rebellion, anarchy and violence". And Rached Ghannouchi, the President of Ennahdha, adds: "adventurist calls for the overthrow of the government and the replacement of state institutions at the regional and local levels by so called committees of popular management smack of anarchy." [17]

"Clearing out" the local authorities in the regions

Concerning Sidi Bouzid, the daily newspaper "La Presse" says: "A regional coordination of salvation will be formed as a revolutionary alternative to the current local and regional authorities' according to a press release published on July 26 at the end of a working meeting held at the head office of the UGTT regional union in Sidi Bouzid." [18]

"The coordination, which will be responsible for taking appropriate decisions and measures to guarantee the good management of the affairs of the region, undertakes to work in common with the different organisations, structures of civil society and political and progressive forces for the immediate dissolution of the constituent national assembly, considering that the powers which emanate from it, including the provisional government and the presidency of the Republic, are illegitimate," said the same source.

"The same press release published by the components of civil society, the political parties and the social organisations of Sidi Bouzid, after two days of consultations, stresses 'the need to make the peaceful civil disobedience decided on by the Union régionale du travail succeed, while ensuring citizens of basic social services'."

Whereas nationally the employers' organisation UTICA is not a member of the Front de salut national, its representatives in Sidi Bouzid participate at local level. Activists say this kind of situation is not unusual.

On July 30, the daily *La Presse* noted a similar phenomenon in the Sfax region: "The local salvation coordination, made up of progressive and democratic political parties, and components of civil society in El Hencha have exerted a strong pressure on the delegate of the region, forcing him to leave the delegation office, without any physical threat, say sources from the progressive movement and human rights activists in the town..."

"The same sources announce an open sit-in until the realization of the objectives of the coordination,

namely the fall of the government and the dissolution of the constituent national assembly. According to Ali Ben Abdallah, coordinator of the Front Populaire and Hédi Sellami, a human rights activist in El Hencha, a meeting was held yesterday to examine the possibility of setting up a local management commission which would substitute for the local authorities and monitor the continuity of the functioning of the activity of administration and public commodities. In which case, the initiative would be synonymous with civil disobedience."

Political forces in Tunisia

There are more than 150 political parties in Tunisia, and many of them are continually splitting, merging or changing names. More than a third of the deputies elected in October 2011 "have changed party and thus no longer represent the voters who sent them to the Palais du Bardo on the basis of the promises of their initial parties." [19]

The three biggest blocs are the Troika (led by Ennahdha), the Union pour la Tunisie (Union for Tunisia - under the hegemony of Nidaa Tunes) and the Front populaire (Popular Front). The UGTT trade union federation is also present on the political field.

1. The Troika has been in power since late 2011. It is led by the Islamist party Ennahdha which won 41 % of the seats in the Constituent National Assembly in October 2011. Ennahdha was in free fall in the polls at the end of July with 13% of voting intentions (as against 19.7 % in June), behind Nidaa Tunes and ahead of the Front populaire.

Ennahdha is surrounded by two smaller parties, also currently experiencing difficulties:

- the CPR (Congrès pour la République – Congress for the Republic) which holds eleven ministries as well as the Presidency, held by Moncef Marzouki,
- Ettakatol, the former FDTL, section of the Socialist International since January 2011, which also holds several ministries and the Presidency of

the National Assembly, held by Moustapha Ben Jafaar.

2. Union pour la Tunisie (UPT) is the only credible candidate for government in the current electoral context. Its biggest component by far is Nidaa Tunes, a neoliberal party set up in June 2012, around a member of the former regime, Beji Caïd Essebsi (BCE), who was also prime minister from March 2011 to late 2011. Set up six months after the elections of 2011, Nidaa Tunes only has 5% of the deputies in the assembly. But this party, with 20.3% of voting intentions, was at the end of July ahead in the polls, beating Ennahdha by 7.3 % and the Front populaire by 12.8 %. Nidaa Tunes represents a part of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie adhering to secularism, some former leaders of Ben Ali's party, and some small centre-right or centre-left currents.

Also present in the UPT:

1. A centre-right party (Al-Joumhouri / Parti républicain, the former PDP), which oscillates between Ennahdha and the opposition, accelerating the decomposition of a party which nonetheless rose in the polls from 2% in June to 4.6 % at the end of July 2013;
2. Three small parties of more or less leftist origin : Al-Massar (partially originating from the former Tunisian Communist Party), the Socialist Party (the former PSG, a 2006 split from the Marxist-Leninist PCOT party, now called the Parti des travailleurs) and the PTPD (originating from a split from one of the groups of the Marxist-Leninist movement, Patriote démocrate/Watad).
3. The Front populaire has activists who have for a long time played an important role inside the trade union and associative movement as well as in the mobilisations. But with 7.5% of voting intentions in the polls in late July, it is some distance behind the two biggest blocs. Its material resources are moreover much weaker than the latter. The Front notably includes parties from the Marxist-Leninist tradition — the Parti des travailleurs (Workers' Party, the new name of the PCOT, considered one

of the two main forces on the left and led notably by Hama Hammami), the PPDU and Wataad révolutionnaire (the other main force on the left) – or the Trotskyist tradition (such as the LGO), several Arab nationalist parties, the Green party, the association RAID (Attac & Cadtm), as well as those with no party affiliation. The Front populaire was launched on October 7, 2012 and has around 4 % of the seats in the national assembly.

4. The UGTT (Union générale tunisienne du travail – Tunisian General Labour Union), is the only trade union confederation with a real base. Matrix of the national movement at the time of colonisation, the UGTT has always felt it has the right to review the functioning of Tunisian society as a whole. But the UGTT is not a candidate for government and sees itself as a counter-power. Its orientation, systematised in June 2012, is to favour the emergence of a consensus between all political and social forces, including those currently in power. The leadership of the UGTT has, since December 2011, moved to the left, but it wishes to remain independent of any political party. It includes members belonging to practically the whole political spectrum

and its orientation rests on the seeking of an internal consensus acceptable to all of them.

5. Among forces of lesser importance, but sometimes disposing of significant resources and effective networks, are:

- Several "destourien" currents originating from the parties of Bourguiba and/or Ben Ali, including that of Kamel Morjane (Ben Ali's former foreign minister), and that which Hamed Karoui (Ben Ali's former prime minister) is attempting to set up.

- Tayyar Al-Mahaba (the "current of love"!), founded by a wealthy employer originating from Sidi Bouzid but living in London, a former Islamist who became an ally of Ben Ali! His party of the time, Al Aridha Echaâbia / La pétition populaire, came third in the 2011 elections.

- The Alliance démocratique of Mohamed Hamdi and Mehdi Ben Gharbia, formed on July 3, 2013, has around a dozen deputies, 9 of them originating from the centre-right party Joumhourî.

This article has been written in collaboration with activists residing in Tunisia, France, Belgium and Switzerland.

SOUTH AFRICA:

Are BRICS any use for rebuilding the collapsing global financial architecture?

PATRICK BOND ·

Here in South Africa, after the lifting of local exchange controls [3] and thanks to US financial deregulation during the late 1990s –so New York bankers could earn higher profits [4] – our currency became very volatile, and we recently joined Turkey, Brazil, Indonesia and India named by Morgan Stanley [5] the 'fragile five' currencies.

South African finance minister Pravin Gordhan seemed to panic during a Financial Times interview [6] last month, complaining of the world elites' 'inability to find coherent and cohesive responses across the globe to ensure that we reduce the volatility in currencies in particular, but also in sentiment.'

The following week, however, on the sidelines of the St Petersburg G20 Summit, Gordhan joined others in the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) network to congratulate themselves [7] about a forthcoming BRICS 'New Development Bank' and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).

Could these two infants challenge the Bretton Woods Institutions in the coming years' chaotic world financial environment? Nearly seven decades after the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established to restore Western interstate banking following the Depression and World War II, the BRICS stand at the verge of replacing Washington and its neoliberal ideology with South-centred, state-aided capital accumulation.

That is the rhetoric, at any rate. But especially in the last few weeks, the question of whether BRICS strategies are profoundly different from – or in-

stead reinforcing of –the global financial architecture's self-destruction remains to be answered. After all, one of the CRA's objectives, according to South African Treasury officials [8], is to 'complement existing international arrangements.'

Even so, a \$50 billion BRICS bank capitalization wouldn't initially challenge the World Bank (which lends almost that much every year). And a \$100 billion CRA would quickly be exhausted in the event of a more serious financial meltdown.

Perhaps those sums can be increased in coming years, since they are pitiable amounts to face off against emerging-market financial melting of the sort witnessed since the mid-1990s. Since then, numerous countries have required a \$50 billion package overnight to halt financial looting.

Financial backlash against BRICS

To illustrate, in recent weeks trillions of dollars worth of paper assets have shifted around, driving quite intense currency crashes in most BRICS. As a result of an announced change in US Federal Reserve policy in which a bit less artificial stimulation ('Quantitative Easing') will be provided to banks thanks to Fed 'tapering', interest rates more than doubled over a few weeks, leading to dramatic outflows from emerging markets and the crash of the South African rand, Brazilian real, Russian rouble and especially the Indian rupee.

Swedish economist Anders Aslund of the Peterson Institute for International Economics was scathing in a Financial Times article in late August: 'The BRICS party is over. Their ability to get going again rests on their ability to carry through reforms in grim times for which they lacked the courage in a boom.' Goldman Sachs banker Jim O'Neill was

asked by the Wall Street Journal last month about the acronym he had created a dozen years earlier: 'If I were to change it, I would just leave the "C".' The Economist opined, 'The Great Deceleration means that booming emerging economies will no longer make up for weakness in rich countries.'

Tempting as it is to write off the more neoliberal of BRICS-pessimist commentators, their confidence grows from several countries' deep-seated problems, not just momentary financial fluctuations. Yet one BRICS member will potentially thrive, and in my visit to three Shanghai universities last week to discuss the (re)brewing economic crisis, I was struck by how insistent Chinese scholars defended the 'reform-minded status quo' (sic) strategy.

As reported last week in the China Daily (reflecting official sentiments), local experts predict that the BRICS bloc is already breaking up in material ways, leaving only China to push ahead through the storm. Remarkd Tsinghua University economist Li Dokui, the end of the US Fed's Quantitative Easing is 'good news for the renminbi' because it need no longer rise in value – but meantime, 'the concept of the BRICS may vanish, leaving just China versus other emerging economies.'

According to Merrill Lynch economist Lu Ting, 'China will be largely immune to the impact due to its sustained current-account surplus, low foreign debt, huge exchange reserves, high savings and capital controls.' Offering official multilateral acknowledgment of severe danger, deputy IMF managing director Zhu Min warned that if China opens its capital account by liberalizing the currency, it would 'exacerbate' the global crisis – which is typically an observation an IMF man would repress.

BRICS behave

There are still some who believe the BRICS can help fix global-scale problems caused by persistent capitalist crisis, the end of the commodity cycle, fiscal austerity, durable financial deregulation and recent credit constraint combined with new bubbles. Yet strategies advocated by BRICS leaders have so far had no discernible effect on financial volatility.

Within the IMF, for example, Chinese voting power has risen substantially but left no genuine change in the institution's agenda. As University of Delhi professor emeritus Achin Vanaik argued at a Fudan University 'Rising Powers' workshop last week, 'The Asian Monetary Fund and Chiang Mai Initiative, originally seen as countervailing financial power, ended up not opposing but complementing the IMF.'

As for the World Bank, its presidency was grabbed by Barack Obama's nominee Jim Yong Kim in 2012, without a united response from the BRICS. The Brazilians nominated a progressive economist, Jose Antonio Campo; the South Africans nominated neoliberal Nigerian finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; and the Russians supported Kim. As for China, the reward for not putting up a fight was getting leadership of the Bank's International Finance Corporation for Jin-Yong Cai, while an Indian, Kaushik Basu, was made World Bank chief economist. And also reflecting assimilation not antagonism, in 2012 the BRICS contributed \$75 billion to the recapitalization of the IMF, which meant that while China's voting share increased, Africa's decreased.

Thus it was reasonable to ask, with skepticism, whether the BRICS leaders were really serious about challenging Bretton Woods. After all, there was an alternative already in place that they could have supported: the Bank of the South. Founded by the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in 2007 and supported by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay, Banco del Sur already has \$7 billion in capital. It offers a more profound development finance challenge to the Washington Consensus, especially after Ecuadoran radical economists improved the design.

Instead, a much more durable reflection of the commitment to stabilizing world finance – rather than radically changing the most unfair and intrinsically destabilizing components – is China's ongoing financing of Washington's massive trade deficit, by continuing to hold more than \$1.3 trillion of Treasury Bills. The Chinese refuse to sell sufficient

T-Bills in order to genuinely weaken Washington's power, and to set up a new currency that the world could more democratically manage, instead of the Fed with its bias to the interests of the world's largest banks.

Notwithstanding rhetoric about increasing use of BRICS currencies, not much more is being done to end the destructive system in which the US dollar has world 'seignorage': i.e., it is the world's reserve currency, no matter how badly Washington officials abuse that power. If China really wants the renminbi to one day take its place, the pace at which this is happening is agonizingly slow.

Worse still, in close alignment with Washington, South Africa explicitly supports financial liberalization. SA Reserve Bank deputy governor Daniel Mminele acknowledged last November that Pretoria opposed global regulation such as the 'Robin Hood tax' on financial transactions that was supported by more enlightened countries, including those from Europe being roiled by global financiers.

BRICS development banking?

Meanwhile South Africa's own precursor to the BRICS bank – the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) – has been run in a 'shoddy' way, according to the new chief executive Patrick Dlamini last December [9]; he implied that corruption had been tolerated. He then announced both a 40 per cent cut of his 750-strong staff, starting with environmentalists and social specialists, and a massive increase in privatisation financing [10]. But Dlamini [11] admitted this week that the Bank suffered a net loss of \$83 million in 2012-13 due to 'impairment losses on development loans of \$160 million and revaluation losses on financial instruments of \$40 million.' Its lending volume last year was only \$1.8 billion, after reaching \$3.4 billion two years earlier.

The BRICS' largest development finance institution, the Brazilian National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) has also been excep-

tionally destructive in its massive lending portfolio, now in the range of \$80 billion annually, more than twice the World Bank's. Warns Carlos Tautz [12] from Instituto Mais Democracia, 'If the Brics Bank is mirrored on BNDES, this reveals a probable lack of transparency and omissions in governance.'

The China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China have had some positive impacts especially in expanding solar technology and avoiding the imposition of Washington Consensus policies. But as Boston University scholar Kevin Gallagher shows, they can be severely destructive in sites as diverse as Burma, Honduras and Gabon.

In other words, when more announcements about a BRICS New Development Bank and CRA are made next year at the summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, don't expect much that would either stabilise or destabilise world finance; the BRICS appear now merely as a legitimating device.

Legitimation and localisation of global financial chaos

In contrast, the G20 has in past years been a much more substantive site for elite worry over world finance, having been resurrected in November 2008 to deal with the global meltdown just after Lehman Brothers collapsed and world payment systems nearly froze. A few months later, in April 2009, the G20 was central to the push for re-empowering the IMF, first through increased Special Drawing Rights allocations and other grants of \$750 billion to stimulate the world economy, and later, in a full recapitalisation in 2012, to generate more bailout financing options for European bankers, at the expense of structural adjustment for poor and working people.

The St Petersburg G20 did make minor progress on rationalizing corporate taxation and reducing one of the greenhouse gases (HCFs) [13] that should have been covered by the 1987 Montreal Protocol. Still, more durable critiques of both G20 power and BRICS supplication are needed. Some of these were developed at the St Petersburg Counter-Summit by

the Post-Globalisation Initiative [14] and its international guests. A rousing declaration [15] emerged and alternative strategies were debated at our meetings, but the overarching fear was of inadequate civil society response to the bubbling economic and military crises, not to mention worsening climate-related destruction [16].

There are critical geopolitical factors to consider too, for while the world economy is now working against BRICS, turbulent relations between the BRICS and the G7 actually left Russia far stronger after the G20 summit. In St Petersburg, the BRICS unanimously backed Vladimir Putin's attempt to peacefully revolve the Syrian crisis once chemical

weapons were apparently used by the Assad regime against rebels, leading to Barack Obama's threat to bomb Damascus. Brazil also took a tough stance against the US National Security Agency; president Dilma Rousseff was so furious [17] about Obama's snooping on her (and parastatal oil giant Petrobras) that she canceled a Washington trip scheduled for next month.

But the 'talk-left' that is so common in the BRICS foreign policy milieu is invariably negated in the 'walk-right' by Treasury and central bank officials. So the dangers grow greater, not because of a South-North political confrontation, but because of the lack of an economic one.

ARGENTINA

Recent decision in favour of "vulture funds": A new page in the story of illegal and illegitimate debt

The case concerns vulture funds that purchased Argentine bonds in 2001 at 20% of their face value, then refused the exchange offer made in 2005, which was repeated in 2010, preferring to prosecute Argentina in New York courts. Government guarantees that State of New York jurisdiction mentioned in the bond contracts gave them the right to do this, and included the renouncement of any claims of sovereign immunity or most favoured creditor status. This was a standard condition in Argentine sovereign debt emissions throughout the 1990s and during the Kirchner period.

Limited by its own actions, the government's reaction to the ruling has been limited to confirming its own commitment to pay, and trying to curry the favours of the US justice system and the international financial sector. It is hastily presenting a law to congress that will reopen negotiations with the 7% of holdout bondholders in the same conditions as in 2005 and 2010, and moves the payment office of the renegotiated bonds that resulted from these offers to Argentina, so as to guarantee payment possibilities should Argentine assets be seized or impounded following this New York ruling.

The capacity of public authorities to borrow in order to repay existing debts has reached its limits (BCRA, ANSES, National Bank, etc.), the government may find it necessary to return to international capital markets to continue refinancing its debt. This provides the World's powers with the means to pressure our country into reimbursing 100% of the debt to the holdout investors and the Paris club.

Creditors will clearly try to maximise their gains, as is the case of the New York holdout creditors, but this does not imply that the government offer to pay in the same conditions granted under the 2005/10 exchange is not already a fabulous deal for the creditors. Although the initial agreement reduced the amount by 43.3%, the difference was made up within a few years through payments linked to growth in GDP. In this way alone, \$15 billion – of an estimated total of \$40 billion— has already been repaid. To this must be added, interest, currency adjusted bonds and repurchase agreements.

This huge outflow explains, in part, the fiscal unbalance that the country is experiencing and the measures taken to adjust to it, but beyond the official position of debt reduction, public debt is still the most important element in our economy. As the president has recently acknowledged nearly \$174 billion has been paid since 2003. This incredible figure shows that without debt repayment, there would be no need of foreign borrowing or foreign investments, and that funds would be available to assure indexed retirement benefits at 82%. Resources exist, they simply must be reallocated.

But what the president does not say is that total debt has increased from \$144.212 billion in 2002 to \$209 billion today, yet nearly \$174 billion was paid back during that same time . These figures demonstrate that this debt is a gigantic fraud scheme, a system that expropriates the productive resources of Argentina's workers. Its origin is illegal and illegitimate, and it has already been paid back several times over.

The first urgent measure is to immediately suspend payments for the time required to conduct an audit of the debt, which will highlight that it is both ille-

gal and illegitimate. Hereby following the example of the emblematic process that began in Ecuador in 2007 when president Raphael Correa created, by decree N° 472, an audit of that country's public debt, carried out by a special commission (CAIC) which identified the illegal, illegitimate and corruption-born part of its external debt. In our country we have the invaluable contribution of Alejandro Olmos in the "Olmos" case, which proved the illicit nature of the external debt taken on during the period from 1976 to 1982, and established the responsibility of the dictatorial regime in contracting illicit and fraudulent debts repayable to international organisations such as the IMF. Through periodical restructuring, this debt continues to this day and constitutes part of the Paris club claim.

The debt is also and above all, since the 1970s, International Capitalism's favourite instrument of

domination to impose its liberal agenda. Debt Repudiation is a legal process permitting the restructuring of the economy that has, over the last 35 years, favoured the productive extractive economic model imposed by international capitalism.

For these reasons, we call for an audit of the public debt, leaving the ICSID, and the construction of a new regional financial architecture (Bank of the South, SUCRE, ALBA Bank) as a necessary step towards the construction of an anti-capitalist project aimed at meeting the needs of the people.

There is no other way. As Alejandro Olmos said: "Either we serve the interests of the people against those of debt, or we are against the people and serve the interests of debt."

[1]

CADTM

SYRIA

Self-organization of the popular struggles in Syria against the regime and Islamist groups? Yes, it exists!

JOSEPH DAHER ·

Popular committees, elections, and civil administrations

From the outset of the revolution, the main forms of organization have been the popular committees at the village, city and regional levels. The popular committees were the true spearheads of the movement that mobilized the people for the protests. Then, the regions liberated from the regime developed forms of self-gestion based on the organization of the masses. Elected popular councils emerged to manage those liberated regions, proving that it was the regime that provoked anarchy, not the people.

In some regions liberated from the regime armed forces, civil administrations were also set up to make up for the absence of the state and take charge of its duties in various fields, like schools, hospitals, roads, water systems, electricity, communications. Those civil administrations were implemented through elections and (or by) popular consensus and have for main tasks to provide civil services, security and civil peace.

Free local elections in the "liberated" zones have occurred for the first time since 40 years in certain regions, neighborhoods and villages. This is the case for instance in the city of Deir Ezzor, late February 2013, where a voter Ahmad Mohammad declared that "we want a democratic state, not an islamic state, we want a secular state managed by civilians and not mollahs."

Those local councils reflect the sense of responsibility and the capacity of citizens to take on initiatives to manage their affairs relying on their managerial

staff, experiences and clean energy. There are various forms, both in regions still under regime control and those that have freed themselves from it.

Another concrete example of this dynamic of self-management was seen at the meeting of the foundation of the Revolutionary Youth Coalition in Syria, that occurred early June in Aleppo. The reunion gathered a broad range of committee activists and coordinating committees that have played an important role on the ground since the start of the revolution in Syria. They came from various regions of the country and represented larges segments of Syrian society. The conference was introduced as a key step to represent the revolutionary youth of all the communities.

This does not mean that there are no limits sometimes to those popular councils, such as the lack of representation of women, or of certain minorities. It is not about embellishing the reality, but to re-establish the truth.

The example of Raqqa

A prominent example of self-management of the masses is the city of Raqqa, the only provincial capital that has been liberated from the regime (since March 2013). Still under regime shelling, Raqqa is completely autonomous and it is the local population that manages all the civil services for the collectivity. Another equally important element in the popular dynamic of the revolution is the proliferation of independent newspapers produced by popular organizations. The number of newspapers went from three before the revolution – that were in the hands of the regime – to more than sixty written by popular groups.

In Raqqa, the popular organizations are most often led by the youth. They have multiplied, to the extent that more than 42 social movements were officially registered at the end of May. The popular committees have organized various campaigns. One example is the "revolutionary flag represents me" campaign, which consists in painting the revolutionary flag in the neighborhoods and the streets of the city, to oppose the islamists' campaign to impose the black islamist flag. On the cultural front, a play mocking the Assad regime was played at the center of the city and, in the beginning of June, the popular organizations have organized an exhibit of art and local crafts. Centers were established to take care of the youth and treat psychological disorders as a result of the war. The end of the year Syrian baccalaureate exams, in June and July, were entirely organized by volunteers.

These types of experiences of self-management are found in many liberated regions. It is worth noting that women play a great role in these movements and in the protests in general.

For instance on 18 June 2013, in the city of Raqqa, a mass protest led by women was held in front of the islamist group Jabhat al-Nusra's headquarters, where the protesters called for the liberation of the incarcerated prisoners. The protesters hailed slogans against Jabhat al-Nusra, and denounced their actions. The protesters did not hesitate to hail the first slogan used in Damascus in February 2011: "the Syrian people refuses to be humiliated." The group "Haquna" (meaning our right), of which many women are part of, have also organized many gatherings against the islamist groups in Raqqa, hailing among other things "Raqqa is free, down with Jabhat al-Nusra."

In the city of Deir Ezzor, in June, a campaign was launched by local activists that sought to encourage citizens to take part to the process of surveillance and the documentation of the practices of the popular local councils. Among other things, it encouraged them to promote their rights and the culture of human rights in society. There was a particular emphasis on the idea of rights and justice for all.

A clear manifestation of the dynamic of the popular revolution is the emergence of newspapers produced by popular organizations. The number of newspapers has indeed increased from three before the revolution – all belonging to the regime – to more than sixty written by popular groups.

Against the Islamists

Those are the same popular organizations that have most often opposed armed islamist groups. The latter want to use force to take control of the liberated zones while they have no roots in the popular movement, and they are not from the revolution.

The city of Raqqa has for instance seen a continuous and unshaken resistance against the islamist groups. Since the city was liberated from regime troops, in March 2013, many protests were organized rejecting the ideology and authoritarian practices of the islamist groups.

There were solidarity gatherings require the liberation kidnapped activists held in islamist-held prisons. The protests enabled the liberation of some activists, but numerous others remain in jail to this day, like the famous Father Paolo, and others including the son of the intellectual Yassin Hajj Saleh, Firas.

Similar protests contesting the authoritarian and reactionary practices of the islamists took place in Aleppo, in Mayadin, al-Qusayr and other cities like Kafranbel. Those fights are ongoing today.

In the neighborhood of Bustan Qasr, in Aleppo, the local population has protested numerous times to denounce the actions of the Sharia Council of Aleppo, which gathers many islamist groups. On 23 August for instance, the protesters of Bustan Qasr, while condemning the massacre through chemical weapons committed by the regime against people in Eastern Ghouta, were also calling for the liberation of the famous activist Abu Maryam, once more jailed by the Sharia Council of Aleppo. They continue until today to demand his release. At the end of June 2013, in the same neighborhood, the activists hailed "go f*c* yourself Islamic council," protesting

the repressive and authoritarian politics of the latter. Popular outrage was also expressed following the assassination by foreign jihadists belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria group (ISIS) of a 14-year old boy, who allegedly made a blasphemous comment in a joke referring to Prophet Mohammad. A protest was organized by the popular committee of Bustan Qasr against the Islamic council and the islamist groups. Activists hailed "what a shame, what a shame, the revolutionaries became shabiha," and compared the Islamic council to the Syrian regime's secret police, a clear allusion to their authoritarian practices.

There are weekly protests on Fridays. During the one on Friday 2 August 2013, the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs), who play an important informative role for the revolution, but also a role of support by supplying foods, good and services to the populations and the refugees, declared this in a release: "in a unified message from the revolution to the entire world, we are confirming that the kidnapping of activists and essential actors of the revolution, unless they serve tyranny, hinder the freedom and the dignity of the revolution." This message was addressed directly to those reactionary islamist groups. In the same vein, on 28 July 2013, the LCCs wrote a release with the title "the tyranny is one, whether in the name of religion or of secularism," rejecting both the islamists and the regime.

We should also note that some jihadist forces, such as Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS, have concentrated on trying to reach hegemony in some liberated areas attacking activists and FSA battalions, rather to fight against the regime, while many jihadists pouring into Syria from countries like Iraq and Lebanon are not flocking to the front lines. Instead they are concentrating their efforts on consolidating control in the northern, rebel-held areas of the country. Many Jabhat al Nusra fighters left in the middle of ongoing rebel operations in Homs, Hama and Idlib to head for Raqqa province once the provincial capital fell in March 2013. During the battle for Qusayr in late May, Jabhat al Nusra units were noticeably

absent. In early June, rebel reinforcements rallied to take the town of Talbiseh, north of Homs city, while Jabhat al Nusra fighters preferred to stay in the liberated areas to fill the vacuum that the Free Syrian Army affiliates had left behind.

We repeat once more that these jihadists and islamists reactionary groups are an enemy of the revolution, alongside all groups that encourage sectarianism, kidnapping, torture and murder, as a practice of power must be considered enemies of the revolution to fight.

Some last events confirm us their reactionary behavior.

The seizure of the city of Maaloula was for example presented by Jabhat al-Nusra's official account, as part of the "Eye-for-an-Eye" revenge campaign, initially declared after the chemical weapons attacks in the Ghouta. One of Nusra's photos for the attack on Ma'loula was published on Facebook with a verse from the Qur'an stating: "Allah give us patience and victory over the infidels" — perhaps not the best slogan to use when launching an al-Qaida-led attack in which a Jordanian Islamist blows himself up at the gate of the oldest Christian village in the country.

The ISIS was also accused of collecting forcibly collect taxes to owners of shops in different areas under they control, such as in Raqqa (taxes as up to 15 000 Syrian liras) Tell Abiyad, and other cities.

A couple of weeks ago, the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights received a footage of fighters from the ISIS cutting off the heads of 2 men, the man in the footage states that the men were cooperating with the regime. Activists from Aleppo city reported that the execution took place at the end of August near the al-Dweiraniya village of eastern Reef Aleppo.<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvXI...> This kind of behavior must be condemned strongly, just as their attacks on activists pro revolution and FSA bataillons.

Arabs and Kurds United

In the Northeastern part of Syria, populated by a majority of Kurds, recent battles between islamists and Kurdish militias from the PYD (linked to the PKK) has led to the emergence of many popular initiatives from the activists and the local population. Those popular initiatives aimed to show the brotherhood of Kurds and Arabs in this region, and to reaffirm that the popular Syrian revolution is for all, and that it condemns racism and sectarianism. During those battles, in the Raqqqa province, the city of Tall Abyad has seen the creation of the "Chirko Ayoubi" brigade, which joined the Kurdish Front brigade on 22 July 2013. This brigade now gathers Arabs and Kurds together. They have published a common declaration denouncing the violations committed by islamist groups and the attempts at dividing the Syrian people and ethnic and sectarian bases. Unfortunately some other FSA forces have fought on the side of the islamists.

In the city of Aleppo, in the Achrafieh neighborhood – mostly populated by Kurds – a protest was organized on 1 August 2013, gathering many hundreds of people supporting the brotherhood between Arab and Kurds, and condemning the acts committed by islamist extremist groups against the Kurdish population and chanting the unity of the Syrian people.

In the city of Tell Abyad, which has suffered from heavy fighting, the activists have tried to organize many initiatives aiming to end the military fighting between the two groups, and to stop the forced (expulsion?) departures of civilians, to put in place a popular committee to govern and manage the city and to promote collaborative initiatives and actions between the Arab and Kurdish populations, to reach a consensus through pacific means. The efforts are ongoing despite the continuous battle between islamists and Kurdish militias.

In the city of Amouda, around thirty activists met up on 5 August 2013 with Kurdish and Syrian revolutionary flags behind a poster saying "I love you Homs," to show their solidarity with this city besieged by the Syrian regime's army.

Recently again, in the city of Quamishli – where Arab populations (Muslim and Christian), Kurds and Assyrians live – local activists have organized numerous projects to ensure coexistence and the administration of certain neighborhoods by joint committees. In the same city, the branch of the Free Kurdish student Union has started a small internet campaign calling for freedom, peace and brotherhood, tolerance and equality for the future of Syria.

In a great majority of cases, the Syrian popular movement has not stopped to repeat its rejection of sectarianism, despite attempts by the regime and islamist groups to lighten this dangerous fire. The slogans of the protesters, such as "we are all Syrians, we are all united" and "No to sectarianism" are repeated constantly to this day.

Thus, the popular committees and the organizations play a crucial role in the pursuit of the revolutionary process, because those are essential actors who enable the popular movement to resist. It is not about diminishing the role played by the armed resistance, but the latter depend on the popular movements to continue its fight. Without it, we would not stand a chance.

"Death rather than humiliation"

In conclusion, the Syrian revolution is still there, continues, and will not stop. It will continue despite this war without mercy led by the regime against the popular movement, as well as its repeated massacres against the civilian population; and despite the internal threats from the islamist and reactionary groups. Though they represent a minority, those groups are dangerous and they are also enemies of the revolution, through their opposition to the objectives of the uprising for the democracy and social justice, their sectarian ideology and their authoritarian practices.

Like the protesters continue to sing in the many protests "The Syrian people won't be humiliated" and "death rather than humiliation". The popular

movement will continue its fight until the victory of the objectives of the revolution.

Viva people's revolutions!

Power and Wealth to the people!

Post Scriptum regarding foreign interventions and anti war mobilisations

The Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, alongside 5 other socialists revolutionary organisations in the region [2], have declared their opposition to any possible future Western intervention, while also condemning the massive, murderous and destructive interventions of Iran, Russia and Hezbollah on the side of the Assad regime in its war against the revolutionaries. This declaration also opposed the interventions of jihadists reactionary and terrorist groups supported by gulf monarchies that want to transform this popular revolution into a sectarian war because they fear the victory and the spread of the revolution to the region and their borders. We know that the US intervention has no intention to overthrow the regime, but merely to punish it, in Obama's words, the current Syrian leadership and save face for the US administration, after all the threats concerning the use of chemical weapons. and to push the regime towards negotiations. A US strike has to be understood in the framework of defending its vital interests, in addition to Israel's interests and security. We, the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, demand instead the provision of arms without political conditions to the democratic components of the Free Syrian army and also the provision of humanitarian aids to the population in needs inside and outside of Syria.

The FSA is not a an islamist force as portrayed in many medias, they are many battalions representative of the richness of Syrian society composed of Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Christians, Druzes, Kurds, Assyrians etc.. In many regions, they submitted to and collaborated with civilian authority, working closely with local administrative councils. And they have struggled to ensure that their fight against Assad will pave the way for a new democra-

tic society. In some regions controlled by the FSA weekly forums and gatherings are held in which citizens were able to speak freely, and have their concerns addressed directly by local authorities as we explained above. In the same time the Assad regime, so-called protector of the minorities as presented by some, has destroyed more than 30 churches since the beginning of the revolution.

We claim once again our support for the Syrian revolution and its objectives: democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism.

This said, the so-called solidarity with the Syrian people is a joke and moreover an insult from organizations and people that are saying no to Western foreign interventions in Syria, while they have said and say nothing on massive foreign interventions of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, and above all not give a shit or said a single word to condemn the more than 100 000 martyred, multiple massacres, millions of refugees and destructions since the beginning of the revolution in Syria and committed by the Assad regime, in addition to nothaving supported the popular movement for democracy and social justice against the Assad regime, on the opposite they have undermined it and / or tried to portray the movement as a conspiracy following the Assad regime propaganda lines most of the time. Solidarity has to be based first of all on the the support of the popular movement in its revolution for democracy and social justice in the case of Syria and elsewhere and on internationalism, in other words support the people in their struggle for emancipation and liberation. Only when this point is clear can you raise such slogans.

Whatever happens, we believe as a Syrian Revolutionary Youth in Homs wrote on his placard:

"Obama's and others' statements do not matter to us. We started our revolution, and we will be the ones to finish it. Our unity is stronger than any foreign strike."

The revolution continues and still lives... and it needs our solidarity!

EUROPE

What to do about the Debt and the Euro?

BIBIANA MEDIALDEA ·

Yet, these policies are rational from the point of view of the bourgeoisie. They are a brutal way – a shock therapy – for restoring the profits, for guaranteeing the financial rents and for implementing the neoliberal counter-reforms. What is going on is fundamentally the validation by the states of the financial claims on future production and GDP. That is why the crisis takes the form of a sovereign debt crisis.

A false dilemma

This crisis reveals that the previous neoliberal project for Europe was not viable. It presupposed that the European economies were more homogeneous than they actually are. Differences between countries increased due to their place in the global market, to their sensitivity to the euro exchange rate. Inflation rates didn't converge and low real interest rates favored intense capital flows among countries and financial and housing bubbles. All these contradictions – exacerbated with the implementation of the monetary union – existed before the crisis but they have exploded with the speculative attacks against the sovereign debts of the most exposed countries.

The social and popular alternatives to this crisis require a daring refoundation of Europe, because European and international cooperation are required for the reconstruction of the industrial pattern, the ecological sustainability and the employment structure. But as such a global refoundation seems out of reach in the immediate relationship of forces, the exit from euro is proposed as an immediate solution in different countries. The dilemma seems to be between a risky 'exit' from the euro-zone and a utopian European harmonization

emerging out of the workers' struggles. In our view, this is a false dichotomy and it is important to work for a viable political strategy for the immediate confrontation. Any social transformation implies the questioning of dominant social interests, their privileges and their power and it is true that this confrontation takes place primarily within a national framework. But the resistance of the dominant classes and their possible retaliatory measures exceed the national framework. The strategy of leaving the euro does not necessarily concentrate on this effort for a European alternative and in this sense, a strategy of rupture with "euroliberalism" is required in order to generate the means for an alternative policy. This text is not about the program for this rupture but rather concentrates on means to implement such a program.

What should a left government do?

We are in the midst of what can be technically called a "balance-sheet crisis". This is a crisis triggered by private sector deleveraging and debt minimization, caused by the accumulation of an enormous amount of fictitious assets, not backed with real fundamentals. In practical words, it means that citizens have to pay for the debt or in other terms validate the claims of the finance on current and future production and taxes. The European states, in an action strictly coordinated at European and even at the global level, have decided to nationalize the private debts by converting them into sovereign debt and to impose austerity and transfer policies in order to pay for such debts. It is the justification, the motivation and the opportunity for the implementation of "structural reforms" whose objectives are classically neoliberal, shrinking the public services of the welfare state, cutting social spending and flexibilizing the labour markets, in order to lower the direct and indirect wage.

In our view, the political strategy of the left must concentrate on the fight for a majority for a left government, able to get rid of this straightjacket.

Getting rid of the financial markets and managing the deficit. In the short term, as an immediate measure, a left government should find ways to finance the public deficit outside the financial markets. The European rules forbid some of them and this is the first rupture. Technically, there is a wide range of possible measures which are not new and have been used in the past in various European countries: a forced loan on the richer households; the prohibition to borrow from non-residents; the obligation for banks to a quota of public bonds; bold taxes on international transfers of dividends and capital operations, etc. and of course a radical fiscal reform.

The simplest way would be to have the deficit financed by the national central bank, as it is the case in the United States, Great Britain, Japan, etc. It is possible to create a special bank allowed to re-finance itself with the central bank, but principally devoted to buy public bonds (the ECB has done the same in practice).

Of course this is not mainly a technical issue. It is a political rupture with the European order. Without such a rupture, any heterodox policy would be immediately thwarted by an increase in the cost of the financing of the public debt.

Getting rid of the financial markets and restructuring the debt. However, this first set of immediate measures does not reduce the burden of the accumulated debt and of the interests on this debt. The long-term alternative is then the following: either an everlasting fiscal austerity or a policy of cancellation of the debt and an immediate moratorium on the public debt. A left government should say: 'we cannot serve the debt stealing wages and pensions, and we won't'. After this moratorium it should organize a citizens' audit to target illegitimate debt, which corresponds for instance to four elements:

- the past "fiscal gifts" to richest households, corporations and "rentiers"
- the "illegal" tax privileges: tax evasion, tax optimization, tax havens and amnesties
- the bailouts of banks since the burst of the crisis
- the debt created by the debt itself, through the snow ball effect created by the difference between interest rates and GDP growth rates, as damaged by austerity and unemployment policies.

This audit leads the way for the imposition of a swap of titles of the debt canceling a large part of it, as required. This is a second rupture.

But the sovereign debts are also totally intermingled with the private banks. That is why the bailout of a country has been in general a bailout of banks. A third rupture from the neoliberal order is needed: the control of international movements of capital, the control of credit and the socialization of banks. This is the only rational mean of untangling the skein of debts. After all, this has been the option taken in Sweden in the 1990s (nevertheless followed by their reprivatization).

To summarize, opening an alternative road requires a coherent set of three ruptures:

- financing of the past and future issues of sovereign debt
- cancellation of the illegitimate debt
- socialization of banks for the control of credit.

These are means for a social transformation. How can we get there?

A left government is necessary

In order to develop these three main ruptures that are required for resisting the financial blackmail, a left government must be in place. Although the social and political conditions for a strategy of convergence and fight for such a government widely vary according to the countries, all Europe focused in the summer of 2012 on the possibility for Syriza

to win the elections and to constitute the axis for such a government in Greece. At the time and afterwards, Syriza led a campaign on the essential themes we stand for in this manifest: a left government is an alliance to cancel the memorandum and to restructure the debt protecting the wages and pensions and the social services of health, education and social security. Our approach here chimes with the "no sacrifice for the Euro" approach of Syriza.

An exit of the euro is not a guarantee for rupture with 'euro-liberalism'

It is obvious that a left government delivering such measures must be very bold, very concentrated on a socialist program and must have a large popular support. This popular support can only be obtained if the platform is clear on the main task of fighting the financial interests and to reconstruct an economy for full employment and the social management of the common goods. We should not deviate from this strategy. If the cancellation of the debt is the goal, we should not deviate from the goal. To win and to deserve to win strictly depends on political coherence and clarity. The first measures of the left government is the fight against the debt and austerity.

For this effective policy against the debt, a left government, provided it has the required popular support, must be ready to use whatever democratic means necessary to confront the financial interests, including measures of nationalization of strategic sectors and a direct confrontation with the Merkel government, the ECB and the European Commission.

The defense of democracy and social achievements should be deepened at a supranational level. However, if the Brussels policy prevents it, that defense will ultimately have to be ensured from already existing national frameworks. This confrontation should not see the euro as a taboo, and have alternative options open including leaving the euro either if no other alternative is possible in the European framework or if the European authorities

force it. However this should not be the starting point.

For any left government, the difficult consequences of leaving the euro must be clarified. First, it would not necessarily restore democratic sovereignty: the financing of the deficit would escape the control of financial markets, but this control could be exercised by speculation against the new/old currency whenever a country has a current account deficit.

Second, the global weight of the debt would not be reduced. Instead, it would be increased in proportion of the rate of devaluation, since the debt is denominated in euros. In this case, the government would be forced to redenominate the public debt in the new national currency, what is equivalent to a partial cancellation of the debt. The State has the power to do that, even if an international judiciary conflict is to be expected, but private firms and banks do not have the same sovereign power; consequently, the value of private and financial debt would increase in the national currency equivalent. In this framework, a nationalization of the banks would be eventually required by no other need than the bankruptcy of all the credit sector, but this also means an increase of the public debt towards the international financial sector.

Third, an inflationary process would be ignited by the devaluation and therefore interest rates would tend to be increased, generating new problems of internal debt and unequal distribution of income.

Fourth, the exit of the euro is typically presented as a strategy designed to gain market shares through a competitive devaluation. This type of approach does not break with the logic of competition of all against all and abandons a strategy of a common European fight against austerity.

Finally, continuing the fight without proposing an exit of the euro and the EU as an alternative, increases the area of maneuver and bargaining power of a left government, as well as the chances of spillovers of resistance to other countries in the EU. Hence this strategy is progressive and internationalist as opposed to isolationist and national.

For a strategy of unilateral rupture and extension

In contrast with the neoliberal vision of competition, progressive solutions are based on cooperation and will work even better if they are generalized to a larger number of countries. For example, if all European countries reduced working time and charged a uniform tax on capital income, such coordination would avoid the backlash that the same policy would undergo if adopted in only one country. To pave the way for cooperation, a left government should follow a unilateral strategy combining:

- 'good' measures unilaterally implemented as, for example, the rejection of austerity or the taxation of financial transactions;
- accompanying plans for protection such as capital controls.
- The political risk of challenging European Union rules to implement these initially nationally-based policies should be acknowledged. The idea is to extend these policies on a European scale to allow these measures to be adopted by member states, for example, in the extension of fiscal stimulus, or a European tax on financial transactions.

However the political confrontation with the EU and other European states' elites, in particular the German government, cannot be avoided and thus the threat of exit from the euro is not excluded as a viable option.

This strategic scheme acknowledges that the re-foundation of Europe cannot be the precondition to the implementation of an alternative policy. The eventual retaliation measures against a left government must be neutralized through counter-measures that effectively involve resort to protectionist measures if needed. But the strategy is not protectionist in the usual sense since it defends a social transformation emerging from the people and not from the interests of national capitalism in its competition with other capitalists. It is, therefore, a

'protectionism for extension', whose very logic is to disappear once the social measures for employment and against austerity have been generalized across Europe.

The rupture with the European Union rules is not based on a petition of principle, but rather on the efficacy, fairness and legitimacy of measures that correspond to the interests of the majority and are equally proposed to neighboring countries. This strategic challenge can then rely on social mobilization in other countries and hence build a relation of forces that can challenge the EU institutions. The recent experience of the neoliberal rescue plans implemented by the ECB and the European Commission has shown that it is quite possible to bypass a number of the provisions of the EU Treaties, and that European authorities do not hesitate to do so for the worse. As a consequence, we reclaim the same capacity for measures for the best, including the imposition of capital controls and other instruments for the defense of the wages and pensions. In this scheme, the exit of the euro is a threat or a weapon of last resort, as we pointed out previously.

This strategy relies on the legitimacy of progressive solutions that arise from their highly cooperative class nature. It is a cooperative strategy of rupture with the current EU framework because it is undertaken in the name of another model of development based on a new architecture for Europe: a larger European budget financed by a common tax on capital that finances harmonization funds and socially and ecologically useful investments. But we do not wait for this change: the fight against the debt and austerity is the task of the day, such as fair measures defending the wages and pensions as well as the social services and common goods.

In short, a popular strategy for a left government must be ready to do whatever necessary for this democratic fight. We stand for that strategy.

<http://tinyurl.com/euro13>

HEALTH:

The Proposed EU-US Free Trade Agreement and the NHS

GUS FAGAN ·

In 2007, US and EU leaders established the Transatlantic Economic Council to further liberalise trade between Europe and the US. Preparations for this have continued since then and this year (2013) negotiations began to establish free trade between the two leading economies. It will probably be a few years before such a bilateral trade treaty is actually signed. Although publicly promoted as increased trade in goods which will increase jobs, it's really about regulation, investments, the rights of investors and the marketisation of publicly owned services.

Although the media might focus on headline-grabbing public disputes, for instance, French demands for the exclusion of culture (TV, films, broadcasting, etc), the really significant events will take place in secret negotiations between the EU and US and within the EU regulatory framework and in increased private access to public services in Europe as the Commission prepares for the establishment of this free trade area. This preparation is often described as harmonisation. For instance, when Poland applied to join the EU, it had to undergo a massive process of harmonisation in which its laws, economic structures and policies had to be made to fit in with those existing in the rest of the EU. The UK's recent Health and Social Care Act was also framed with an eye to future liberalisation of the services sector across the EU. And the UK government is one of the key backers of a free trade area with the US.

Will the negotiations succeed in establishing EU-US free trade? There are hurdles, for instance, French demands for the exclusion of culture, agri-

cultural subsidies in Europe, and European resistance to hormone-treated beef. But the European Commission, the EU economic elite, the UK and German governments and the European Parliament are all committed to it. The European population is not well informed partly because these issues are never properly explained in the media and also because it is focused on domestic issues and economic and social problems. The media are owned by the same corporations and elites that are in favour of liberalisation. Organised EU-wide political resistance to health marketisation is weak so far. There have been a few EU-wide conferences in the recent period in the Netherlands, in Poland and in France, but the social and political forces represented were small. So it may be difficult to mobilise significant social opposition across Europe to the US-EU trade agreement. If social mobilisation is possible, the aim might be to exclude health from the conditions of the treaty or to demand its non-ratification..

The Canada-EU Trade Agreement (CETA)

In 2009 Canada and the EU began negotiations over a free trade deal (CETA) similar to what is now being negotiated between the US and the EU. But, after four years, the negotiations are still dragging on, hampered by disagreement over imports of beef and dairy products, pharmaceutical patents and exemptions demanded by Canada's provinces. Of course, the negotiations are secret but the text of the proposed agreement was leaked and has been subject to detailed analysis by legal experts and defenders of public services in Canada. The Canada Health Act, as it exists, requires provinces and territories to restrict the rights of private investors and service providers in order to maintain a health

care system based on public administration, universality and comprehensiveness.

The Canadian exemption for healthcare in the proposed free-trade agreement stipulated that any such exemptions have to be in relation to 'a social service established or maintained for a public purpose' (Annex 2-c-9). Its proposed exemption in the treaty is this:

'Canada reserves the right to adopt or maintain any measure with respect to the provision of public law enforcement and correctional services, and the following services to the extent that they are social services established or maintained for a public purpose: income security or insurance, social security or insurance, social welfare, public education, public training, health, and child care.'

But the exclusion is open to interpretation. There are disputes over what can be counted as 'public purpose' and, as in the GATS agreement, the presence of private providers within the public system allows the exclusion to be challenged. Legal opinion in Canada is very critical, claiming that the exemption is deliberately weak. The Canadian conservative government, an aggressively right-wing and neoliberal government, is pushing hard for this free-trade deal.

The EU seems to have stated stronger reservations on healthcare:

'The EU reserves the right to adopt or maintain any measure with regard to the provision of health services other than hospital, ambulance or residential health services which are privately funded.

Participation of private operators in the health system is subject to concession. An economic needs test may apply. Main criteria: number of and impact on existing establishments, transport infrastructure, population density, geographic spread, and creation of new employment.

Several member states reserve the right to adopt or maintain any measure with respect to the provision of privately funded hospital, ambulance or residential health services.'

Legal opinion would be required to assess the strength of this exclusion, it does appear, on the surface, to be stronger than the Canadian reservation. The EU Services Directive of 2006 which aimed to promote 'a competitive market in services' made a similar general exception for healthcare:

'(17) This Directive covers only services which are performed for an economic consideration. Services of general interest are not covered by the definition in Article 50 of the Treaty and therefore do not fall within the scope of this Directive. (Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market)

In all these treaties and directives, the same general exemption formulas are used - services 'maintained for a public purpose' (Canada), services 'in the exercise of government authority' (GATS), services 'of general interest' (EU Directive). What all these formulas have in common is that they are vague, open to interpretation, and are weakened by other clauses in the treaties. In the GATS treaty, for instance, the very next clause defines 'in the exercise of public authority' as 'any service which is supplied neither on a commercial basis, nor in competition with one or more service suppliers'. This reference to other service providers immediately undermines the general exclusion. A legal review of the GATS treaty by the World Health Organisation in 2002 concluded that 'The exclusion from GATS provided by Art 1:3c does not apply to a service merely because the government provides it'.

The proposed EU-US Free Trade Agreement.

The mandate for the EU negotiators, the 'recommendation from the Commission on the negotiating Directives for a comprehensive trade and investment agreement with the US', finalised in May 2013, has been leaked. The aim of the Agreement, according to the Commission, is to remove 'unnecessary obstacles to trade and investment, including existing NTBs, through effective and efficient mechanisms, by reaching an ambitious level of regulatory compatibility for goods and services, in-

cluding through mutual recognition, harmonisation and through enhanced cooperation between regulators'. (Art 24)

Once again, there is the same brief 'exemption' as we find in GATS:

'20. Services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority as defined by Article I.3 of GATS shall be excluded from these negotiations'.

In other words the protection of public services such as health is no stronger than in GATS, which critics already regard as extremely weak. These weak exclusions are also undermined by requirements which provide international corporations with a number of legal loopholes. For instance, criteria such as 'non-discrimination', 'necessity' and 'proportionality' are routinely used to challenge government regulation. GATS has a 'necessity test' which prohibits measures that 'constitute unnecessary barriers to trade in services'. In 1997, the EC challenged Italy's public monopoly on job placement centres. The European Court of Justice agreed with the EC and ruled Italy's program was a violation because it was "liable to affect trade."

The proposed EU-US treaty would set in stone all liberalisation and privatisation measures already achieved at the time the treaty is signed and bring all future regulations within the restrictive provisions of the new agreement:

'15. The aim of negotiations on trade in services will be to bind the existing autonomous level of liberalisation of both Parties at the highest level of liberalisation captured in existing FTAs, in line with Article V of GATS, covering substantially all sectors and all modes of supply...'

It's also important to note that exclusions relate only to present provisions. Future regulation or changes in regulations would not be excluded from treaty provisions. In order to maintain sufficient regulatory policy space, health services need to be fully excluded from all marketisation measures, protecting both existing and future policy measures. The Canadian-EU treaty specifically excluded

future measures from protection and the EU's proposals limit protection only to existing measures. Future regulatory changes to contain costs, strengthen social solidarity or improve quality of the service could then become either more open to market forces or more difficult to implement and vulnerable to compensatory claims.

There are two other areas which, although they raise concerns across a number of areas not directly related to health, would have a powerful affect on public health provisions. These are harmonisation and investor-protection.

'5. The Agreement shall be composed of three key components: (a) market access, b) regulatory issues and Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), and (c) rules'.

What is aimed for here is the harmonisation of EU and US regulations. Since tariffs in the United States and the European Union are already low, the proposed agreement focuses in particular on regulatory issues. The agenda of transatlantic business interests is to use these negotiations as a means to pursue deregulation efforts that have been unsuccessful to date. The European Commission has released a list of 130 'meetings with stakeholders' on the EU-US free trade talks. At least 119 meetings were with large corporations and their lobby groups. This means that more than 93% of the Commission's meetings with stakeholders during the preparations of the negotiations were with big business. Industry representatives have pushed for harmonization of the regulations that have limited their access to some of our most important consumer and environmental safeguards, which could include such things as health and safety at work, restrictions on harmful chemicals and hormones in food, environmental standards, and so on.

The other issue is investor rights. So-called investor-state dispute settlement would enable US companies investing in Europe to skirt European courts and directly challenge EU governments at international tribunals, whenever they find that laws in the area of public health, environmental or social protection interfere with their profits. This

type of investor challenge to public authorities already exists in many agreements. For instance, a similar provision in NAFTA allowed the US company Lone Pine Resources to challenge the Canadian government. In 2011 the provincial government of Quebec, with broad popular support, introduced a moratorium on fracking until a proper environmental study had been carried out. The company then demanded \$250 million in compensation from Canada. In 2012, the Swedish energy giant Vattenfall launched an investor-state lawsuit against Germany, seeking €3.7 billion in compensation for lost profits when the German government decided to phase out nuclear energy after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. There are many more examples.

In fact, Canada is the sixth most sued country in the world and currently faces over \$5 billion worth of investor claims under NAFTA. For that reason, it attempted to limit when a company could invoke investment arbitration in CETA. But the EU is fighting back strongly, seeking more investor-friendly definitions of 'direct' and 'indirect expropriation' or what could contravene an investor's 'fair and equitable treatment'. 'Indirect expropriation' would allow an investor to challenge any government law, regulation or other measure that would reduce or eliminate company profit.

These treaties being negotiated are a minefield of threats to public services and government regulations. The structure of health services and the mix of public/private is different in each member state and individual member states may want different protections. But member states do not negotiate international trade agreements. This is in the hands of the EU Commission, according to article 207 of the EU treaty. Trade policy is an exclusive power of the EU – so only the EU, and not individual member states, can negotiate on trade matters and conclude international trade agreements. However, the same article stipulates that, where public services such as health are affected by an international

treaty, the Council of Ministers has to agree unanimously:

'The Council shall also act unanimously for the negotiation and conclusion of agreements:

'... (b) in the field of trade in social, education and health services, where these agreements risk seriously disturbing the national organisation of such services and prejudicing the responsibility of Member States to deliver them.'

So the population of individual member states could demand that their government refuse to endorse the treaty if healthcare or other sensitive issues raise concern. It is unlikely that a UK Tory government would go along with this but it is something that could be raised now with the Labour Party.

The European Parliament also has to vote to ratify this treaty before it can come into force. It makes sense, therefore, for campaigners to put pressure on the EP. A big majority of MEPs is in favour of a free trade agreement. The vote to begin negotiations with the US passed by a wide margin, with 460 votes in favour, 105 against and 28 abstentions. But the EP also agreed to support French demands for an exclusion of cultural services (381 votes in favour, 191 against, with 17 abstentions). This vote is not binding on the EU negotiators. But the French threat of a veto on the treaty might persuade the Commission to make exclusion of culture part of the EU position. The ratification vote doesn't take place until the deal has been signed. It's unlikely that the European Parliament would reject an agreement at that late stage.

This treaty, if passed, would represent an enormous challenge to public-owned health services across Europe. There was very little awareness in Europe, even among those wanting to defend public services, to the implications of the EU-Canada agreement, even though that has been on the negotiating table for over four years. It is essential that campaigns in Britain pay serious attention to the US-EU negotiations and link up with campaigns in other EU states.

Revolution, civil war and imperialist intervention

Since August 21, Syria has been on the front pages of the world's press. The killing of more than 1,400 people with chemical weapons provided the excuse for Obama to launch a criminal threat of intervention by the United States against this already martyred Middle Eastern country. A threat in which he has got himself bogged down and which for that reason is even more dangerous.

A hundred thousand dead, half a million injured and maimed, more than a million (if you count only minors less than 18 years old) refugees; that is the balance sheet of the victims caused by the dictatorship of Bashar Al-Assad since March 2011. This makes the Syrian conflict one of the most tragic of the first years of the twenty-first century. These figures are those of the reports of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and so far nobody has challenged them.

The military intervention of the United States will only add to this tragedy with a very large dose of barbarism and the definite probability of a regional explosion with incalculable consequences.

For we who look at these things from the outside, without feeling in our own flesh the anguish and the daily violence, the pain and hatred due to the daily loss of relatives, friends or companions, the desolation and destruction of a country once known as "the land of cinnamon", the debate nevertheless unleashes raging passions and evokes a feeling of urgency faced with the dangers for humanity that an imperialist aggression represents.

How can we help stop the massacre in this country? What can we do to prevent the imperialist intervention which will cause a great new leap in the spiral of violence that strikes primarily the Syrian people and those of the region? What can we do to help

ensure that this people which rose up against decades of oppression manages to achieve its objective? The answers to these questions, as to so many others, cut across the bitter debates that are developing in the so-called "Left" on a world scale.

The crisis of the capitalist system of domination, open from the 2007 financial crisis onwards, has initiated a new period of rebellion. A period of struggles and protests that have in their turn triggered revolutionary processes against governments and regimes in different countries of the world and challenged the traditional political organizations and institutions of capitalist governance. But they have also triggered counter-revolutions and wars whose purpose is to crush the rise of this new process of struggle of the peoples and their desire and determination for change.

In this new stage on a world level, the Arab Spring, that is to say, the process of democratic and anti-capitalist revolutions which has liquidated the old status quo that had lasted for more than five decades in the Near and Middle East, is the first regional laboratory for the confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution. The cost in human lives of the barbarism caused by dictators, by monarchs, by the fascist state of Israel and the leaders of world imperialism would be all for nothing if we do not learn the bitter lessons that these processes themselves provide us with.

In our opinion, we are in the presence of a long-term process, whose development will consist of advances and retreats. A process which, with its peculiarities, different rhythms and distinct time scales, will continue to spread steadily. That is why the direct military intervention that U.S. imperialism is preparing for Syria is intended, among other objectives, to strike at a regional revolutionary process of which we must seek the origin in the

structural crisis of capitalism, which has been open and visible since 2007.

Identify the root causes of the present conflict; identify the sectors in conflict and the role of each driving force; understand the internal dynamics of the forces, build an active solidarity in order to support the revolutionaries who are fighting over there: all this is so much raw material for the debate we must conduct so as to dispel the darkness caused by the big imperialist propaganda media and those of the Syrian hereditary dictatorship and its allies. At the risk of being unilateral, the contribution to the debate that we want to make with this text must be seen in relation to our position in Bolivarian Venezuela and our struggle in defence of the conquests of the revolutionary process in our country.

Syria: A chapter of the Arab revolution

The outbreak of the first popular protests in Syria in March 2011 followed, with its own peculiarities, the model and the goals of the rebellions in Tunisia and Egypt. Popular mobilizations which became transformed into massive rebellions demanding freedom, social justice and dignity.

At that point, the expansive wave of what was called the Arab Spring included several countries in the region: Yemen, Morocco, Bahrain, Libya, in addition to the two countries already mentioned, Tunisia and Egypt. Nobody dared to talk then, in the Syrian case, of foreign intervention, except for the participation of Russia, which has from the beginning provided military support to the regime in Damascus. After a month of protests, the repression unleashed by the Syrian government had already left a balance sheet of 3,000 fatalities among protesters.

The semi-legal opposition, tolerated by the government of the Assad clan, rushed to his aid and concocted, in concert with the regime, a relative and manipulative policy of opening, embodied in a new constitution designed to give the regime a democratic facade. This did not prevent increasingly cruel and disproportionate repression, which accumulat-

ed victims by the hundreds each week, nor did it stop the protests that took shape and grew in number and combativeness. As events unfolded, even the so-called reforms granted with this pusillanimous opposition were considered unnecessary by Assad, with the cynical argument that the Syrian people had not asked for them.

The criminal NATO intervention in Libya, the brutal absorption of the process in Yemen, the cosmetic reforms in Morocco, the crushing of the revolt in Bahrain by forces from Saudi Arabia, the cruel crescendo of violence in Syria, the coup d'état in Egypt; all this has not so far put a stop to the wave of revolts that toppled Ben Ali and Mubarak, and has not "stabilized" the region.

Quite the contrary: in a few months, this process has liquidated the old status quo laboriously built up by the United States in the region with its Western allies, Israel and the monarchies and dictatorships that have ruled the region over the past fifty years. A status quo that was, from its inception, backed by the USSR, which no longer exists. A status quo that was first shaken by the Iranian revolution against the Shah and that Bush Jr. tried to restore with the occupation of Iraq, which is now an obvious failure. Between January and June, 2011, in scarcely six months, this chessboard, shaky but supported for decades by the United States in order to ensure their control of a region that is strategic because of its natural resources and its geographical location, vanished.

This is the framework in which the Syrian revolution became a civil war, or an armed conflict, and then became the terrain of tragic intervention by global and regional powers. In the first place, and from the beginning of the revolution, there was support in weapons and equipment provided by Russia to a Syrian government that was supposedly "legitimate" in the eyes of "international law", but had demonstrated over the last thirty years, for those who had eyes to see, its character as a blood-stained regime. Since then, the spiral of horror has been completed with the present U.S. threat of massive destruction.

An atypical civil war

The civil war in the United States in the late nineteenth century, the one in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution and the Spanish Civil War between Republicans and Nationalists, to mention only a few examples, were characterized on both sides by relatively concentrated political and military command centres. This is not the case of the rebel camp in the civil war in Syria.

The evolution of the Syrian revolution followed the "model" of the Arab Spring: mass mobilizations that extended to the rest of the country from the cities where the rebellion began. The peaceful nature of the demonstrations was defended by the Local Coordination Committees until the repression had gone from the use of snipers and assassinations in the street to the direct intervention of the armed forces of the regime, acting as an army of occupation in their own country and using all the weapons that one of the best equipped armies in the region had at its disposal. The peaceful protests gave way to armed defence on the part of the population, which tried and is still trying to resist inside the country. But this armed defence is atomized, local and extremely defensive.

A rejection of the first massacres caused desertions from the armed forces of the regime and a military centre of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was installed in Turkey and began to try to organize a defence force of the revolution. But the FSA brigades operating within the country do so on the basis of local criteria and needs, without answering to a general plan and a single command, which moreover does not really exist.

Without a single national centre of the rebellion in the country, with a political leadership abroad paralyzed by insurmountable political and tactical differences, with its military forces acting without connection and without central control; such a situation favoured the intervention of sectarian and extremist foreign militias who answer to those who finance and arm them and conduct a political and ideological struggle that corresponds only to their

own interests. These *takfiri* extremist forces, funded by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, just like the militias linked to Al Qaeda, act in the interests of these monarchies and try to direct the war in agreement with them, but their objectives and conceptions are rejected by the Syrian people.

So, without being able to build a unified political leadership or a single military command, the revolutionary Syrian people has been driven to exchange the peaceful nature of its engagement for armed defence of the revolution in order to confront the regime's brutality. Much more than a conventional civil war, we are confronted with the armed defence of a revolution attacked in a ferocious manner by all the destructive force of the state apparatus.

We reject imperialist intervention because it goes against the revolution

Contrary to what Assad claims, the main objective of the military intervention planned by the U.S. is not the overthrow of the Syrian regime. Obama says his aim is to lead a punitive action against Damascus, but we cannot really believe that. Instead, Assad's fall could be considered by imperialism as collateral damage if it happened as a result of its military intervention.

The main concern of this old and weakened imperialism, still dominant in the world, is the uncertainty affecting this region and the participation of a large number of forces that have their own interests: Russia, China, Iran, Israel, Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia, Al Qaeda, etc. According to the North American logic, none of these forces, with the exception of Israel, should impose itself on the others, at the risk of challenging the Yankee world domination.

On the other hand, as the main counter-revolutionary force, the United States cannot allow the process of regional rebellion to develop. It is for this reason that it justifies and treats in a friendly way the government resulting from the military coup in Egypt, it goes along with the various currents of political Islam that are subordinated to

capital, as in the case of Tunisia or previously, of Morsi in Egypt. It facilitated the repression in Yemen and encouraged Saudi Arabia to intervene militarily in Bahrain.

It is certainly not the alleged "anti-imperialism" of the dictatorship in Damascus that worries Obama. Nor is it the false socialism of the state party that governs Syria, a country that, before the conflict, had 40 per cent of its population living below the poverty line. Nor is it a plan for gradual domination of the region. It is on the contrary the conviction that the extension of the rebellion that began in Tunisia in late 2010, and which has spread in this historically volatile region of the world, can put an end to the puppet totalitarian regimes that oppress these peoples and lead to the questioning of the very existence of the criminal state of Israel.

That is why we support these peoples and this revolutionary process, which Obama also wants to strike with his intervention against the rebellious, heroic, martyred Syrian people, and this is why we emphatically reject imperialist intervention.

The erroneous argumentation of comrades who support Bashar al-Assad

For comrades who only see the bloody imperialism of the United States, the world is something simple and predictable and history repeats itself like an endless wheel. They see the international reality as a black and white photograph between on the one hand the intentions, hopes and policies of Obama - or any Yankee president - and the rest of humanity on the other. They do not seem to have learned yet of the death of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, or the restoration of capitalism in Russia and China, or the global crisis that erupted in 2007 and is the most serious crisis of the last hundred years. They close their eyes to a process of regional rebellion that has lasted two and a half years. And when they talk about it, they describe it as a plan meticulously designed by the United States, which they present as omniscient and omnipotent, thus despising the popular revolts.

The arguments of these sectors rely fundamentally on the denial of facts and reality. For them, there is no real civil war in Syria, but they publish in abundance photographs of "rebels killing Syrian soldiers." There was no use of chemical weapons, but at the same time they assert that "only the rebels have used them." They characterize as identical the foreign fundamentalist brigades and forces which oppress and act against the objectives of the revolution, and the rebel Syrian people, thus justifying Assad's repression against this people.

They say that if we do not defend Assad, we are necessarily in the camp of the imperialist intervention. They argue that there is not a massive sector of the Syrian people who reject the regime and as proof of this, they say that Assad is still in power. But they overlook the fact that the regime maintains itself by conducting a massacre against a poorly armed people and by the destruction of much of the country.

They do not speak of the figures advanced by UN bodies such as UNHCR, which estimate the number of victims at more than 100,000 dead, two million refugees and half a million wounded. But they demand that the UN publishes the report of its inspectors on chemical weapons and that it finds a political solution to the conflict. A conflict whose nature, besides, they deny.

And those who have no problem denying the dictatorial nature of the regime of this hereditary republic justify its defence in the name of the "lesser evil."

This superficial and conspiratorial view of history is at the same time intolerant with those who, though in the camp of the opposition to imperialist intervention, think differently and do not accept to defend the Assad clan. And when their arguments fall short, they spend their time discrediting, making groundless accusations against and criminalizing those who have different opinions.

The need to make the voice of the radical Left heard

We do not take it upon ourselves - and we think it would be a mistake and a lack of respect for those who are struggling in the region – to enter into tactical discussions. We believe that we must respect the views of those who, in the ongoing popular processes, defend revolutionary objectives. That is why we call for this statement signed by organizations from different countries in the region, and among them Syria, [1] to be made known widely.

However, we cannot limit ourselves to expressing our rejection of imperialist intervention and solidarity with the Syrian people in their struggle. There are many of us in the world who have, since the beginning of the Arab Spring, supported unconditionally these revolts. But we have so far done so in isolation from each other, each in our own countries, where we live.

For we who struggle against capital, the recovery of the internationalist tradition is a fundamental task in order to confront the new times that are emerging today. A first step in reviving this tradition is the need to create spaces for discussion and for joint action and solidarity that has an international impact.

If we do not act, the position of those sectors of the Left in the world who support the Syrian regime will represent a debt that the mass movement will make all those who situate themselves on the left pay, without distinction.

It is necessary for the voice of the radical Left to be heard on the level of its real power. So that the peoples who are struggling in the world can see that there is a different Left; plural, democratic, anti-capitalist, genuinely committed against imperialist brutality and against all forms of barbarism.

Behind the toxic clouds that cover today the daily life and death of the rebel Syrian people, our duty is to take steps forward, towards an international coming together of the radical Left, which acts as an amplifier of the cry for freedom and the dignity that comes from deep within the collective memory of the peoples who are struggling .

A necessary clarification concerning the attacks against Santiago Alba Rico

It is unfortunate that from within our Bolivarian process voices have been raised, attacking Santiago Alba Rico. By distorting his positions, they use them to discredit him and present them as purported evidence of a pro-imperialist posture. These are the same people who, short of arguments, discredit those who think otherwise and want to cast doubt on his political and intellectual honesty, almost accusing him of being an imperialist agent.

Santiago Alba Rico lives in Tunisia: he is a writer, a philosopher and an activist of the Arab Spring. A friend of the Bolivarian Revolution, he was invited to Venezuela on several occasions by the government of President Chavez to participate in the jury of the Libertador Prize for Critical Thinking. He was part of the organizing committee of the last Forum against the Debt of the Countries of the Mediterranean, held in Tunis. He is a member of the Freedom Flotilla in Solidarity with Palestine. He is a friend of the Cuban Revolution and of the processes that are opposed to neoliberalism in Latin America. In a recent article, Atilio Borón, winner of the Libertador Prize for Critical Thinking in 2013, defended his integrity as a left-wing activist, although he does not share his position.

Marea Socialista, which includes Santiago among its friends on the international level, wants to express here its solidarity. We also reject any kind of accusatory insults in the debate over ideas, as well as the intention of suppressing critical internationalism and the aim of imposing a single thought based on dogmatic illusions and not on the facts of reality, honestly analyzed and verified.

Carlos Carcione, Stalin Pérez, Juan García, Zuleika Matamoros, Gonzalo Gómez, Alexander Marin

Caracas, September 8, 2013

*From **Aporrea**.*

USA:

Two Americas — Where Racism Lives

MALIK MIAH ·

His killer, George Zimmerman, racially profiled 17-year-old Martin, then claimed self-defense when Martin challenged him. The Florida jury, five white women and one Puerto Rican woman, acquitted him after discussion of race — the central issue — was excluded from the trial. It became Zimmerman's word against the dead teenager's short life. The trial centered on Martin, not Zimmerman's stalking and point-blank shooting of an unarmed Black youth.

Only the Puerto Rican juror interviewed afterwards felt that Zimmerman "got away with murder." She said the prosecution had failed to provide evidence of "intent" to murder Martin. Since the victim is dead, and the cops let Zimmerman walk away from the crime, that's not a surprise.

It took mass protests to even get the police and prosecutors to arrest Zimmerman, and charge him with second-degree murder. His lawyers attacked Martin as the criminal during the trial and declared Zimmerman the victim.

Ongoing protests could lead to a civil rights charge from the Justice Department — although that's a long shot — and a civil wrongful death suit against Zimmerman by Martin's parents.

Racism Persists

A typical headline appeared after the acquittal in the Washington Post (July 27): "After Zimmerman verdict, a racial divide lingers." The article notes, "Whites, by a slight majority, 51 percent, approved of the verdict, according to The Washington Post-ABC News poll. In the Pew poll, 49 percent of whites approved of the verdict, with 30 percent disapproving.

"Further, the Pew poll found that 78 percent of Black respondents thought the case 'raises important issues about race that need to be discussed.' But only 28 percent of white respondents agreed with that statement, with 60 percent saying race was 'getting too much attention.'"

The white apologist, anti-Black media led by Fox News and right-wing talk radio launched vicious smears on the civil rights leadership and president Obama for raising the issue of race after the verdict. The focus of these racist outbursts was to shift the issue from a light-skinned Latino (Zimmerman is half Peruvian) to so-called Black-on-Black crime in cities like Chicago.

The stark reality is a very segregated America. In a de facto segregated society, most Blacks are killed by other Blacks just as most whites are killed by other whites. Yet no white media pundits talk about white-on-white crime, gun violence, single parent families, etc. These apply only to Blacks as reasons for high African-American incarceration.

In fact, the FBI report on the Martin shooting said it was not racial profiling, but a criminal profiling of Martin by Zimmerman because of his hoodie and other attire. No one genuinely believes that a white high school teenager wearing a hoodie in his own complex would be stalked by Zimmerman.

The data show that the criminal justice system is racially biased. The reality is this: if a Black kills a white person, compared to a white killing a Black person, we all know who gets the worse sentence. The issue is an unequal, unfair criminal justice system.

One well-known statistic shows how the system is based on racism and institutional discrimination. Blacks are only 13% of the population but 40% of prison population (2009 Department of Justice sta-

tistics). "Stop and frisk" laws in cities like New York are overwhelmingly directed at people of color — yet few are ever charged with a crime.

Yet the "whites as victims" propaganda can lead white people who don't see themselves as racists to take anti-Black positions. Because they buy the lie that the civil rights movement "gave" Blacks special privileges — that's how they see programs that make up for discrimination in education or hiring — many white people who were okay with ending legal segregation and inequality now believe they are the victims of what Fox News demagogue Bill O'Reilly calls the "race hustlers" and "civil rights establishment."

It is a short step from this attitude to full blown racism and support for white nationalist/nativist ideology.

Breathing While Black

President Obama and Attorney General Holder — the first African Americans to hold those jobs — both acknowledged the unique history of African Americans after the Zimmerman verdict and the divided response in the country. Some on the left say that this was due to the rise of public protests led by the civil rights leadership, young people and others outraged by the acquittal.

I believe Obama and Holder were genuine. President Obama said at his unexpected press conference that there are "very few African-American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store" or "the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off." "That," he said, "includes me."

"Those sets of experiences inform how the African-American community interprets what happened one night in Florida," Obama added. "And it's inescapable for people to bring those experiences to bear."

This led to a chorus of upper middle-class Blacks from lawyers and business executives to elected officials stepping forward to tell their own "being Black but assumed suspicious" stories such as *Driving While Black*, *Walking While Black*, *Being a Black Man* where it is not evident you have a Harvard education or work at a top Wall Street firm.

This type of institutional racism is the lived reality of Two Americas, where a majority of white people, including working-class whites, still act primarily in solidarity with other whites rather than with Blacks of their same class and social standing.

The code phrases "Reagan Democrats" and the "Southern strategy" camouflage an underlying reactionary white nationalist ideology, protecting white folks' false perception that keeping whites on top is better than helping Black or Brown people.

The racism is still so deep in much of the South that most whites don't know what all the fuss is about bigots like Paula Deen exploiting her low-paid Black cooks, who actually created most of the southern style recipes and meals that she takes credit for!

The Threat of White Nationalism

This defense of "white skin" advantage — an incipient white nationalism — explains why a Black conservative president is so reviled by the Republican Party. Barack Obama barely received 10-25% of white voters in southern states (13% Alabama, 14% Georgia, 10% Louisiana, 23% Texas, 24% Tennessee and Arkansas, reported in the *Daily Kos*).

I say "incipient white nationalism" because it doesn't reflect a conscious position of most whites who take anti-Black positions, genuinely believing that African Americans have gotten enough for 200 years of slavery and segregation. In their minds, they didn't cause slavery and segregation and shouldn't have to pay for it. (The U.S. government has never actually apologized for slavery, or given the former slaves reparations.) The problem with

something incipient is that it can grow into full blown white hatred and violence.

Martin Luther King Jr., wrote, in his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider."

King stated, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." But most whites have never understood, or they simply reject, this lesson. That's why white nativism/nationalism is a dangerous, reactionary threat.

Obama understands that threat, which is why he spoke out after the Zimmerman acquittal. Yet he supports the system and cannot take on the "whites as victims" demagogues. He therefore minimizes the threat. The president told a Black audience later that as bad as some of the states' attacks are on voting rights and civil rights gains, it is not as bad as decades ago when Jim Crow segregation still existed, and Blacks were being lynched.

What Obama and other upper-class Blacks minimize is that without mass resistance, the clock can be turned back. Demographics (people of color becoming the U.S. majority by 2050) are neither destiny nor will automatically lead to real political power.

Power must be taken. A white power shift to a multiethnic ruling class is not inevitable. Subtle and opaque white racism is still stronger than working-class solidarity.

South Africa was a white minority-ruled country for 100 years before the majority could gain political power. Even to get as far as we are today took illegal mass civil disobedience against unjust laws. Martin Luther King and other leaders were beaten and jailed by racist governors, cops and judges. The "new South" still defends their predecessors' beliefs and uses code words like "states' rights" and voter ID laws to suppress the rights of African Americans.

Lessons from Du Bois

There are different types of nationalism. The nationalism of an oppressed people, fighting their oppression by a dominant ruling nativist group, has progressive qualities, while that of the oppressor is entirely reactionary.

A central theme of the civil rights movement was to challenge the common view that Blacks were the "other" — not true Americans. The great Black historian, political activist and leader W.E.B. Du Bois explained how Blacks survived in a white dominated society. In his 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois wrote:

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

No white American experiences that double consciousness, which is the bedrock of Black nationalism and of the struggle for full equality in this society. It's why race trumps class for most socialist-minded African Americans: How can the unity of workers and the oppressed occur unless confronting racism and white supremacy is front and center?

Blacks know this subconsciously, which is why we must have a double consciousness to survive day to day life. What Du Bois wrote more than century ago about the issue of working-class solidarity and race relations remains a central issue for the left and labor movements.

Radical Debates

In my own political evolution as a young student in Detroit in the late 1960s, I had these same discussions with Black Marxists I met at Cass Technical High School and Wayne State University.

Detroit was a center of Black radicalism and many Black socialists had read Lenin and Trotsky, Marx and Mao. What was debated was not the need for socialism but whether Black socialists should build an all-Black Marxist origination or join a multiethnic socialist group like the Young Socialist Alliance and Socialist Workers Party.

I advocated the latter, purely based on my understanding of Marxism (colorblind) and class analysis. It was a question of winning power, which I did not believe was possible by a Black nationalist based socialist group. Among my Black radical friends, many said that it was not possible to be in a predominantly white Marxist organization so long as racism drove all politics including in the labor movement and the left.

In truth, as I learned, the national question — the continuing oppression of Black people, both individually and collectively as a people — is the central issue of U.S. politics. Whether Black socialists are in a multiethnic group or an all-Black socialist formation is not decisive. Since all these groups are small propaganda organizations working in larger milieus, the issue becomes focusing on the racism of the state and the dominant white power structure.

Unless this reality is understood, the far right's ideology will advance as it seeks to reverse modest liberal gains on equality. Not by accident, the U.S. Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action and diversity in higher education, and the defeat of voting rights in its last session, show that to be the case.

Toward New Mass Resistance

The Zimmerman acquittal was the final nail in the coffin for many of those who actually believe we are moving toward a "nonracial country" and the colorblind society King advocated more than 60 years ago.

The minority of bigots will only learn, as we used to say, by the crack of a "two-by-four." But the lesson of Black experiences and history is not only that white nationalists will try to convince a majority of whites (not just poor and working class) to back the rich over solidarity with their class allies. It is also possible to win whites to the Black struggle for equality through mass resistance, as occurred during the civil rights movement against unjust court decisions and unjust laws.

The divisions within minority ethnic nationalities will also persist. Latinos are of three colors — white, Brown and Black. A light-skinned Peruvian American, Zimmerman could stalk and racially profile Trayvon Martin, a dark-skinned African American. But Latinos who are Black face double discrimination for their skin color and language and culture.

Since all Blacks are assumed guilty of something, African-American males are taught at a young age not to trust cops and authorities. Obama as president of the most powerful country in the world will do little. But the fact he spoke up as a Black man shows how deep the racial/national divide is.

While the division affects Latino and Asian-American minorities, it uniquely impacts African Americans because of the history of slavery and Jim Crow segregation. It's the point Du Bois explained when he described "the color line" as the central question of the 20th century, perhaps not imagining it would remain so in the 21st.

The lessons of Du Bois, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X are as relevant today as they were when first given. We must all re-read and follow that history, their speeches and writings and apply the direct action tactics utilized to bring about fundamental change.

The positive news is that following the Zimmerman verdict and appeals to white fears, the new generation is beginning to rise up.

September/October 2013, ATC 166

SPANISH STATE

Catalonia: independence from Spain, independence from capitalism

ESTHER VIVAS ·

Some say that independence comes first, and then we'll see. That this will end unemployment , poverty , hunger. As if independence were a divine manna. However, this is a fallacious argument . Just ask people in Greece, Portugal, Ireland , Cyprus and the Spanish state itself. Being independent means we get out from, well, the grip of the Troika. The European financial power does not give freedom to the people. There can be no real independence under the burden of debt , the blackmail of the risk premium and the "markets" .

Others claim that "Madrid robs us " and that if we say "Farewell to Spain" , problem solved. Nothing is further from reality....Where are we going with a country in the hands of just 400 families forever? Moving towards independence, involves asking : independence for what and for whom.

The open debate in Catalonia today is an opportunity to... rethink the foundations of our model of

society. Be independent , yes, but to open a constituent process that allows us to decide together which country we wantbanks are the most responsible for the crisis and La Caixa is the largest bank in Catalonia. To save financial institutions, we have sunk into absolute misery. We will never be free nor independent, if we are subject to their policies.

It is also common knowledge that La Caixa does not want a referendum [on independence] "Social peace" is the ultimate guarantor of its profits and the Spanish State its biggest source of business.... Its loyalties have been shown with the royal family... ensuring a golden retirement to the Infanta Cristina in Switzerland, as head of the International Department of the La Caixa Fundación, and increasing her salary to 320,000 euros per year...

Which country will we have if its largest bank evicts families and rips us off through preferred shares ? ... What will our independence amount to if we are in the hands of thieves?

From the Esther Vivas blog.

JAPAN:

Politics and struggle after the tsunami

DOUGAL McNEIL ·

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was crippled following the earthquake, and radiation damage to its structure compounded an already desperate situation. The signs of what is to come are grim: a report notes that "Japan Tobacco Inc. says radioactive cesium levels in some dried tobacco leaves harvested this year in Fukushima Prefecture exceeded the company's limit", [3] above-limit radioactive cesium levels have been found in Miyagi beef, [4] while abnormalities in butterflies collected around Fukushima suggest radiation is causing mutations. [5]The stress and disruption of ongoing earthquakes through the first half of 2011, and the continuing uncertainty around food safety, radiation, and social displacement, reveal stark problems in Japanese society.

If the earthquake and tsunami were natural disasters, there was nothing natural about their social impact. The disorganised, chaotic and occasionally callous response of both the Japanese government and Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) has exposed their priorities and principles to public view. The disaster has generated a crisis for Japan's ruling class, and has stimulated a protest movement on a scale that has not been seen in Japan for many decades. The results of the nuclear disaster have been superimposed onto a society already under enormous strain after two decades of economic stagnation; the homelessness caused by the evacuation of Fukushima crashed into the problems of a chronic, and under-reported, housing crisis. So the movement against nuclear power has significance beyond its immediate aims. It has acted as a catalyst for discontent on a whole range of other social

issues, and has the chance to develop a wider anti-capitalist energy. Huge problems confront the movement, of organisation, outlook, analysis and direction. But it represents a chance the workers' movement and the left in Japan have not seen since the 1960s. This is an under-reported struggle, and deserves to be better known.

This article outlines the political impact of the earthquake and disaster, describes the emerging protest movement, looks at some of the challenges confronting Japan's anti-nuclear movement, and considers some of its prospects. We have drawn on Japanese sources as much as possible to make some of the voices of the protest movement audible, and to share the excitement of this campaign.

A tragedy that could have been avoided

"It was a crime and the people in government who made that decision should go to jail." That's the view of farmer Ito Nobuyoshi, speaking to journalist David McNeill one year on from the disaster. He lives in the small village of Iitate, some 40 kilometres from the plant. There was terrible radiation damage on 14 and 15 March. "It rained on those nights and the rain brought the radiation down on top of us," Ito told McNeill. For some reason "the government delayed releasing data that would have shown the radiation's path and saved many from heavy exposure. Hundreds of families unknowingly evacuated into the most irradiated areas." [6]Stories like this abound.

After having spent months claiming that nothing could have been done to save its plant from damage after the earthquake, TEPCO in October was forced to admit that it knew safety improvements were needed and had failed to act. The reason? The company's directors were afraid that acknowledging safety concerns might have led to lawsuits. Fearing

that people in areas hosting plants would be worried by revelations of safety breaches, the company chose to suppress its own evidence. In their words, "There was a worry that if the company were to implement a severe-accident response plan, it would spur anxiety throughout the country and in the communities near where nuclear plants are sited, and lend momentum to the anti-nuclear movement." [7]

Investigative journalists and campaigners had been issuing warnings about safety concerns for years, only to be ignored by mainstream media sources content to keep in step with government and company lines. Researcher Onda Katsunobu published a book called *TEPCO's Dark Empire* in 2007, listing the company's history of safety breaches, cover-ups and corruption. It stayed in obscurity for four years. Plenty of other signs of the dangers the nuclear industry posed to ordinary people were there before the earthquake. In 1996 Fujita Yuuko's book *Silent Killer* exposed the huge health costs workers for TEPCO faced, following the life of Shimahashi Nobuyuki who died of leukaemia at the age of 29 as a result of being exposed to radiation through work. [8] The bosses who now claim they could not have known what was to come are lying, and they know it. What is different now is that the public does too.

Here the phrase about capitalism privatising profits and socialising losses receives stark confirmation. Over one hundred thousand people have been made homeless, many of TEPCO's workers have been exposed to life-threatening conditions, radiation will ruin the livelihood of thousands of small farmers, and whole ways of life have been uprooted and destroyed, all because the utility company put its own stability – and bottom line – ahead of public safety.

As each new revelation came out about TEPCO's ineptitude and recklessness, public dissatisfaction rose. In a sign of how worried the Japanese government was at this public discontent, the National Diet (Parliament) ordered the first independent report in its history. The commission was no radical

or popular body, but made up of establishment figures, scientists and officials the ruling class could have assumed would be "safe pairs of hands". Its conclusions, released in July, are damning. The message from its chair, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, indicates how thoroughly the official world had been discredited:

The earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 were natural disasters of a magnitude that shocked the entire world. Although triggered by these cataclysmic events, the subsequent accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant cannot be regarded as a natural disaster. It was a profoundly manmade disaster – that could and should have been foreseen and prevented. And its effects could have been mitigated by a more effective human response [...]

Our report catalogues a multitude of errors and wilful negligence that left the Fukushima plant unprepared for the events of March 11. And it examines serious deficiencies in the response to the accident by TEPCO, regulators and the government. [9]

The report goes on to try to spread the blame for this "wilful negligence" across "Japanese culture" more generally, but the facts speak for themselves: corporate culture, and the top-down, bullying atmosphere of big corporations are hardly unique to Japan.

Corporate neglect vs working class solidarity

In the days and weeks immediately after the earthquake, basic survival was the order of the day, and it is out of the networks formed in this process that the first steps of the protest movement began. TEPCO itself quite happily added insult to injury: "from September 12th, half a year after the meltdown, the utility started sending, mostly through the post, a 58-page application form for compensation that demanded receipts (actual, not copied) for transportation and other fees incurred during the evacuation, bank or tax statements proving pre-disaster income levels and documented evidence of worsening health since the move.

A month later, TECPO had received just 7,600 completed forms – that is about 10% – because they were widely considered too arduous and detailed, but above all because many of the required documents requested were destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami." [10]

The response of ordinary Japanese people stands in contrast to this insult. Unions and community groups began the task of organising shelter and care when it became apparent the government was unable, or unwilling, to do so. Although reconstruction will take many years – and some areas will be uninhabitable indefinitely – much government temporary accommodation requires families to leave after two years. In other areas there is no subsidy for basics such as water and gas in evacuation zones. Smaller, radical unions, especially those who organise among young casualised workers, have politicised relief work, providing services to their members and working class communities at the same time as they organise against the political logic of reconstruction. Iwahashi Makoto, an activist with the autonomist union POSSE, explained this strategy at a union gathering in Seoul last year:

The government's official line amongst this is "Creative Reconstruction", a code for neoliberal reconstruction, reshaping cities to the demands of business. The government has adopted policies such as deregulation to encourage global competition among multinational corporations, establishing "recovery zones" with tax incentives, and fast-tracking deregulation for private capital to flow into the devastated ports and farmlands. At the same time, the government has done nothing to guarantee the living standards of ordinary people. Some people have been excluded from social security, and families have had their benefits stopped once they are deemed "independent" after relocating to temporary housing.

Given this situation, we believe that it is important for activists to assist reconstruction in Sendai. There are people who have been abandoned and have received almost no state assistance. In helping these people, we hope to highlight the issue of

poverty in Japan as a general social problem, rather than a transient one that has developed solely due to the earthquake. The earthquake has highlighted deep social problems, such as the inadequacies of social and residential security; these are not issues that have emerged for the first time. The problems in the affected areas reflect problems in Japan more generally, and our first aim is to raise poverty as a social issue. [11]

Iwahashi's argument that "the problems in the affected areas reflect problems in Japan more generally" is important; having endured two decades of declining living standards, rising unemployment and growing economic uncertainty, the Japanese working class felt this crisis all the more acutely. [12]

Workers in the construction industry face these problems in particular concentrated form. The Japanese construction industry has managed to stifle most union organising, and is dominated by organised crime, ruthless casualising employers and atomised work regimes. TEPCO exploits all of this. In June 2011 POSSE's blog reported that "The most dangerous clean-up work post Fukushima Daiichi meltdown has been left to day labourers. These workers are exposing themselves to high levels of radiation by carrying the contaminated water from the tank etc., and oftentimes don't even know what they're getting themselves in for because the Situations Vacant add outright lies about the work or will try to lure workers by offering permanent fulltime work when it actually is contract or casual employment. This reveals issues of poverty and the inequality gap inherent in society." [13]

The protest movement emerges

It is unsurprising that, given the Japanese people's experience of the horrors of nuclear weapons at the end of World War II, anti-nuclear sentiment has always been strong among workers. But decades of relative social stability, and – until the collapse of the "Bubble" economy in the 1990s – increasing standards of living for many workers helped the ruling class to separate the "bad" nuclear question

(nuclear weapons and militarism, too hot politically for Japan's rulers to touch even as, from the 1950s onwards, they faced US pressure to rearm) from the "good" nuclear question (energy, "prosperity", power). What anti-nuclear movement Japan had before 2011 was small, dispersed, fractured and marginal.

Initially it looked as if nothing much would change following Fukushima. There were protests against nuclear power and the government's handling of the disaster from early in March, but these were very small, and were ignored by the Japanese media. Their size, though, concealed their significance. Campaigning journalist Chie Matsumoto observes: This is not the only one demonstration we've had in Japan. When you look at the past demonstrations throughout the year since the disaster, it is very clear that people are starting to act on it. It used to be very rare for Japanese to take action: It used to be considered that protests and demonstrations were only for the limited few...[and were not] the right of the people.

But since the disaster, demonstrations have taken a different turn. They have been growing bigger every time. Many of different sizes have sprung out across the country.

The very recent one at the Diet building was probably one of the very few that people gathered on their own, rather than upon request for collective action by trade unions or civil society that they belong to. These were individuals who were truly angry, frustrated and betrayed by the Japanese government, and they acted out. [14]

These unprompted gatherings had a spontaneous air to them, with similarities to the Occupy movement: people heard about sit-ins and demonstrations from friends on social media sites and decided to start similar events in their own cities. A younger generation, untouched by the exhausting legacy of defeats and setbacks that have plagued Japan's existing left, built these rallies, many of them taking political action for the first time in their lives.

Social media played an important role in the beginning of this process, and then, as people's confidence increased by seeing how many other people shared their views and were prepared to march, workplaces came alive with political discussion, often for the first time. "I found out about this rally through Twitter", one Kyoto woman told interviewers covering an anti-nuclear rally; "I can't talk about this with the people I work with or the people around me but compared to before I think I can have a conversation about why we don't need nuclear power and people seem to agree." [15]

With each week, new revelations of the disaster's damage or the shady practices of TEPCO would dominate Japan's major newspapers and, with them, each week through the northern spring and summer of 2011, the movement grew. What started as vigils of a few hundred people grew into weekly gatherings of several thousand. The movement "rose like a rocket", growing from nothing into a force that dominated Japanese politics for months on end. A sit-in and tent embassy outside the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry lasted six months from September 2011, and massed crowds of supporters regularly saw off police attempts to disperse the protest.

"Women of Fukushima", a protest movement of displaced women from the affected region, intersected with the sit-in and became another pole of organising attraction. Demonstrations started, and continued, outside the Prime Minister's residence. The Friday protests grew from 300 in March to 90,000 in July. For a country known for its docile and apolitical public culture, suddenly Japan was politically alive. Evacuees from affected regions played important roles in these weekly mobilisations, and gave the movement confidence to resist calls for "national unity" and other attempts to depoliticise the situation.

At one rally in October the Akahata [Red Flag], the Communist Party's daily newspaper, interviewed an evacuee from the nuclear meltdown: "I didn't know how dangerous nuclear power plants were before this," he said. "Many people don't know

what a big mess a meltdown can cause. I took part in these rallies to share my experience with others. I find the demonstrations happening in front of the PM's office very encouraging; it makes me happy to know that people unaffected immediately by the disaster are also protesting for themselves." [16] Inspired by the lead Tokyo activists offered, smaller demonstrations in rural areas, and around Fukushima, have now become common.

Most inspiring of all are the mass protests. Some 60,000 mobilised in Tokyo to mark six months since the disaster. Over twenty thousand marched in late July 2012, enduring extreme humidity and mid-summer heat; at another July rally 200,000 surrounded the Diet building. Earlier in July 170,000 people marched in Tokyo. These are all amongst the biggest demonstrations Japan has seen since 1960. Police and organiser estimates vary wildly, as always; but, even going by the police's under-estimates, the crowds involved in protesting are on a scale qualitatively different from anything this generation has known.

Prime Minister Noda at one stage tried to dismiss the protest movement as "a lot of noise":

"But these voices are not just noise", the Japan Times reports protester, student Hayashi Yuichi, retorting. [17] The ruling class has, for the moment, lost the initiative as it tries to respond to this popular movement. On the one hand, Noda and his cabinet are desperate to act as if the protest movement leaves them unaffected, and to assure business that normal life – with nuclear power plants reactivated – can continue. But at the same time the movement threatens to keep spreading, and the longer people stay on the streets the more confident and emboldened they feel. This marks a sharp break from the authoritarian, strictly repressive social order Japanese capitalism has maintained; if protest is legitimised by this movement, who knows where it will stop? As Matsumoto Hajime, one of the more radical protest organisers, told the New York Times, the country is "on the cusp of something new". [18]

This "something new" finds expression within the movement, and around its base. Inside the movement, Kunitomi Kenji, a veteran revolutionary socialist and editor of the *Kakehashi*, argues that a "primitive anti-capitalist consciousness" is emerging amongst demonstrators as they gain experience protesting and are exposed to the inspiration of debate and discussion inside the movement. They are pulling society to the left as they go; a survey conducted by the *Mainichi Shinbun* showed 47 percent felt solidarity with the demonstrators and their aims. This registers a significant shift in a country where protest has long been demonised. [19] The very fact that people are protesting in large numbers again is giving them a sense of their own power: "It doesn't matter, for now, if people hear us or not," Ayuko Higashi told the *New York Times*, during her third anti-nuclear rally. "It's just a big step forward to start raising our voices. [20]"

The bulk of material produced around the campaign so far, from political groups and activists' campaign groups, limits itself to the question of ending Japan's reliance on nuclear power. But it is clear that significant numbers are drawing connections between their own safety, the forces that benefit from nuclear power, and the limits of Japan's democracy. "It's become clear who is really pushing for the nuclear agenda", one man from Aichi told the *Akahata* at one of the Friday-night rallies in September. "We want to show the PM Noda that ordinary people's rage is more dangerous than Keidanren [Japan's leading business lobby group] or the US." [21] Another told the paper they were "shaking with rage", while another first-time protester expressed the views of many: "It feels like a turning point in history. We won't stop until all the nuclear power plants have been decommissioned."

Ruling class responses

The current Democratic Party government is weak and divided. Since its first Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio was humiliated by Obama into accepting ongoing US imperial dominance in Okinawa, the government has limped through cri-

sis after crisis, directionless and despised by both big business and ordinary people. A section of the party – led by faction leader Ozawa – split over increases to a GST-style tax. Much like Labor in Australia, the Democratic Party is caught between its desire to rule for capital and its falling political stocks as it betrays and punishes its supporters. [22]

In this wider political context, the government was initially poorly placed to respond to the outpouring of public anger and fear following TEPCO's exposure. Having initially come out with commitments to end the use of nuclear power by the 2030s, within days the cabinet had reversed its position, buckling to pressure from business and nuclear industry lobbying and committing to the status quo. [23] Police repression is usually a common feature of Japanese trade unionist and activist life, and Communist Party supporters have in the past been jailed for distributing leaflets in people's letterboxes, but police actions against the nuclear movement have been very restrained, with only a handful of arrests. It seems clear that the government is committed to nuclear power, and to the nuclear industry, but lacks the will – yet – to confront the movement head-on. Meanwhile Noda's popularity ratings continue to slump, his rivals consider their options, and nationalist distractions are pulled out as attempts to deflect public attention from the crisis at home.

Other establishment figures have opportunistically tried to attach themselves to the movement bandwagon.

Former Prime Minister Hatoyama has appeared at protest events, telling crowds that "We have to cherish this flow of new democracy that you are creating... We can see how far apart the distance between the public voice and the prime minister's office has become. As a former prime minister, I would like to deliver your message to the prime minister's office right now." [24] It is clear that Hatoyama and others see in the protest movement a chance to position themselves and to build an

electoral support base. What is less clear is whether the movement will let itself be co-opted.

Portrait of a movement

Marx wrote that "the tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living." [25] This nightmare for the Japanese workers' movement was the legacy of defeats from the 1970s. We do not have space to go into the full history, but some background is essential for grasping what is new about the current movement. The vicious repression of the 1930s and 1940s, followed by US-inspired anti-Communist purges, had left the young "New Left" of the 1960s bereft of tradition or continuity, and without links to the working class movement that might have kept them grounded in reality.

As a result, and tragically, a great upsurge of youth rebellion was squandered in the 1970s, as socialist activists turned to ultra-left stunts (and sometimes terrorism), inter-left warfare and a glorification of violence. Increasing state repression produced within the left a culture of confrontation, and so-called "socialist" groups engaged in battles with each other, battles which by the end of the 1980s had left over 100 activists dead, murdered by other socialists. The remnants of these thuggish and sectarian groups still exist, and their antics discredited both protest and socialist politics in the minds of many working class Japanese people. That legacy of bitterness and regret is still felt very strongly today.

For this reason, some of the most radical aspects of Japan's protest movement may not look all that audacious to Western eyes. There have been no big confrontations, few inspiring moments of defiance to compare with UK students rioting at Millbank Tower or Greek workers engaging in pitched battles. But, for Japan, the fact that ordinary workers are protesting at all reveals a big step forward in popular consciousness. It is the mass nature of these demonstrations that is significant: if Japan has not yet seen a full radicalisation, it is currently in the middle of a widespread politicisation. This should give heart to socialists everywhere.

"I don't normally come to protests but because it was for No Nukes I thought I could come along to just check it out", one woman told protest organisers in Kyoto. [26] In normalising public protest once more, this movement can spill out into other areas of life. The revolutionary socialist newspaper *Kakehashi* captured some of the ways this movement raises further questions when they quoted a high school student protesting at the monster rally which surrounded Parliament: "We want the government to tell us kids the truth. We want the right to decide what to do with nuclear power plants. [27]"

The "tradition of the dead generations" weighs on this movement still, though. Many demonstration organisers have stressed the apolitical nature of their movement, asking people not to bring organisational banners or "non-related" signs to anti-nuclear demonstrations. Organisers have gone out of their way to stress their friendly relations with the police, bowing to them and thanking them for their hard work at the end of demonstrations. [28]

Although the demonstrations are overwhelmingly working class in composition, it has been celebrities, prominent citizens and middle class figures who have dominated the stages and publicity of these events, not unionists.

The anti-nuclear movement is dominated by two main coalition groups: *Sayonara Genpatsu Issenmannin Akushon* (Goodbye Nuclear Power, 10 Million People in Action), a larger grouping drawing together older, more well-established campaign groups, intellectuals and writers, *Kenzaburo Oe* most famously; and the *Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes*, a younger and newer formation. Although the *Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes* has a more radical image and more youthful energy, both coalitions have contributed towards mass mobilisations and both tap into similar social sentiments, drawing in comparable social forces. Political distinctions between the two mobilisations offer clues as to how this struggle may develop, and what social forces and politics are in play.

The big rally in *Yoyogi-Uehara*, organised by *Kenzaburo Oe* and others, was notably older than the Friday night gatherings outside the Prime Minister's office have been. There are several strands to the movement; *Sayonara Genpatsu* gathers together many from the 1960s generation and the "old" New Left, while around the *Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes* – and beyond it in fledgling non-aligned groups – younger sets of activists are trying out different political programs and analyses. Many of these people have never been involved in any protest movements before.

This movement's aversion to politics will, in the future, become a problem. As the government presses on with its plans to restart reactors and lock the nuclear industry into Japanese capitalism, questions of strategy, politics, and analysis will become urgent. There is a huge political gulf between the political desires the anti-nuclear movement shows are so widespread and the organisational forces active and able to make these desires take form. The Japanese Communist Party, for a few years towards the end of the last decade, experienced a boom in youth membership and interest, and seemed to be set for a generational revival, but this has not translated into electoral success, and besides, the party's politics and structures remain unresponsive and moribund. [29]

It is too soon to dismiss the possibility of an organisational breakthrough coming out of this movement, though, and certainly it presents an opportunity for activists with socialist politics to argue their case to an audience much bigger than has existed, and much more buoyant than has been possible, for a long time. There is a real sense that this is a moment to seize; protester *Naoki Okada* told the *Mainichi Shinbun* at one of this year's weekly Friday rallies that "If we're going to be rid of them, now's the time... It took just months for Japan to get to zero operational reactors, so why do we need to restart any?" *Okada* said. "I wanted to strike now, while everyone's determination not to let this pass is united." [30]

Certainly, some leaders in the movement feel this limitation already, and are pushing their way towards overcoming it. Political clarification becomes possible as activists get a sense of their potential power. Amiyama Karin first became famous in Japan as an ultra-nationalist and right wing punk singer; she has radicalised to the left over the last years and is now a spokesperson for an anti-nuclear group. Her new political direction was made clear in a speech she gave to one of the mass rallies: "The way the media talk about us has changed. A new awareness of direct democracy has emerged. It's time to change history... We've held weekly Friday vigils outside the PM's office since the end of March. The number of participants grew from there and now is a social movement. We are gaining momentum." [31]

The challenge facing the Japanese socialist left is to build on that united "determination not to let this pass".

Ideological breakthroughs

One way this can be achieved is through the links between the economic and environmental crisis. The disaster, for POSSE organiser Iwahashi Makoto, has prompted a break with pro-ruling class ideas, and gives anti-capitalist ideas a chance to get a wider hearing:

The disaster resulted in untold damage, but it also provides us with an opportunity. Up until now, the idea of "self-responsibility" has been dominant in Japan. That is, welfare issues were not seen as a question of poverty, but as a problem with the poor themselves and their attitudes and choices. Some 2.05 million people currently receive welfare – a record high. This is not, however, viewed as structural poverty by society. Even people on welfare have internalised the idea of self-responsibility. Beneficiary bashing continues even after the quake. Our starting point has to be a struggle against the hegemonic idea of self-responsibility that pervades Japanese society.

When this kind of consciousness develops, we will be able to take advantage of the political situation

the earthquake has produced. For the first time in Japan, everyone can see that a large number of people have been pushed into poverty because of circumstances beyond their control, and not because of their own actions. These people are victims. But the earthquake, while an extraordinary event, is not the only factor that pushed these victims into poverty. It has exposed deeper structural problems in Japanese capitalism.

We are currently forming a movement to demand a decent standard of living by tackling issues victims face. We want to link this to a struggle against neoliberalism and capitalism. We believe that addressing the issues of the affected areas is an important way to fight the ongoing hegemony of anti-welfare ideas of self-responsibility. [32]

There are signs this kind of wider social critique is starting to spread. The revolutionary socialist Kakehashi reported on an October demonstration in Hibiya Park as a stand for change and for "the politics of dignity". [33]

What is to be done?

We are not in a position, from abroad, to offer tactical advice to our friends and comrades in the Japanese anti-nuclear movement. The excitement this movement offers is its picture of a new generation searching out their own traditions, their own questions, their own answers. In part old lessons need to be relearned; it is in the experience of building a movement that a new generation finds the confidence to challenge existing authority and power.

The stakes are very high. Contamination around Fukushima will cause displacement, loss and health damage for working people for many years, if not decades, and yet the Japanese ruling class has made it clear they are committed to maintaining the nuclear industry. TEPCO, with its history of appallingly slack safety standards, has given no indication it will be changed. All the issues of Japanese capitalism remain. So this is a movement that needs to win.

What activists abroad can see, and participate in, though, is the revival of a battle of ideas on the Japanese left. The movement has opened a space up for the discussion of all sorts of issues – from the limits of the ideology of "self-responsibility" to the potential power of the working class – and has provided an inspiration for older activists to reconnect with new social forces and young workers.

Slow train coming

Veterans like Kunitomi Kenji and his comrades in the Revolutionary Communist League and National Council of Internationalist Workers and militants who stuck to a vision of working class self-emancipation through the repression of the 1970s, the sec-

tarian disasters of the 1980s and the apolitical emptiness of the 1990s are now part of a movement drawing in tens of thousands of people who have never protested before.

Their challenges lie before them. The movement is bound to come up against a more serious ruling class opposition, and to find some of its own ambiguities and political confusions forced into confrontation and clarification. What will come of it? There will be much for us to learn.

The stance one protester took when interviewed by the Akahata outside the Prime Minister's residence shows what lies ahead. "If we slow down," he said, "we won't get to our goal." [34].

Marxist Left Review

USA :

Heroism Against the Machine

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

Then there are those heroic individuals who seem to come out of nowhere, perhaps influenced in some ways by the atmosphere of dissent but with no indication that they ever were, or intended to be, part of an organized movement let alone symbols of it. That's who Chelsea Manning seems to be, pretty much an ordinary woman with ordinary human qualities and problems — who didn't check her moral compass at the door when she signed up for the military. It is all the more critical now for the social justice movement to defend and, yes, celebrate her as one of our own.

Maybe she was indirectly influenced by the example decades earlier of Daniel Ellsberg, who revealed the "Pentagon Papers" with their revelations of the lying fraud behind the United States' war in Vietnam. Maybe not. In any case, you can and should read the statement of this hero here: <http://www.bradleymanning.org/news/bradley-mannings-statement-taking-responsibility-for-releasing-documents-to-wikileaks>. Here's a brief excerpt explaining her actions:

"The more I read the cables, the more I came to the conclusion this was the type of information that should become public. I once read [unavailable] a quote on open diplomacy written after the First World War [about how] the world would be a better place if states would avoid making secret pacts and deals with or against each other. I thought these cables were a prime example of the need for more open diplomacy...I believed the public release of these cables would not damage the United States. I did believe that the cables might be embarrassing since they represent very honest opinions and statements behind the backs of other nations and

organizations. In many ways these cables are a catalogue of cliques and gossip. I believed exposing this information might make some within the DoS, [Department of State] and other government entities, unhappy."

Because of the political and judicial climate at the time of Daniel Ellsberg's revelations, Richard Nixon's attempt to destroy his life didn't succeed. It's different in the more reactionary age of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. As Chris Hedges writes, "Manning will surely pay with many years — perhaps his entire life — in prison. But we too will pay. The war against Bradley Manning is a war against us all." (http://www.truthdig.com/report/print/we_are_bi)

Hedges is right, of course. Self-interest as well as basic morality and human decency demand that the antiwar and civil liberties movements stand in solidarity with Chelsea Manning as well as with Wikileaks, which published her revelations after mainstream corporate newspapers' cowardly refusal to be the primary recipients. You can follow developments and offer support through Manning's defense committee website www.bradleymanning.org.

In its lust for revenge, the government and the military wouldn't accept Manning's statement of responsibility exposing her to 20 years prison, but pressed the ridiculous charges of "aiding the enemy," "espionage" and "computer crimes."

Manning had no contact with "the enemy," didn't spy for anyone and hacked into no government computers. No matter. The military judge ruled not guilty on aiding the enemy — a charge which would have exposed any media reporting leaks to the same charge — but convicted Manning on almost everything else. Her sentencing is pending as this

editorial is written, but it's clear that the public struggle for his ultimate freedom will last for many years to come.

There's another comparison worth thinking about: What made Chelsea Manning behave differently from the flyboys she saw on the video in their Apache helicopter, gunning down civilians on a Baghdad street and then returning to incinerate a van (including kids) who were trying to assist the wounded victims?

Those guys weren't necessarily cynical psychopaths when they joined the military. Nor were those who have raided village homes in Afghanistan, shot the men, raped teenage girls and burned the bodies to hide the evidence.

We don't know when and why they shed their moral compasses, or how many of them will return to become violent abusers or PTSD-afflicted human time bombs. The military and the government have every reason to keep us from finding out any time soon. The truth would expose too much about what these wars have done to our society as well as those we've pulverized with our smart weapons and stupid leaders.

Why Truth is Needed NOW

Decades from now when it's too late, there will be studies that provide considerable detail like Nick Turse's new book *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*. Turse's research showed that routine civilian massacres "were the inevitable outcome of deliberate policies, dictated at the highest levels of the military," and that "It was not out of the ordinary for U.S. troops in Vietnam to blast a whole village or bombard a wide area in an effort to kill a single sniper."

The real story of the Iraq and Afghan wars remains largely hidden. Right now, we need the heroism of Chelsea Manning and more like her to lift the information blackout. That's why the system is determined to crush her and anyone else who might follow her example of ordinary, and extraordinary, heroism.

The truth is needed now for our society to face its real condition, which is partly exposed yet too much hidden. As everyone knows, president Obama spoke eloquently about the killing of Trayvon Martin after the acquittal of the murderer George Zimmerman. (Articles in this issue by Malik Miah and Meleiza Figueroa discuss the case and the realities of racism in the United States.) Trayvon was an unarmed, innocent American teenager killed while doing nothing wrong. But so was 16-year-old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, a name Barack Obama never pronounces in public.

Abdulrahman was the son of Anwar al-Awlaki, the jihadist Yemeni-American preacher whose death in a U.S. drone strike Obama reported to the U.S. public with satisfaction. It was a couple weeks later that his son, never accused of anything, was blown to pieces by another drone while eating with friends in a café. That attack was presumably ordered by the lying John Brennan, then Obama's "counterterrorism director" and now head of the CIA, who stated with a straight face that drone attacks have killed no noncombatant civilians, and rubber-stamped by the president who's said to approve all drone targets.

While the Department of Justice is being asked to bring civil rights charges against George Zimmerman, it should also be investigating the murder of Abdulrahman al-Awlaki by his own government. If the former prospect is a long shot, the latter is a bad joke. As for the thousands of dead civilians from drone attacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen, no one even has the jurisdiction over those covered-up crimes.

Most of the U.S. population, understandably, tends not to see the acts of our government in faraway covert operations as directly impacting our own lives. That leads us directly to the case of National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden. What makes Snowden so "dangerous" is, above all, his tearing away the veil that tries to hide what these wars actually mean for the rights that U.S. citizens are supposed to enjoy.

The fact that every phone call, email, google search, etc. are all stored in black-site NSA metafiles stuns many folks whose daily lives are too insecure and stressed to worry much about whom we're killing this week in tribal North Waziristan or the Yemeni desert. It poses the question point-blank: Is the government's "war on terror" protecting the U.S. population from potential harm, or targeting it?

President Obama's statement, claiming that "before Mr. Snowden's leaks," he was ordering a review to bring greater oversight and "transparency" to the secret monitoring programs, is "transparently" an after-the-fact cover story that fools no one. Whatever pale "reforms" may be made to the NSA domestic spying programs will be due directly to Snowden's revelations.

The U.S. government enraged people throughout Latin America, including its friends, when it ordered the interdiction of Bolivian president Evo Morales' plane on suspicion that Snowden might be aboard. And raising a noisy public demand that Russia turn Snowden over, which obviously wasn't going to happen, just gave the Putin regime a free shot to kick sand in Washington's face. None of this has exactly been a domestic or diplomatic triumph for the current holder of the imperial presidency.

To be sure, Russia's granting temporary asylum to Snowden has nothing to do with that regime's support for human rights. Its treatment of its own dissidents, from opposition political figures to Pussy Riot, and its almost-medieval criminalization of LGBT people, are beyond barbaric. Sheltering Snowden now is an action based on Russian state and regime interests, and certainly not reliable in the long run. But it is a very good thing indeed that Snowden, for the present, is beyond the reach of the U.S. government, and in Russia at least he is not going to be vulnerable to a drone strike.

The U.S. government's pursuit of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden also demonstrates the continuing importance of Wikileaks, and what lies in store for its founder Julian Assange if the "criminal justice" system gets hold of him. Without

Wikileaks, how much would we not know? The call for Assange to face questioning on sexual assault allegations in Sweden is legitimate in itself; what makes it impossible is the near-certainty that once there, he'd be trundled off to the United States on a sealed "espionage" indictment.

As we argued in our previous editorial statement (<http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/3926>), the presidency of Barack Obama has been a human rights disaster. That is not fundamentally because of his own deficiencies, and not really because of the power of the right wing in Congress either. It is above all because of the U.S. imperial drive to dominate and police the world, and the inevitable consequences and blowbacks it produces.

Those individuals who defy the imperial machine and its national security secrecy state, whether they come from the movements or seemingly out of nowhere, are priceless. Chelsea Manning is worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize, and Edward Snowden of a Medal of Freedom. They deserve our gratitude and whatever solidarity the movement can offer.

Editorial Postscript – August 27, 2013

VERY SHORTLY AFTER Against the Current went to press, the judge in the court-martial trial of Bradley Edward Manning handed down a sentence of 35 years – less than the 60 or more years demanded by the prosecution, but shockingly harsh for Manning's "crime" of exposing U.S. war atrocities in Iraq, none of which have been punished. Soon afterward, as everyone now knows, Manning announced that she wishes to be known as Chelsea Elizabeth Manning and to be recognized as a woman.

What hasn't changed, of course, is the heroism and extraordinary courage that Manning showed in maintaining a moral compass when so many military personnel from soldiers to commanding officers to high-level bureaucrats, to say nothing of lying politicians hiding behind the face of "supporting our troops," have abandoned theirs. The added factor now is Chelsea Manning's decision to live

openly as who she really is, and the struggle that must be waged to defend her right to do so within the confines of a military prison.

This struggle includes her right to hormone therapy, which the military says it will refuse to provide. In addition, the regulations that govern military prisons make Manning eligible for programs and release on parole in less than ten years. Chelsea Manning must not face the loss of these rights in retaliation for her gender identity. The movement that has risen in Manning's defense must, and undoubtedly will, redouble its efforts now.

What justice really demands is that Chelsea Manning be unconditionally freed now. That decision rests with president Barack Obama, who has the powers of pardon or commutation of sentence. To do that would require that Obama display a tiny fraction of the courage that Manning has shown. We add our voices to the calls for a presidential pardon for Chelsea Manning, while certainly not holding our breath awaiting the outcome.

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FRANCE

"The pension reform is a typically right-wing measure"

OLIVIER BESANCENOT ·

Raphaelle Besse Desmoulières: What do you think of the pension reform that has just been announced by Prime Minister Jean- Marc Ayrault?

Olivier Besancenot - By Tuesday morning we knew we had to fear the worst. We saw Gattaz (president of the MEDEF employers' federation) leaving the Prime Minister's office, looking delighted! And we were not mistaken. Once again, it is the purchasing power of workers that is affected, with rising contributions and a lengthening of the period of payments necessary to receive a full pension, to 43 years from 2035. But the worst is the government's promise to the MEDEF, of a future reform in 2014 of the financing of social protection, which could represent savings for employers of up to 34 billion euros in the contributions they make for family allowances. This is an unprecedented attack that deserves an unprecedented response.

How is it possible to mobilize around a minimal reform, even though the unions do not seem to be very much on the offensive?

There is anger, even if the government underestimates it completely. The supposedly "left" government is preparing to enact a typically right-wing reform. This is a first. The challenge is for the whole of the social and political non-governmental left to take part in a large-scale mobilization. Unlike in 2010, there will be a divided trade-union front. The consequence of this is that we have to decide whether or not we will sink into an attitude of resignation. Everything is possible on the issue of pensions. In 1995, which saw the first major revolt against the Juppé plan on social security, and which won a victory, the union front was also divided.

What is your assessment of the first year of the Left in power?

It is absolutely dramatic. It is strongly in continuity with the previous policies. Even on social issues, there is less and less of a difference between the Left and the Right. I am thinking of the whole policy on law and order and immigration. For us, Interior Minister Manuel Valls is absolutely not a loose cannon. He has been mandated to organize a diversion. The government is taking the responsibility of playing on the dangerous ground of the terrible equation between law and order and immigration, opening up a series of false debates, while it prepares to take part in organizing social regression.

Is the NPA in favour of intervention in Syria?

We are opposed to any Western military intervention in Syria and elsewhere. The revolutionary processes that are underway can be subject to being hijacked by the counter-revolution. Our solidarity goes first to the Syrian people, in the face of the ongoing slaughter. For months we have been demonstrating with others to demand concrete political and economic solidarity. And also, why not, if the Western powers stop their hypocrisy, arm the Syrian revolutionaries?

The NPA has launched a subscription for a million euro. Is your party in danger?

We are not in the red; we have the money to continue our activities. The only question that arises is whether or not we are able to stand in all the constituencies for the European elections, so as to defend our political project against today's Europe, a Europe of austerity that is organizing social regres-

sion, and for a clearly internationalist policy that does not slip into chauvinism .

Mélenchon renewed, on Sunday, August 25, his invitation to you to join the Left Front. What is your answer to him?

The question does not arise in terms of joining the Left Front. What we hope is that the leadership of the Left Front looks a bit less in the direction of the government Left and instead seeks to respond to the call for unity that we have been making for months, in order to form an opposition that is uninhibited and consistent. That implies clashing with the government on the issue of pensions and rejecting, in the municipal elections, all sorts of doubtful alliances.

For the municipal elections, what is your strategy?

On the basis of an anti-capitalist municipal project, we want to regroup the lists that express policies

that are opposed to the government Left. This means having NPA lists in a maximum number of places, as well as united lists with some other local groups, sometimes with the Left Front. For the moment, Lutte Ouvrière says it is inclining towards presenting its own lists. It's up to them to decide.

The former NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou says you will both be candidates for the European elections. What is the situation?

We take things in the right order. We will not make ourselves ridiculous by discussing that, while we have not yet reached our objective for the financial appeal. Talking about it when we are not sure of being able to stand everywhere doesn't make much sense.

This interview was published in the daily Le Monde on August 28, 2013.

SYRIA

Inside the Syrian Revolution and what the Left must do

Yasser Munif: This summer I actually spent two months in Syria, in northern Syria, the liberated area, and it was a very humbling experience. I learned a lot and I saw a popular revolution, an ongoing popular revolution. People are rebuilding institutions, they are managing their cities after the fall of the state and the regime, and it is a very challenging task to do because there are no resources, there is no funding, and there are permanent attacks by the regime. Those areas I'm talking about in the north are liberated: there are no clashes on the ground. But there are constant airstrikes and missiles are launched on these cities.

So people are coming up with creative solutions: they are creating political institutions. There are local councils in each one of those cities and they meet on a weekly basis. They discuss everything in the city and they try to solve their problems.

And so there are millions of people who hear the media in the West and elsewhere talking about civil war and so on, and most of these people reject those labels. They believe there is a popular revolution in Syria. It's true that it's at a critical period and there are challenging tasks ahead of them, and there are jihadists who are trying to undermine their work, and obviously the regime.

Jeff Napolitano: And the jihadists are often sort of clustered in or considered part of the "rebels" but they are, as you say, quite distinct from the revolution itself.

YM: Right. It's been about three or four months now. The revolutionaries are actually fighting on two fronts. On the one hand there is the regime, on

the other hand there is the Al-Nusra and Al-Qaeda-created groups, the jihadists. And the jihadists are actually arresting, torturing, killing many activists — people who have been resisting since day one. Most of the Al-Qaeda-created groups are not really fighting the regime. They are staying in those northern parts. They are letting the Free Syrian Army and other factions to fight the regime and they come behind them and take over whatever liberated cities or villages there are. So they're very vicious. As I said, they're arresting activists. Anyone who criticizes them is arrested, tortured, sometimes killed. Right now they have more than 1,500 activists in their prisons.

So as you can see, there are two fronts in Syria right now: the jihadists on the one hand, and the regime on the other. And that's why many people believe that the jihadists are in some way or another actually allied to the Syrian regime. Al-Qaeda is actually selling oil to the regime. The pipeline has to go through the region controlled [inaudible] between Al-Qaeda-created groups and the regime to get that oil to reach the coast.

So things are much more complex than they seem here in the U.S. where most of the time you read articles about "Al-Qaeda" and "Al-Qaeda," and Al-Qaeda is actually not part of the revolution. It is anti-revolutionary.

JN: Right, the dominant debate in Congress it seems is, "Well, if we bomb Syria (and the fear isn't actually bombing Syria) the fear is who is going to come to power if we bomb Syria." So that's sort of what the dialogue is. There are apparently many people in Congress, Republicans particularly, who seem to think that the problem with bombing Syria is just that Al-Qaeda is going to

take over the country, as opposed to the fact that bombing the country is just not a good idea.

One of the popular myths (or I don't know if it's a myth, but you tell me), or impressions is that the rebels or revolutionaries (they're not referred to as "revolutionaries," they're referred to as "rebels") is that the folks that oppose Asad and the regime are in favor of a strike on Syria. Is that the case?

YM: You know, from far away I can't really tell. I think that the population is split, many people are against. I think that some people, because of the destruction and the violence and the killing, they're seeing the strike as a "way out," but I don't think that they are necessarily the majority. People have learned in the past 30 months that no one is really allied to their cause or cares about the Syrian population, that the Syrian people don't really have any friends (because some people talk about the "Friends of Syria" and so on) and they understood that the West — Europe and the U.S. — are not necessarily in favor of the victory of the revolution. Actually, people know that — you know, when you talk to the average person in Syria in those liberated areas — they tell you that whenever they're losing any territory or region when they're fighting against the regime, they receive weapons; whenever they are winning, the weapons stop coming. And the reason why this is, is because the West and the U.S. want to see this war go on as a stalemate because that's in their interest. They're not necessarily in favor of the regime, and they're not necessarily very favorable for the revolutionaries, or what they call "Al-Qaeda" to win. So the best thing for the U.S. has been so far to keep this conflict going. And that's also in the interest of Israel, they don't necessarily want to see the revolutionaries to win. And actually, for many Israeli politicians and U.S. politicians, they are in favor of a weakened Bashar in power.

JN: I'm really curious because nobody ever talks about this, or at least not in popular media in the United States, in fact most of the stuff that I read on the Left is about why

it's a bad idea to bomb Syria, but they don't actually talk about what the revolution actually looks like.

And you're talking about rebuilding institutions, and I'm sort of reminded the thing that I studied when I was in graduate school was the Spanish Revolution — the republican revolution that was fueled by the anarchists and the socialists in the 1930s — and they, too, were also struggling on sort of a war with two fronts: one being the fascists, and one the Communists, but that's a different story. But what I was struck by are the descriptions of what the Revolution actually looked like in Spain, and sort of the egalitarian society that sort of just sprouted there. What does the revolution look like on the ground in Syria?

YM: The revolution is very complex, it's very multi-layered, there are actually different things happening and going on. The most dominant part, let's say, is the popular revolution, but there is also an ongoing semi-Cold War between the U.S. and its allies on the one hand, and Russia and its allies on the other. There is also a conflict between Iran and its allies on the one hand, and Israel and the Gulf on the other. So there are all these different layers of this conflict, but the most dominant one — and that's what many Syrians believe — is the popular revolution. And I think this is very important to understand.

And another reason to compare the Syrian revolution to the Spanish War as you were saying is that every leftist, every progressive has an opinion about what is happening in Syria, as was the case with the Spanish Revolution many years ago. And most of the left, unfortunately, is taking the wrong position. They're understanding the Syrian revolution in a very binary and reductive way—

JN: Is this the U.S. left or even the left in Syria?

YM: Even the left in Syria, the Arab left, and the U.S. and European left is split. For the most part, they are understanding this conflict as a war between, on the one hand, the U.S. and [on the other

hand] people who are against the U.S.: "anti-imperialists" according to some people, so that would include Hizballah, Iran, Syria, and they believe that Syria has been helping Palestinians and so on. They have a very ignorant understanding of Syrian history and how violent the Syrian regime has been for the past 40 years, and how many times they betrayed the Palestinian struggle, and so on. And so in some ways those leftists or progressives are actually embracing the Bush doctrine: the either/or, where you don't have any kind of complexity in your position—

JN: The "either you're with us or against us?"

YM: Yes, the binary, the reductive way of thinking about the revolution. And I think this is very detrimental. It's sending the wrong message to the Syrian people. Many Syrians believe that the left by default is for the regime. Recently we have seen demonstrations in New York and other cities with people demonstrating against the war, but also holding and carrying pictures of Asad.

JN: In Boston, for example, just the other day I saw pictures. There was a prominent picture in the Boston Globe in an article against the protests and they focused on a group of people in the crowd who were waving Syrian flags that had Asad's picture emblazoned in the middle of it, and portrayed the entire march as not just being against the strike on Syria, but being in favor of Asad. But I know from inside knowledge from some of the organizations that sponsored it, that that was antithetical to the message of what they were trying to get across.

YM: Right, right. And the left is — *that* left (I don't want to generalize) — that part of the left is losing its credibility. People either in the U.S. or in the Arab world or in Syria won't necessarily get the message that this is really a message against the war. They're going to see the pictures of Asad and

understand that this is really propaganda, it's not really against the war.

I think that the left has a real task ahead of it. It has to really formulate a new position, a more coherent position. A position where one can be at the same time against the war and also against dictatorship. And as long as they don't do that, I think that they won't have any kind of credibility. People in Syria will see that as almost a license to kill because the Syrian regime has been actually broadcasting those demonstrations on Syrian State TV, showing how much it is popular in the West and that people are demonstrating in the streets of New York and other cities showing those pictures of Asad. Actually the Syrian regime is not even able to organize such demonstrations or rallies in Syria, so it was very happy to see that emerging in many parts. And many of the people who are demonstrating actually don't know anything about the reality that Syrians are living, and their struggles, and their fights, and their everyday resistance, and what they're trying to build, and the creativity in what they're doing.

I think that one is very humbled when you go to Syria and see what people are doing. And I think there is also racism, and just denying any kind of agency to the Syrians and saying, "this is all a conspiracy, the U.S. has been planning this since the beginning, it is conspiring against Asad," and so on. And that means that the Syrians don't have any agency, they can't really think for themselves, they can't really make a revolution, and so on. And I think that this is a big mistake that the left is doing.

JN: So I have the prescription that the General Secretary of the American Friends Services Committee put out in a letter to the President and to Congress, and what she calls for — and you let me know what you think of this — but what she calls for is a comprehensive arms embargo to all parties of the conflict, that the only solution in Syria is a political solution, and that we urge ("we" being the AFSC, "we" being the population of the United States), urge to provide full support to the efforts of Lakhdar

Ibrahimi, the joint UN-Arab League envoy, into press for a rapid convening of a Geneva II Conference, and that the U.S. should seek a transition that builds on existing institutions rather than replacing them, and does not alienate those people who have served the government or the army. So that is the top of my organization that prescribes those as what we should do from here. What would you think about that, and what do you think that we should do? "We" being the U.S. population, the left in the U.S.

YM: I think the most important thing to do (for the progressive movement and for people who really care about the Arab revolution and they want to see them go somewhere, and support them, and show their solidarity) is basically move away from the alliances with different states, and build a social movement that supports the Syrian population.

And that solidarity of support can take many different forms. It can be through reporting: actually a responsible journalist who goes to Syria and sees what is happening on the ground, and try to take their job seriously. And not only report the in-fighting and the military aspect of the revolution because I think that's only the tip of the iceberg and that's the most visible part, but this is not the most important part. I think what is happening in Syria

is much more than that. There are many revolutions going on in every field: the political, the cultural, the social, the economic. People are really creating new institutions with new ideas, they are trying to tackle the most difficult problems and try to solve them. And so I think that's part of what could be done.

People need doctors, they need engineers, they need any type of activist that could help them. All this type of solidarity, basically trying to replicate what people have been doing in Palestine: trying to build a global solidarity movement that transcends the state-centric kind of politics that has been taking place in the past 30 months only revolving around governments, and states, and armies, and so on. I think that's the most powerful message that we can send to the Syrian population: building an alternative social movement that's global, and that really understands the complexity of the Syrian revolution and doesn't reduce it to "jihadists" and "Al-Qaeda," and understand that there are these different layers. Progressives and leftists should really push for the revolutionary part, and not just repeat this narrative of the "conspiracy" that just reduces it to what we've been seeing in the media.

Listen to the interview on the following link

Interview transcribed by Linda Quiquívix:

ON EGYPT

— an interview with Gilbert Achcar

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

ATC: You had said that forcibly suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood "would be very costly for Egyptian economy and society." After the massacre of August 14 and the events that have followed, what's the hope for a democratic revolutionary process continuing in Egypt? What should be the response of the Egyptian and international left to this escalating and deadly crisis?]

GA: The repression of the Muslim Brotherhood proved very costly indeed, both in human lives and for its impact on the Egyptian economy, not to mention the serious deterioration of the country's image. But note that I spoke before of a suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, which to this date is still not what is going on.

Escalating the repression to the level of suppressing the Brotherhood would definitely entail an even higher and more lasting cost. Under such conditions, the best scenario remains a return to the political track, with a compromise between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. This would require that the Brothers depart from their intransigent attitude.

Most of the Egyptian left (the Revolutionary Socialists being one exception) have welcomed the repression after having welcomed the coup. This shows their weakness and failure to design a truly

independent third way rejecting both the old regime and the Islamic fundamentalists.

"No military and no Brothers, the revolution is still in the square" was a major slogan of the leftwing mobilizations in the weeks before and after the election of Morsi. Unfortunately, most of the left proved incapable of sticking to this line and focusing on building a mass movement centered on social demands. Instead, they shifted from allying with the Muslim Brotherhood in the fight against the old regime to allying with the latter's main apparatus in the fight against the MB.

The international left should avoid this same pitfall of swinging between these two poles, as unfortunately some have done, suddenly shifting to what amounts, to all intents and purposes, to blanket support of the Muslim Brotherhood depicted as "innocent victims." Both the military — who, on top of their very heavy-handed bloody repression, are busy reestablishing many of the old regime's positions that were overtaken by the 2011 uprising — and the Muslim Brotherhood who, on top of what they did during their stint in power, are resorting to disgusting sectarian agitation and attacks, must equally be condemned.

The hatred of the Christian Copts in Egypt plays the same function that anti-Semitism played in Weimar Germany.

September/October 2013, ATC 166

ARAB REVOLTS:

Can People Get What They Want? — an interview with Gilbert Achcar

DAVID FINKEL ·

Against the Current: To begin, we'd like to know something about your new book. Since you've been writing it in the midst of these amazing upheavals, in what ways has your perspective perhaps changed or developed during this time?

Gilbert Achcar: I can't say that my views changed while working on the book. I've been researching and working on the region for a long time, as you know. I was expecting this region to go through some social explosion at some point, although of course events themselves surprised everyone in their magnitude and the way they developed.

The book is mostly about precisely explaining how these events are deeply embedded in the social, political and economic history of the region, with a strong emphasis on the dynamics of the uprising.

The key distinguishing feature of the book is that it is, very plainly, a Marxist analysis. I apply the tools of the Marxist conception of history and analysis of revolutionary upheavals to the current events.

From the beginning I have been emphasizing that this is a long-term revolutionary process, not a "Spring" or something that stops with the overthrow of this or that president. It's a process that won't stop before a radical change happens that can put the region back on the track of social and economic development. Short of such a change, the turmoil will be ongoing.

Through this prism I also analyze the coming to power of Islamic forces, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt and the related En-Nahda party in Tunisia, stressing that these experiences will be short-term and inevitably fail in addressing the social and economic problems — because in that re-

gard they continue the previous regimes' policies, which are bound to fail in a period where the fundamental social-economic problems are aggravated by the uprisings themselves.

I wrote all this before the recent events [the overthrow of Morsi in Egypt — ed.], but the book gives a clear clue about the current new upheaval. At least that's my view — the readers will judge by themselves if it stands up to the acid test of helping to understand such tremendous new developments taking place several months after it was written.

Egypt's Upheaval

ATC: Egypt appears to be a three-way struggle of the mainly secular democratic or liberal movement, Islamist forces, and the military-bureaucratic-police "deep state," with U.S. imperial policy concerned first and foremost with preserving the latter. Do you think the military, at this point, has successfully hijacked the democratic movement and will it be able to "stabilize" the situation by defeating the Muslim Brotherhood without a massive bloodbath? Why did the military's apparent collaborative relationship with Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood break down?

GA: First, there's a lot of confusion about the events and, across the political spectrum, about the position to take toward them. The key point is this false posing of alternatives: Was the overthrow of Morsi the result of a revolutionary upheaval, or a military coup? This way of putting the question misses the main point, that it was a combination of both. In the book I stressed the fact that it was a similar combination that led to the overthrow of Mubarak,

with dangerous illusions prevailing in the mass movement about the army.

In a sense we have had a repeat of that double dynamic. Morsi is now targeted instead of Mubarak, with partisans of the old Mubarak regime on the streets along with the left and liberal forces. The MB is now demonstrating in favor of the overthrown president instead of being with the mass movement that forced his overthrow.

The fact that Morsi was "democratically elected" doesn't contradict the fact that he, and the Muslim Brotherhood behind him, betrayed the mandate given by all those who voted for Morsi in the second round to prevent the candidate of the old regime from reestablishing its kind of order.

On a background of abysmal failure in bringing any solutions to the deteriorating conditions of living of the population, the MB has been actively working to establish their kind of authoritarian order, not a comprehensive consensual democratic one. They thus alienated any remnant of popular sympathy beyond their own dedicated constituency.

The popular movement to recall the president was not "undemocratic" but a very high form of democracy — which one would wish to see applied everywhere — instead of seeing the "elected" betray their electoral promises one after the other in ruling until the end of their mandate.

Another difference with the overthrow of Mubarak is that, when the army overthrew him in 2011, it took the reins of power directly through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. This time they designated a civilian president because they had learned the lesson of their previous experience, which cost them much in terms of image and popularity.

The military have managed to regain a lot of popular credibility, even to increase it within some sectors of Egyptian opinion who are tired of the turmoil in the country. When they kicked Morsi out, however, they didn't expect the MB's resistance to be so stubborn. They expected it to acquiesce to the

removal, and cooperate. But the MB wouldn't do that, because it would have lost its credibility among its own supporters.

The MB had to resist, and was encouraged in that by the attitude of many western governments who were embarrassed by the military's "breach of legality" after having bet on the Islamists. Therefore the Muslim Brothers are mobilizing, in what is a crucial battle for them. They know they can't really win, in the sense of reinstating Morsi; their strategic horizon is rather the intensive mediation by Washington and their own sponsor Qatar, along with other oil monarchies, to reach some kind of compromise.

Any agreement has to be face-saving in order for the MB to accept it. The negotiations aren't easy, but it's difficult to imagine any other alternative.

The MB remains a huge organization, even though it's clearly opposed by the majority of the Egyptian population. Either a comeback of Morsi or a suppression of the MB would be extremely costly for the Egyptian economy and society. That's why it is difficult to imagine an outcome that would not entail some kind of compromise.

Syria's Civil War

ATC: Do you see any way out of the Syrian catastrophe? What do you think remains of the popular democratic impulse that began the uprising? Given the sectarian bloodshed and the role of various external regional and global powers, is this a war that can last as long as the 15-year Lebanese civil war? Does Washington have the desire, the will or the capacity to resolve it?

GA: Outside intervention, in the sense of direct military intervention by the United States, is very unlikely, either sending troops or even a "no-fly zone" or the like. You have read the testimony of General Dempsey assessing the high costs and dangers of various intervention options.

The only one that seemed feasible and seriously put forward as an option in Washington is granting military aid, delivering weapons to the rebellion. That's about the limit of what Washington can do, and even that isn't obvious because of the problems in making sure that weapons would not end up in the hands of enemies of the United States.

Now, if we are speaking of direct foreign intervention in general, there's a heavy one on the side of the regime from Iran and its allies in the region, Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia forces. Over the last few months this enabled the Syrian regime to launch a successful counter-offensive and regain a lot of the ground it had lost, giving the impression that it was victorious.

Indeed Assad made a very boastful speech a few days ago that he would win the war. But only a few months ago he was losing ground to the point where people were expecting the regime's collapse in the short term, the very fact that prompted its allies to intervene massively and directly. Otherwise, if the Syrian regime had been in good shape, they wouldn't have done so — it's particularly costly for Hezbollah's image as a resistance force against Israel, of course, to get involved in a war against a popular uprising in Syria.

Washington is very much worried about this intervention by Iran and its allies. It made the Obama administration appear weak — in fact confirming that the U.S. has been losing ground in the region to Iran. This indeed is what led to the administration changing its stance on arms delivery from its previous "non-lethal aid" stance.

But the key point is that Washington is doing this not in order to give the uprising the capacity to overthrow the regime. It does not want the regime to be overthrown. It took them months even to say that Assad should "step down" in the context of some political compromise. They have been sending one mediator after another for precisely this purpose.

Despite all their other problems with Russia, the U.S. administration cozied up to Moscow to pres-

sure Assad for what Obama called the "Yemen solution."

This so-called solution was actually designed by the Saudis and the United States as a way of aborting the uprising in Yemen. The Yemeni dictator stepped down but remains in the country with his cronies in a very influential position, and the continuity of the state is fully preserved.

The "Yemen solution" Washington is contemplating for Syria requires trying to change the balance of forces, because in the context of a successful counter-offensive Assad is certainly not going to "step down." All this has been quite humiliating for Washington.

Where it is going will be decided on the battlefield. Chances for any compromise or coexistence are extremely difficult after so much killing: over 100,000 people, which many consider a conservative estimate.

The question of how long it can take is also difficult. Syria looks more and more like a three-part country as the northern Kurdish area is organizing its own autonomy similar to Iraqi Kurdistan. The rest of Syria is split between opposition and regime-held territories, but the boundaries are continually shifting. Just today, you have news of the opposition making inroads in previous regime-held areas. It's not consolidating into separate regions such as to create a de facto partition.

In the end, the Syrian regime is based on a sectarian minority — a small minority, in fact, from which are recruited men fully loyal to the regime. And even though the regime has supreme military forces, its human power is limited while the opposition has a much bigger human pool, a fact that can become determinant if it gets the weapons it needs — whether from outside, or from seizing them from Assad's army as it has recently done by taking control of an important stock of antitank weapons.

The opposition has been requesting antitank and anti-aircraft weapons, which is a very legitimate request for essentially defensive weapons in the face

of a murderous regime. In this respect, I think the recent statement of USLAW (U.S. Labor Against War) opposing arms deliveries to the opposition is not logical when it claims that this will only increase the casualties: In the absence of adequate defensive weapons, the imbalance of forces is what allows the regime to destroy and kill massively. There is no doubt that the vast majority of killing and destruction is perpetrated by the regime.

ATC: There are questions about the character of the rebellion itself at this point. What's your reading of the balance of forces within the opposition itself?

GA: This is difficult to assess. One thing that complicates the picture is that some groups have been pretending to be Islamist, growing beards and so forth, to get money — because the main sources of funding and weapons have been the oil monarchies. These monarchies do not support "democracy" to be sure; on the contrary, they want to turn the democratic uprising into a sectarian one of the Sunni majority (70%) against the 10% Alawite minority (a spinoff of Shi'ism) that constitutes the hard core of the regime.

Most of what the oil monarchies send goes to Islamic forces, from the relatively "moderate" Muslim Brotherhood to the al-Qaeda type. So in that sense the inaction of the West, combined with the privileged regional funding of the Islamists, has resulted in the increasing influence of such forces within the opposition, although for the first year to eighteen months the dominant character of the uprising was that of a popular, democratic, youth-led movement.

It's a fact of life that the only possible source for support of the rest of the Syrian opposition happens to be the western countries, with Russia and Iran heavily supporting the Assad regime and the oil monarchies privileging the Islamists.

This said, the majority of the Syrian people remain attached to the democratic spirit they started with, and the recent and increasing role of the Islamist forces, especially the extreme Salafists who try to

impose their moral codes where they prevail, leads to clashes between them and the population that has stood up against the regime. It is to be hoped and wished that the secular opposition will be able to improve the coordination and organization of its own forces.

This is a country where Islamists were much weaker than in Egypt prior to the uprising. If the regime were to fall, the tens of thousands of young activists now in Assad's prisons, who organized the coordination committees that launched the uprising, would hopefully be freed and contribute powerfully to change the balance of forces in favor of the secular democratic camp.

The situation is shifting rapidly in all respects, militarily and politically. I don't think anyone attached to left-wing values can be neutral in this confrontation, let alone support the bloody (and economically neoliberal) regime of Assad.

Note that people on the left had much less hesitation supporting the Iraqi resistance to the U.S. occupation — although that resistance was much more heavily Islamist-dominated than in Syria.

In both cases, the people's struggle is justified and legitimate, and must be supported as a right. Of course, defending the right of Iraqis to resist the U.S. occupation of their country, but not forces engaged in operations that were sectarian killings.

So one must also condemn sectarian killings in Syria, including when these are done by forces fighting against the regime, but the struggle against the regime remains a legitimate fight that must be supported.

Libya After State Collapse

ATC: How do you assess the events in Libya following the overthrow and assassination of Qaddafi?

GA: The Libyan operation is a major failure for the United States. No Western power is in control of the situation, contrary to what so many people said would happen when NATO intervened.

I predicted this outcome during the fighting there: NATO with Washington behind it tried through its intervention to steer the uprising with the same purpose of state preservation they are pursuing now in Syria. They wanted Qaddafi to step down and hand power to his son. However, the uprising thwarted their plan, all the more easily in that it had refused from the start any foreign "boots on the ground."

The result is that Libya is the only country in the region where the old state has been radically dismantled by the uprising, to the point that the new government is finding it very difficult to build a new state in the face of a myriad of local militias.

The Qaddafist state has been dismantled to a greater extent than occurred in any other country in the region. Actually. In Egypt and Tunisia the "deep state" is still there, whereas in Libya it has been dismantled and a very chaotic situation ensued, as in any country where the state collapses.

The local militias, from Islamic fundamentalist to regional, are clashing with a real democratic process involving important participation in politics, which included a higher rate of electoral participation than in the post-uprising elections in Egypt or Tunisia. And there are all the time demonstrations protesting the government, or the militias, or the Islamists; there's a women's movement, a new trade-union movement; the whole country is boiling politically.

This is quite positive in the wake of 40 years of Qaddafi dictatorship, given the absence in the whole region of progressive alternative forces with clear strategic direction and values, capable of leading toward the kind of change that's needed to bring this whole process to a positive end.

ATC: Finally, to touch briefly on the new U.S.-sponsored round of Israel-Palestinian Authority negotiations: To be blunt, is there any reason to take this seriously?

GA: No, not in the sense of expecting anything substantive to come out of it. But the fact that this is happening is related to the increasing worries among western powers about the Palestine-Israel conflict since the beginning of the Arab uprisings. It's a major source of anti-western resentment in many Arab countries. As long as dictatorships and despotic regimes were cooperating with the West, that was acceptable. But since 2011 people are in the streets, that's where politics are happening, and people have learned that if they express their will strongly they can change things.

The quite significant step of the European Union to enforce the boycott of Israeli settlements is a sign of these worries. No money that the EU sends to Israel is to reach the settlements or companies that assist the settlements. This has irritated the Israeli government, which retaliated by stopping EU aid to the Palestinians.

So there's increasing pressure on Israel to make concessions, but it would take much more and stronger economic sanctions — as were imposed on apartheid South Africa — to force the Israeli government to change its stance.

The real Israeli base of support is in Washington, which has remained entirely conciliatory to the Israeli government despite all of Israel's provocations and insults to the Obama administration. When the U.S. "envoy" to the talks is a longtime committed Zionist like Martin Indyk, you know what can be expected.

September/October 2013, Against the Current 166

USA/SYRIA

U.S. Hands Off Syria!

SOCIALIST ACTION ·

The Barak Obama-led march to yet another "war" suffered an important but far from definitive setback when the usual U.S. "coalition of the willing" failed to materialize in late August to lend a fig leaf of Great Power authority to what then appeared to be an imminent U.S. attack on Syria. But Obama's threatened deadly missile strike still remains high on the imperial agenda and requires nothing less than massive and united mobilizations of all antiwar forces to challenge it.

We wish to stress here that the term war, in the context of endless U.S. "wars" in the Middle East today and beyond, where millions are slaughtered in the name of defending America's "national security" (that is, oil interests), is horribly abused. What we are looking at today is not war in the traditional sense but rather the unilateral publicly announced and wholesale murder of innocent people.

The "other side," the victims of imperialist and chauvinist domination, rarely fire a shot in return. The kill figures usually record a few dozen Americans dead, mostly by "friendly fire," alongside thousands or millions of the "enemy," as in Iraq, where 1.5 million were slaughtered. The imperialist-fabricated lie, now fully exposed, that Iraq harbored "weapons of mass destruction" has come home to haunt today's warmakers.

Whatever military equipment the victims of imperialist war might possess is obliterated in the first hours of today's modern "wars." The world's most sophisticated military behemoth is capable of mass murder and destruction without a single boot on the ground or incurring a single dead or wounded soldier. This is what Obama hopes to accomplish in Syria today.

The central U.S. objective is to impose a government capable of repressing the Syrian masses' struggle for freedom and equality while simultaneously promoting U.S. interests in Syria and the region. Currently, the U.S. finds itself unable to establish any "friendly" and viable "transitional national council" with a semblance of credibility among the Syrian masses. Syria's most principled and effective fighters oppose Assad, U.S. intervention, and reactionary fundamentalist or other "rebels" forces armed and beholden to imperialism.

Obama has prescribed "limited" and "precise" Tomahawk Missile strikes, perhaps 300, launched from four "ready on the alert" U.S. warships stationed in the Mediterranean Sea in order to "punish" Syria. However, the British Parliament's vote to reject support to U.S. military action against Syria, followed by Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement that Germany would not become involved militarily (at least for now), has slowed the U.S. war machine's desire for an immediate strike. More-over, despite the enormous pressures they have exerted, U.S. diplomats failed to announce any significant support from Middle Eastern nations, including from the Arab League and countries that are even more intimately aligned with US policy.

Although he lacked UN, NATO, or Middle Eastern support, or even a partner among the ranks of top U.S. allies, and despite the fact that national polls demonstrated majority American opposition to a war against Syria, Secretary of State John Kerry nevertheless pressed on for a "go it alone" military strike. But Obama's rush to war was at least temporarily stalled when bipartisan Congressional opposition indicated that even in the legislative belly of the imperial beast the president might not have majority support.

Obama virtually taunted Congress to defy him, declaring at the White House on Aug. 31, "I am ready to give the order." However, a section of the ruling rich no doubt believes that little or nothing would be accomplished with Obama's proposed adventure, and much more might be lost with regard to the already severely diminished U.S. credibility.

FOR A UNITED MASS MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL U.S. INTERVENTION AND WAR!

The matter will supposedly be decided when Congress resumes on Monday, Sept. 9. In the interim, antiwar and social justice forces are mobilizing for protests across the country—in almost in every instance, properly focusing on the demand, "No U.S. War on Syria!"

Socialist Action fully supports this critical focus and the efforts of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) to unite and mobilize the broadest sections of the antiwar movement and all social justice fighters in mass actions to stop any U.S. attack on Syria. UNAC have properly made explicit their coalition's view that everyone opposed to U.S. imperialist intervention, regardless of their views on the civil war in Syria, must take to the streets in united efforts to stop the proposed U.S. military strike now.

Socialist Action stands squarely opposed to all U.S. intervention in Syria while simultaneously supporting the right of the people of Syria to self-determination. Socialist Action was among the first to hail the massive and repeated popular and peaceful uprisings that challenged the dictatorial regime and neoliberal economic policies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. These mobilizations were regularly met with brute military force.

Today these forces, organized largely in Local Coordinating Committees that provide a modicum of defense and significant vital social services to Syria's beleaguered people, if they prove capable of sinking deep roots into the entire population, can become central to any working-class challenge to Assad's power, or that of any other tyrant who might follow. The critical need to build a revolu-

tionary socialist party and associated mass working-class formations, however limited the opportunities today, remains essential to any successful challenge to Syria's capitalist order.

Socialist Action rejects support to the U.S. or Saudi-Qatari-funded forces, or to any others in the region that funnel aid to achieve U.S. objectives. Many of these semi-secret U.S. weapons providers, while advancing U.S. corporate interests, simultaneously seek to impose on the popular opposition, and on Syria itself, a reactionary fundamentalist ideology and practice that would have Syria ruled by clerical reaction rather than the oppressed working masses.

It is not at all peculiar that the fundamentalist forces that are militarily backed, directly or indirectly, by U.S. imperialism are the very same forces simultaneously deemed as terrorists by the Obama administration. U.S. imperialism has no qualms about supporting the most heinous elements provided only that they are subordinate to its global pursuits.

Tragically, Syrian society is deeply divided, with even a portion of the secular forces in the diffuse Free Syrian Army demanding and receiving U.S. imperialist aid, acceptance of which never comes without agreements to subordinate the interest of the vast population to the rich and powerful in Syria or their U.S. benefactors. However fraught with immense difficulties at the present juncture, Syria's future rests in the capacity of its working masses to chart a revolutionary and independent course—the only political and social course to capable of effectively defeating Assad's dictatorship and imperialist efforts to re-colonize Syria.

WASHINGTON IS THE BIGGEST TERRORIST!

The U.S. antiwar movement in the main has courageously and properly stood above Obama's effort to justify a U.S. war based on the unproven charge that the Assad regime used Sarin gas to murder hundreds of Syrians. So deep has been the expose of previous U.S. pretexts for war, that there are few takers who today automatically jump to the conclu-

sion that the evidence produced by U.S. spy agencies is true.

From "Remember the Maine!" (the 1898 pretext used to conquer Cuba and take Guantanamo Bay), to the Tonkin Bay fabrication that was employed to justify escalating the Vietnam War that killed four million Vietnamese, to Iraq's alleged "weapons of mass destruction," a deep skepticism has permeated the American conscience.

No doubt the massive spying on the e-mails and all other phone and electronic communications of virtually all Americans, revealed by Edward Snowden, add to the ever deepening questioning by millions of people as to the truth of anything put forward by U.S. politicians. A Jan. 1, 2013 report on a recent Gallup poll is headlined "Congress begins 2013 with 14% approval: Average approval for 2012 is the lowest in history."

Even if the Assad government were proven to have employed Sarin gas, virtually no one in the U.S. antiwar movement would argue that the U.S. would-be "cop of the world," whose routine torture and imprisonment of prisoners without charges or access to counsel has been universally condemned, has the moral or political standing to attack any-

one. Syria's future resides in the will of its people to deal with their oppressors, not on U.S. imperialism, whose presidents allied with, funded, and helped orchestrate Iraq President Saddam Hussein's 1980-88 war against Iran.

With the full knowledge and consent of the U.S., Hussein's government employed Sarin gas against Iranian Kurds—which killed thousands. That secretly U.S.-funded war is estimated to have taken the lives of well over a million people.

U.S. imperialism's aim then was to punish the Iranian people for their revolutionary ouster of the U.S.-imposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi regime, installed in 1953 by a U.S.-orchestrated, CIA-led coup. Today, no one doubts that the overriding objective of that U.S.-instigated and funded Iraq-Iran War was to recoup the oil resources of the region.

Each and every U.S. war in the Middle East has been met with, and continues to be met with, the concerted opposition of the people of the occupied nations. However distorted this opposition may be at any given time, it is clear that the re-colonization of the Middle East today by the world's top superpower is detested by the world's people.^a

The Post 2015 Development Agenda

DANIEL MUNEVAR ·

The results of this methodology are for everyone to see: of the original 8 Millenium Development Goals (MDG), only 2 have been met, with serious doubts regarding the possibility of meeting the other 6. In other words, the track record of the current development agenda is less than stellar [1]

So, maybe the issue is not necessarily to continue adding new elements to the framework, but simply to assess if some of the elements that are already present are working, and if it's not the case, whether they can be eliminated. The one element that stands out on that regard is Debt as a development policy tool.

Since the implementation of the Plan Marshall in Europe, policy circles have been burdened with the notion that injections of capital and fresh financial resources constitute one of the basic components of development. Based on this premise, the World Bank has tried throughout the last 69 years to help countries to borrow their way into development. As it's demonstrated on my book, the results of this approach on the living conditions of millions of people around the world have been dismaying [2]

Instead of providing developing countries with fresh resources, the debt system has forced those same countries to prioritize payments to their creditors over the provision of basic social services. According to World Bank data, just in 2010, developing countries paid USD 184 billion on debt service, roughly the equivalent of three times the resources required per year to secure the fulfillment of the MDGs. Even more troublesome between

1985 and 2010 net public debt flows to developing countries, that is the difference between debt disbursements and debt payments, have reached USD 530 billion [3] To place this number in context, the net resources transferred by developing countries to their creditors is the equivalent of five times the resources devoted to the Plan Marshall.

Throughout this time, Debt has been used by the IFI's and creditor countries alike to push countries to adopt policies that if anything prevent them from securing minimum living conditions for their populations. From the privatization and downsizing of public services, to trade opening that has seriously undermined food sovereignty, the policies enforced upon developing countries have seriously undermined the capacity of those countries of achieving development through endogenous means.

Therefore, if something needs to be done, is to cancel the public debts of developing countries. Contrary to what skeptics point out, this debt represents a drop in the bucket: in 2010, it reached USD 1.6 trillion (total public external debt), or less than 5% of the resources devoted by the US Government to rescue the banks [4]. If such a massive amount of resources can be marshaled to secure the bonuses of banking executives, is it too much to ask to ask for a small share of those same resources to secure better living conditions for hundreds of millions of people around the world? Clearly this is a political question, rather than an economic one, but the fact remains that debt continues to be a major obstacle for development. As CADTM has advocated during the last 24 years, let's get rid of it.

Cadtm

SYRIA:

The woman in the Syrian revolution, viewed by revolutionary women

WOMEN'S GROUP OF THE COORDINATION OF SALAMYEH ·

They participated in the weekly peaceful demonstrations alongside men of their city Salamyeh. When, in August 2011, the regime decided to stifle the free voice of the city in a violent campaign of mass arrests that affected most peaceful activists in Salamyeh, they organized women demonstrations to advocate the overthrow of the tyrannical regime and demand the release of their detained sons. They organized sit-ins and protest rallies in most streets of the city, the most famous being the sit-ins the central public square of the city just before Mother's Day in March 2012. Their demand for the release of the detainees was not appreciated by the director of the security forces of the area that responded fiercely by going with shabbiha to beat and arrest all those who tried to prevent or defend the protesters.

After tightening the repression and surveillance of the city and the increase of the risk of arrests, the women of the coordination of the city of Salamyeh had to find another way to make their voice heard to the world and to all of the sons of the nation by organizing sit-ins in solidarity on a weekly manner at their homes with all the children of the Syrian revolution and to write statements that explain their position regarding the events in Syria in general, and of the city of Salamyeh in particular. Statements were read during sit-ins, published on internet through their own page and distributed to the citizens of the city after printing.

They were the first to take action in solidarity with the women prisoners on strike in Adra prison and devoted them a statement. They had also issued a

statement following the prefabricated terrorist attack by shabbiha in Salamyeh against the committee offices, next to the house of the director of the security services of the area, which cost the lives of dozens of innocent civilians. Their latest release denounced the indiscriminate shelling of the city of Salamyeh that cost the lives of innocent persons in the city, including men, women and children. They condemned the massacres committed by the regime in all Syrian cities brandishing placards dedicated to these cities and that focused on "the unity of the Syrian blood" and warned of the sectarian attempts by the regime to divide Syrians that certainly does not fool and mislead them, neither them nor the citizens of the city. Among the most important slogans that they chanted during the demonstrations we can find: "The girls of Salamyeh want freedom, reject sectarianism and aspire to a civil state", it is because they have experienced a living together in a free city whose social fabric is a beautiful mosaic that includes most of the components of the Syrian people. Only in Salamyeh there are Ismaili, Sunni, Alawite, Christians and Adygeas. Even if their proportions are unequal, these communities constitute the beauty of citizenship that unites them in the love of their great motherland Syria and their small town Salamyeh.

The women of the coordination of the city of Salamyeh by commitment and responsibility to all citizens without exception participated with activists of the city among the free rebellious youth in relief actions when their city was filled with affected refugees from other Syrian cities because of the criminal and treacherous regime. They offered what they were able to welcome them and meet their needs.

Amel, one of the active women in this group said: "We participated in the funeral processions of our martyrs, although generally the exit of women in cemeteries is not a customary practice in our city, we wanted to break archaic customs, including this one. Each of us considered the martyr as a son, brother or father, any martyr is the son of the city and not just of his family". She added: "What distinguishes this group of rebellious women, it is the team's spirit with which they work to achieve their objective, which is also the objective of the revolution throughout Syria, that is to overthrow the dictatorial regime based on cliques and clans and the establishment of a civilian democratic state for all the Syrian people with all its components. "

Another, Yasmine, said that what distinguished our movement, it is its peaceful character. However the regime, by committing several massacres against civilians in many parts of Syria, forced people to take up arms to defend themselves. The constitution of the free syrian army pushed us to take a clear position on this issue. This is what we did because we are in favor of a free army organized with a single commandment in accordance with the political leadership of the revolution and whose objective is to establish a democratic, pluralistic civil state to serve all Syrian people, and which assumes the task of protecting civilians and work for the

emancipation and the overthrow of the regime according to a thoughtful and responsible strategy.

While Ahlam, she says: "We categorically reject all phenomena foreign to the society and hide both foreign agendas and agendas removed from the aspirations of the Syrian people, acting under different names and in the form of extremism that only serves the regime and give this latter arguments to hit the revolution and terrorize the population. "She continues:" As a group of women, we believe that the establishment of a free and modern state cannot be achieved without the existence of that citizenship. It is our responsibility today to prepare a new phase in the life of Syrian women. A woman who will enjoy full rights of citizenship in a new society. Our revolution is not only a revolution against a corrupt regime and archaic and obsolete laws that do not guarantee justice to women, it is also a revolution against all the customs and the habits that have delayed women and have prevented them of a full and effective participation in the construction of the state and society.

Long live the revolution!

Freedom for all prisoners!

Women's group of the coordination of Salamyeh

Published on **Syria Freedom Forever** on 5 September 2013.

PAKISTAN/SYRIA

"We condemn the impending American bombing of Syria"

AWAMI WORKERS' PARTY ·

We condemn the impending American bombing of Syria and the hypocrisy of the Pakistani government – including the armed forces – which claim to be against such aggression but themselves pander to the dictates of imperialist powers. We similarly reject the claims of right-wing parties that are parading themselves as committed anti-imperialists, both in Pakistan and around the Muslim world. In fact such parties have enjoyed a consensual relationship with imperialist powers and ruling classes in Muslim countries to the detriment of the left.

It is now a well-established fact that the Americans and NATO have been patronizing the worst jihadi elements in Syria to destabilize the Assad regime, and have now resolved to follow this up with air strikes across that country. Such antics prove that imperialist powers, no matter what rhetoric they employ, are committed only to their narrow geo-strategic interests and will ally with whomever will serve these interests. Only in a world free from imperialism in all its forms can there be substantive democracy and freedom from oppression and want.

We affirm that the Syrian people have every right to oppose, and even depose, the Assad dictatorship. But bombing Syria will only push that country closer to uninhibited civil war and strengthen anti-people forces on both the government and rebel sides of the conflict. In such conflicts it is the most vulnerable elements in society who suffer the most, particularly women and children. This is why there can be no question of even democratic forces condoning military strikes.

It has been almost a decade since the invasion and occupation of Iraq under the false pretext that the Saddam regime possessed weapons of mass destruction. Yet another lie has been concocted by the American establishment and the corporate media to justify the bombing of Syria, and the so-called 'international community' is unwilling to take a firm stand against the war-mongers. Our party remains clear that only a genuine anti-imperialist bloc of countries can resist the aggression of Washington and its junior partners, and it is up to anti-imperialists in all parts of the world to close ranks to build such an alternative bloc of countries. We welcome the efforts of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Russia that have been the only states to openly oppose the imminent military action.

As for our own country: we harbor no pretensions about the posture of our ruling classes, and in particular our armed forces, which have been loyal servants of the Empire since the very inception of the state. In the current conjuncture, contradictions between imperialist powers, the religious right, and our own military establishment have been exposed for the world to see. None of these forces – and the establishment most of all – will ever act in the interest of working people. This is why we oppose them and reject their hollow slogans regarding the rights of the Syrian people.

Abid Hasan Minto,

President Fanoos Gujjar,

Chairman Farooq Tariq, Gen Secretary

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CLIMATE CHANGE:

Occupy COP19!

On the barricades!

Although there is a growing force in society and solutions are being proposed among citizens, we must keep up the pressure on governments. The discourse which claims that everyone can help save the environment by taking up cycling, turning off the light or buying organic products is only half true. Governments have to take responsibility and cannot simply wait for changes in daily habits. We need to organize, mobilize and take to the streets to urge governments to take action.

Take to the streets of Warsaw!

During the negotiations in Copenhagen, the international climate movement was very strong. Thousands of people mobilized for the giant event "Planet First - People First." We are looking at a similar event during COP19, where we take to the streets of Warsaw in a march for climate and social justice. Great social changes are always initiated by a mobilization of the people and by demonstrations. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, international movements have increased. Now is the time to mobilize again and to combine our demands: sustainable solutions for climate and social justice.

Join us!

Join us and support this initiative, with the "*Klimaat and Social Rechtvaardigheid* - Climate and Social Justice" movement and the Belgian-Polish group for the climate.

We also want to know if you plan to go to Warsaw with your organization. Let us know here. If you want your logo to be added to the website, send a high quality version to contact@climatejustice.eu.

Note that this concerns only the march and not the train.

Spread the word as widely as you can. Like our Facebook page and share it with your friends, family or colleagues. You can also find practical tools (leaflets or banners) here

Practical information on the march

The march will be held in Warsaw on Saturday, November 16, in the afternoon. We do not at present have any concrete plans, but they will follow soon! We will update information on time, place, transportation, etc. Visit this page regularly or subscribe to our mailing list.

Train to Warsaw

We want to bring 1000 people to Warsaw by train to join the march. Traveling by train is comfortable and environmentally friendly. There will be food and drink, music, meeting new people and late night discussions. The ideal combination for an unforgettable weekend!

We will leave Brussels on Friday, November 15 in the afternoon to join the march on November 16. On Sunday free time is scheduled in Warsaw and on Monday 18 at 6.30 in the morning we will be back in Brussels. Yes, it is a very short trip and it will be an exhausting journey, but we want to give the opportunity to as many people as possible to join us, without sacrificing their holiday time. Moreover, we are not going there to listen for days on end to the negotiations that will be taking place, we are going en masse to show that we will no longer accept false solutions. It is time for our voices to be heard, and we demand climate and social solutions!

It is possible to board the train in Aix-la-Chapelle, Cologne, Berlin and Poznan. If your organization wants to mobilize from Germany and Poland, let us

know! Individuals can also embark at these stations; just mention it on the registration form. However, ticket prices will remain unchanged because of administrative constraints.

We already organized a train from Brussels to Copenhagen in 2009 to join the event "People First, Planet First" during COP15. We have already some experience. We mobilized nearly 1000 people, which put the climate issue on the agenda of Belgian politics

We need your commitment to make this trip possible!

1. Join us

We can hire an SNCB train to go to Warsaw, but we have to pay the rental of the train. The price is relatively stable, regardless of the number of wagons. What costs the most is the locomotive, the workers, the use of the rails, etc. That all comes to roughly 75,000 euros, with not much difference whether we use 3 or 10 cars wagons.

500 people = 150 euro per person

> 750 people = 100 euro per person

The train will become a reality if we have 500 people by the end of September. Register now and invite your family, friends or acquaintances to join the train!

2. Support

We are also looking for people to financially support this initiative. If you cannot join us, you can always make a donation ([click here](#)). Your donations will be directly used (1) to help people who lack financial resources; and (2) to lower the price for everyone. Imagine that we receive 75,000 euros ... The trip would be free!

The ticket price includes only the round trip Brussels -Warsaw. We will offer vegan meals on the train, to be ordered in advance and paid for separately (more details later). Our partners in Warsaw are working hard to find us cheap (or free) accommodations in homes, schools, abandoned factories, etc. We will provide a warm bed for everyone, since it will be cold in November!

We will also plan entertainment, a radio, a small Oxfam shop, beer, etc! You can come either individually or with your organization. As in 2009, it will be possible for organizations to book a (half) wagon and put up their flags/posters, to make it all more enjoyable.

We are waiting for you on the train, don't miss it!

[Click here for registration information.](#)

EGYPT:

The main enemy is the state

LEE SUSTAR ·

The military's ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi in early July has rehabilitated the image of the armed forces, which governed Egypt directly through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) for 18 months following the February 2011 downfall of Hosni Mubarak. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were able to win elections for the country's parliament and then the presidency. But Morsi's grab for all political power and his pro-market economic policies gave rise to the Tamarod (Rebellion) movement this year, which gathered 22 million signatures calling for Morsi to resign and led to a massive day of protest on June 30.

The military stepped in to force out Morsi, promising new elections, but it moved in aggressive fashion against the Brotherhood. The head of the army and also Defense Minister, el-Sisi portrays himself as new Gamal Abdel Nasser—Egypt's nationalist leader in the 1950s and '60s. He justifies the July 3 coup against Morsi and the subsequent massacres of Morsi supporters as a necessary defense of the country's secular traditions against Islamism.

Mostafa Ali, an activist with the Revolutionary Socialists, explained to Lee Sustar how the armed forces diverted the growing mass movement against Morsi into support for a counterrevolutionary crackdown—and why Egypt's military rulers, while popular for now, have no intention of satisfying the economic and social demands of the Egyptian people.

Lee Sustar – Why did the military move against the Muslim Brotherhood so forcefully? After all, the constitution authored

mainly by the Brotherhood actually consolidated the military's economic and political power. Wasn't some kind of arrangement possible?

Mostafa Ali – There are two reasons. First, the old state apparatus was never really dismantled after the January 25 revolution. By the state apparatus, I mean the upper echelons of the army, the police and the state bureaucracy. They couldn't accept that the people they repressed and stepped on for 30 years or so—that is, the Muslim Brotherhood—could become full partners in power.

The state bureaucracy did everything it could to prevent Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood from playing any sort of an effective role in governing. I can give you one example. Egypt was marred by an unbelievable crisis, a shortage of gasoline. You had lines stretching for kilometers of people searching for gas. This went on for months before the ouster of Morsi. They disappeared immediately the day that Morsi fell. The state bureaucracy was actually sabotaging the attempt of the Brotherhood to run the government or the state machinery.

The second reason, which is more important, is that the army was counting the Brotherhood to be a political front to manage mass popular anger. But the Brotherhood committed mistake after mistake, increasing the level of public anger on the ground with its continuation of neoliberal policies—or you can call them impoverishment policies—for the mass of the population. In the end, the army reached the conclusion that the Brotherhood had failed in carrying out its assignment—in carrying out the role or task they were granted.

The Muslim Brotherhood could not contain public anger. They were actually increasing it by refusing to even make very simple concessions to the work-

ing class and to the poor. For example, they rationed bread—the main staple in the country, something unheard of under Mubarak.

So while the state machinery sabotaged any attempt by the Brotherhood to become full partners in ruling Egypt, the Brotherhood insisted on continuing Mubarak's social policies, thus increasing popular anger. The army decided that the Brotherhood could no longer be at the front of the political scene.

LS: The army's seizure of power and the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood has led some to conclude that the June 30 mass protest was simply a cover for a military coup.

MA: The Tamarod movement was a genuine popular attempt at building opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. We knew that the Mukhabarat, the secret police, jumped on the Tamarod movement, as well as elements of the former Mubarak regime. But even though this was the case, at the end of the day, June 30 was a genuine popular movement against the attempts of the Brotherhood to enforce a dictatorial regime.

This is a ruling class that wanted to use the Muslim Brotherhood to defeat the revolution. When they came to the realization that the Muslim Brotherhood was not effective enough, they decided to do it a different way.

Unfortunately, the Tamarod movement, as genuine as it was, as honest as it was, was used by the military not only to get rid of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also to launch a complete counterattack on the January 25 revolution. This is why the picture is quite complex. You had a genuine wave in the revolutionary movement that was coopted and pushed in a completely different direction by the military in order to end the revolution.

People in the West should understand that the Egyptian revolution and the Arab Spring face a very difficult challenge. The counterrevolution is in full force. People should realize that the Muslim

Brotherhood betrayed the revolution. But that betrayal of the revolution was not the same as the old ruling class attempting to defeat the entire revolution. This is really the difficult question facing us here in Egypt. We cannot equate the crimes of the Brotherhood and the crimes of the ruling class.

So while we publicize the crimes by the police and the army and their massacres of the Brotherhood's supporters, we've always been against the Brotherhood because they fronted for the old ruling class. The main enemy is the state, and it's always the state.

LS: What does it mean that the military was able to move against the Muslim Brotherhood right now?

MA: It is a mark of absolute confidence. They have a popular mandate to crush the Muslim Brotherhood. Along with this is an attempt to vilify anyone who stands up against the massacres that took place against Brotherhood protests in the middle of August.

Certainly the Brotherhood while in power continued the SCAF's attacks on the revolutionaries. But the Brotherhood could not, at the end of the day, kill more than one or two dozen people—of course, with the help of the Ministry of the Interior. In a year in power, the Brotherhood did not carry out 1 percent of the repressive policies that the armed forces has done in a matter of weeks.

The numbers killed are astounding. We have verified almost 1,700 dead in the span of three days between August 14 and 17 after the security forces violently dispersed Brotherhood sit-ins. According to a number of human rights organizations, the dispersal of the Islamists' sit-ins is the biggest massacre in the history of the modern Egyptian state. It is unprecedented.

LS: And yet the army remains widely popular among the population as a whole. Why is that?

MA: Two reasons One is that the Brotherhood was actually quite frightening during its year in power. They've given people every reason to believe that

they will be oppressive on all sorts of levels, that they will continue economic policies against the poor, and that they were about to build a dictatorship. People were generally scared of what the Brotherhood was doing.

The second reason is that the army and the ruling class have carried out a successful campaign of demonizing the Brotherhood. They have convinced many, many people, including those who genuinely opposed the SCAF's rule, that army rule is the lesser of two evils to the Brotherhood. This is really the main argument.

Unfortunately, many revolutionaries have accepted this argument. They have on principle opposed SCAF rule, military fascism and military dictatorship. But they say that the army is the lesser of two evils, compared to what they call religious fascism. So that's why we find ourselves in this precarious situation.

Many revolutionaries see what's happened in the last few weeks as an unstoppable process, heading toward a military fascism. But I don't share that opinion. There are many signs of a possible military fascism. However, the situation on the ground is really quite complex and filled with contradictions.

For example, the army cannot continuously ask its soldiers and officers to shoot at the Brotherhood. In the last few weeks, there has been hysteria and demonization of the Brotherhood. The message was that you can kill as many of the Brotherhood people as you want, and it's fine—it's a national duty.

I don't think this process will continue. There have been a few cases of officers refusing to open fire, both among the police and within the army. The army says formally and publicly that it has no intention of ruling, that it has no intention of pushing Egypt to become a militarized state. It promises that it will disappear from the political scene as soon as a constitution is in place and elections are held. That resonates with a lot of people. So what happens when the army doesn't disappear.

Also, the army is under tremendous pressure to deliver to workers on an economic level. One of the main reasons Morsi was rejected by the majority of working class and poor people was that he was not able to deliver on the demands of the revolution: political justice, economic justice, social justice and so on. So the army is in a difficult position.

LS: What will el-Sisi's foreign policy be like? There is a lot of America-bashing coming from the regime, right now—ironically, given the close ties of the military to the U.S. in the past, before Mubarak fell.

MA: The main public discourse that justifies support for el-Sisi is that he's a new Nasser—that he's a neo-anti-imperialist. So the government has come out against possible U.S. or British intervention in Syria and said it would not participate in any U.S.-led attacks, unlike its participation in the two Gulf Wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003.

As a result, some people are expecting that there will be reconfiguration of the Egyptian army's alliances internationally. There are calls by the right wing to drop the army's tutelage by the U.S. and to rely more on China and Russia. Both countries have expressed publicly their willingness to become military suppliers to the Egyptian army.

That's actually just smoke and mirrors. The Egyptian armed forces are systematically, and on principle, tied to the project of U.S. imperialism in the Middle East, and will never break with that. There is no Russia option, there is no China option. Whatever disagreements exist at the moment between the Egyptian army and its masters in Washington are temporary. The U.S. will come back full circle to stand behind the Egyptian generals, and the Saudis have made it clear to the Americans that this is the best setup.

This is not the 1950s all over again, when Nasser was able to carve something of an independent position between Washington and Moscow during the former Cold War. The generals are simply pressuring the Americans to give them a little bit of respect. They are telling the Americans, "We know

what we're doing—could you please cut us some slack?"

So while the government can talk about a Zionist-Turkish-American conspiracy, they have no intention of repealing the Camp David agreement with Israel. In fact, the government is carrying out a "war on terrorism" against jihadists in the Sinai region with the full permission of Israel. Israel is 100 percent behind the current Egyptian government. In the Israelis' opinion, this is the government that could put an end to the Egyptian revolution.

So despite all the talk about Zionism, the real targets of the xenophobia have been Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Egypt. Because a few Syrians showed up in some Morsi protests, and because Morsi and the Brotherhood supported the Syrian revolution, there's been a disgusting backlash against refugees in Egypt. There are 250,000 Syrian refugees, and of course Palestinian refugees have been here for decades. It's a very unfortunate situation.

The government has arrested many Syrian refugees, including children. That's something that revolutionaries and human rights activists are fighting against. There's also been a setback—and this was fomented by the right wing—for popular support for the Palestinian struggle against Israel. Unfortunately, Hamas, which was the Brotherhood's ally, has been associated with all Palestinians. We in the Revolutionary Socialists have been involved in campaigns against the detention of Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

LS: What will be the political shape of this new regime?

MA: Political discussion now is not about elections but a new constitution. Everything is in flux. It's hard to even ponder the elections. But they're trying to push a new constitution through. There are many reports that government is already working on a compromise with the Brotherhood.

It's significant the other big Islamist party, the Salafist Nour Party, is supporting the government.

They are betting on winning as many as possible from disgruntled members of the Muslim Brotherhood, because they've always been smaller in comparison.

On the other hand, the regime needs an Islamist party to be part of a new setup. This isn't simply because it doesn't want to be accused of being anti-Islamist. They actually need the reactionary and conservative politics of the Islamists to remain a vital part of Egyptian political life. That's why they need the Nour party—so long as it's under their control.

LS: What are the prospects for a renewal of the revolutionary movement?

MA: I want to stress that despite all the signs of an impending military dictatorship or military fascism, it isn't a smooth walk for the military, not will it become one. Because underneath all the xenophobia, the nationalist hysteria, the incredible support for the army, you have a population that rejected the Brotherhood for specific social and economic reasons, and that wants a redistribution of wealth. It is now waiting for dividends—economic dividends. This is a population that wants reforms—economic reforms in the shape of a redistribution of wealth.

For now, money from the Saudis, the Kuwaitis and the Emirates have beefed up the national currency reserves and given the government some room to breathe. They can postpone any decision about taking loans from the International Monetary Fund and market "reforms" for a few months.

But you can already see that the new money is not being used to appease the popular demand for a reversal of the Brotherhood's economic policies—and, for that matter, Mubarak's economic policies. You can see that from the textile strike in Mahalla on August 28. The government has plenty of money, but it has shown no intention so far of carrying out Keynesian policies to raise workers' incomes.

On the contrary, we are seeing trickle-down economics, à la Milton Friedman. The strike shows

that the government is not willing to use the money coming from the Saudis, to calm workers down. So

it's a very complex situation.

Socialist Worker

USA:

A Freedom Budget for all people

PAUL LE BLANC ·

Three yeats after the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, a number of its core organizers projected a new stage of the struggle for equality—expanding and deepening it, creating the economic and social foundations needed to realize Martin Luther King's dream. Their program, "A Freedom Budget for All Americans," was issued by the A. Philip Randolph Institute in fall 1966. In his foreword, King called the document "a moral commitment to the fundamental principles on which this nation was founded." Chances are you've never heard of it. [1]

Even in the much-abridged version reproduced in the appendix to Paul Le Blanc and Michael D. Yates' *A Freedom Budget for All Americans: Recapturing the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in the Struggle for Economic Justice Today* (Monthly Review, distributed by New York University Press), the proposal looks incredibly ambitious. It mapped out a course of structural reforms leading to full employment, universal access to adequate education and health care, and cleaner air and water. And the pace of change it projected was brisk. The plan could be in full effect by 1975, just in time for the bicentennial to open on a suitably confident and optimistic note.

The authors (Le Blanc is an associate professor at La Roche College in Pittsburgh, Yates an associate editor of *Monthly Review*) recount the genesis and logic of the Freedom Budget—as well as how it was derailed, with some of its advocates soon to find themselves on the opposite sides of various late 1960s barricades. With the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington looming, I interviewed Le

Blanc by e-mail about the history and relevance of this mostly forgotten postscript to the event.

(About 20 years ago, Le Blanc and I collaborated in editing a volume of writings by C.L.R. James. Reviewing his latest book would be logrolling, but asking him questions about it counts as continuing my education.)

SUPPOSE YOU had the attention of everyone in the U.S. for a couple of minutes to try to persuade as much of the public as possible that the Freedom Budget, so little remembered now, deserves another look. What's would you say?

THERE IS a detailed plan, worked out by prominent economists such as Leon Keyserling and others, endorsed by over 200 prominent academics, religious leaders, trade unionists, and civil rights figures, showing how we can end poverty and provide jobs for all—but it can only be implemented if we mobilize a powerful democratic struggle to make it so.

HOW DID you become aware of the Freedom Budget?

I BECAME aware of the Freedom Budget when it was first put forward, back in the fall of 1966. I was a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Freedom Budget was being promoted by our former "parent" organization, the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), a left-liberal and moderate-socialist think tank and educational entity. Most of us in SDS felt we were far more radical than the LID, but I was very drawn to the Freedom Budget, which emphasized the link between racial justice for African Americans and economic justice for all people in our society.

The Freedom Budget's most eloquent spokespeople—A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Martin Luther King Jr.—all had a powerful impact on my thinking. The promise of the Freedom Budget, to end poverty and unemployment throughout the United States within a 10-year period, greatly impressed me, especially because with detailed charts and graphs and statistics, it was shown how this could actually be done. Imagine if that goal had been achieved by the end of the 1970s!

Also, as I taught courses on U.S. history year after year, it made sense—when I discussed the civil rights movement with my students—to discuss that link that King and the others saw between racial and economic justice, and to tell them something about the Freedom Budget. Recent developments have caused the Freedom Budget to shift from being a memory of my youth, and a topic for classroom discussion, to something more urgent.

WHAT MADE you and your co-author think that the time had come to try to revive interest in the Freedom Budget? The ultimately directionless nature of the Occupy movement? The vacuum left by "Change You Can Believe In"? Something else?

AS LIVING standards in the United States increasingly sagged over the years—under the impact of so-called "de-industrialization" and globalization, Reaganomics and austerity—and as racism persisted in part because the bottom 80 percent of the population were competing for scarce resources, it seemed to me that the unfulfilled promise of the Freedom Budget had greater relevance than ever.

Two developments in 2008 sharpened this for me. First, the fact that Obama's campaign rhetoric (which seemed to echo the promise of King and Rustin and Randolph) was resonating among a majority of the American people. Second, the Great Recession highlighted the intensified need for something like the Freedom Budget.

Instead, there were bailouts for the billionaires—but the needs of the great majority of people cried out for a new version of the Freedom Budget. This underlying reality is what animated the massive

protests of the Occupy movement. I participated in that movement, and I don't fault it for being "directionless." Masses of people were mad as hell and not inclined to take it anymore, and the Occupy movement appropriately focused attention on the fact that the top 1 percent of the rich and powerful were racking up greater wealth and power at our expense. This helped to generate a massive discussion about "where we go from here." And it seemed to me that now was the time for more and more people to look at the Freedom Budget again.

I'M STRUCK by how casually the budget takes it as a given that full employment is possible—and that a large share of the public, maybe even a majority, might support it. (Neither possibility is mooted much now, despite Paul Krugman's best efforts.) Is it fair to say that confidence reflects the memory of the New Deal and wartime job creation? Or were the architects of the plan counting more on the momentum of the civil rights movement to push things forward?

I THINK both things are true. The primary architect of the Freedom Budget was Keyserling, a left-leaning Keynesian who had played a central role both in developing New Deal legislation (such as the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act) and in helping to oversee the wartime economy. He went on to play a central role in the Council of Economic Advisers under President Harry Truman from 1946 to 1953, and he was a longtime advocate of policies that would guarantee full employment.

The aura of the New Deal continued to attract a majority of Americans into the 1960s. At the same time, Randolph, Rustin and King were convinced that the moral power and alignment of forces represented by the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom could be a key to helping mobilize massive popular support for the Freedom Budget—particularly in the wake of the victories of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act that brought an end to the Jim Crow system.

YOU SOMETIMES hear people say that MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech needs to be put in storage for a while—that it's become too familiar, and too commonly regarded as morally uplifting rather than really challenging. What's the connection between that speech and the Freedom Budget? One is endlessly replayed and the other all but forgotten, but your book suggests they're related.

MARTIN LUTHER King's "I Have a Dream" speech cannot be comprehended unless we understand it as the culmination of a March for Jobs and Freedom—linking economic justice with racial justice.

From his college days in the late 1940s until his death in 1968, King was deeply committed to overcoming poverty and economic exploitation, no less than to overcoming racism. He came to see the struggles to overcome economic and racial oppression as inseparable. In addressing the AFL-CIO convention in 1961, he repeated something he had emphasized more than once over the years—projecting "a dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few."

In his preface to the summary version of the Freedom Budget in 1966, King argued that "there is no way merely to find work, or adequate housing, or quality-integrated schools for Negroes alone." In his explanation of the Freedom Budget's meaning, he underscored the underlying assumptions animating the organizers of the 1963 March: "We shall eliminate slums for Negroes when we destroy ghettos and build new cities for all. We shall eliminate unemployment for Negroes when we demand full and fair employment for all." This was part of the meaning of the assertion in his "I Have a Dream" speech that many whites "have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom."

A COMMON narrative of the 1960s is that the spirit of the March on Washington (or, in some tellings of the story, the New Deal coalition) had disappeared

by the late 1960s—destroyed by some combination of Black Power, white backlash and ever-sharper polarization over the Vietnam War. The Freedom Budget was the shared vision of people like Stokely Carmichael and Tom Kahn who, two years later, would have been yelling at each other. Where does your book stand in relation to that narrative? To put it another way, does it make sense to think of the Budget as the last chance for something different? As a casualty of developments that might have gone otherwise? Or was there something inevitable about how things played out?

IN THE early 1960s, Stokely Carmichael and Tom Kahn were political comrades, closely associated both with Bayard Rustin and with the Socialist Party. Kahn's role and influence in the civil rights movement of that time, quite significant in important ways, is attested to in Carmichael's own autobiography. They diverged sharply in 1964 and increasingly over the next few years.

Kahn and those who remained politically closest to him (for example, Rustin) had concluded that the Democratic Party was the pathway to political relevance. They also increasingly identified the working class and organized labor movement with the person of the relatively bureaucratic and conservative AFL-CIO President George Meany. And they went along with (or at least didn't organize opposition to) the Vietnam War, which was promoted by the Democratic Party leadership and fully supported by Meany.

I consider this development to have been tragic in regard to what Kahn and Rustin had been and might have been, and also incredibly damaging for the prospects of the Freedom Budget. Most of the Democrats saw the Freedom Budget as too radical, especially given the spending priorities associated with the Vietnam War. Meany himself never endorsed the Freedom Budget, and the bulk of those around him were not inclined to mobilize the ranks of labor on its behalf—only the more radical elements in the unions were inclined to go in that direction.

In contrast to this, Martin Luther King concluded that building opposition to the war was inseparable from also advancing the struggle for economic justice, and my account coincides with that approach. Rustin insisted that it would have been economically possible to realize the Freedom Budget while maintaining the U.S. war in Vietnam, but even he concluded that the war probably destroyed the political possibility of winning the struggle for the Freedom Budget.

It can certainly be argued that the Freedom Budget was "the last chance for something different" and that it was a casualty of developments that might have gone otherwise. But it seems to me that, given the actual structures of power, it could not have been achieved through the kind of dependence on the Democratic Party that was built into the strategic orientation of its architects.

My co-author Michael Yates and I have pretty much concluded that its implementation, certainly under today's circumstances, will not be possible without a major shift in consciousness and power relations. This would mean that the political and economic decision-making power of at least a majority of the 99 percent replaces that of the wealthiest 1 percent.

IT'S NOT as if it would do much good to reissue the Budget now with the numbers adjusted for almost 50 years of inflation. At the same time, it's hard to picture anything like it being drafted now, and certainly not with anything like the Budget's backing and support. Do you see some reason to think a Freedom Budget 2.0 is possible? Otherwise, the book seems more like an invitation to counterfactual history than anything else.

FOR ME, there are three major reasons for this book on the Freedom Budget. First of all, as a historian, I felt compelled to tell people "these things happened" and to share what seems to me fascinating information on the people, the ideas, and the struggles associated with the Freedom Budget.

Second, looking at this neglected chapter in our history, and doing so in some depth, sheds new light on the history of the civil rights movement, the history of racism and anti-racism, the dynamics of political and social movements that shaped our country. There are insights into our present life and future possibilities that can be gained by looking at the thinking, the efforts, the triumphs and defeats of the remarkable people who were engaged with the Freedom Budget.

This leads to the third reason. Michael Yates and I are inspired by the better, more abundant, more democratic future that the Freedom Budget was reaching for. We believe such a future could be possible, and that a growing number of people—given the multiple crises afflicting our society and world—will be looking for how we might get to such a better future. Changes in the world over the past four decades necessitate, we think, a new version of the Freedom Budget, and we offer some thought about what this might look like.

If what is happening in the world results in more and more people in thinking about and struggling for a better future, the Freedom Budget idea could gain a new relevance. We see this book feeding into such a process.

First published at Inside Higher Ed

SYRIA:

Welcoming the vote of the British Parliament while supporting the Syrian uprising

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

In a rare instance of the executive in a Western imperial state taking "parliamentary democracy" in earnest, the UK government consulted Parliament about military action against the Syrian regime without being certain in advance that it would win the vote, and decided to respect the outcome that repudiated its plan. As a staunch opponent of the Syrian Baathist regime from a radical democratic perspective, I have several reasons to welcome this outcome.

The first reason is that any limitation on the powers of the imperial executive that has become the usual pattern in most major Western states is undoubtedly positive from a democratic point of view and should be greeted unreservedly. Even though, on the face of it, the decision in this instance spared one of the most ruthless and murderous dictatorships, the fact that the British government asked Parliament for authorisation to engage in a military action purported to be "limited" sets a standard that it will be more difficult from now on for the British government and its peers in electoral democracies to ignore. Although a repetition of the British scenario in Washington is most unlikely, the pressure on the US administration itself is mounting as a result of the British vote. This is in spite of the post-Vietnam War Powers Resolution that "limited" the US executive's power to wage war to 60 days without an authorisation from Congress, a resolution that the White House has nevertheless repeatedly violated.

Not that I have the slightest illusion about the reasons for which many hawkish MPs voted against military action this time. They did so not out of

"pacifism" for sure, let alone "anti-imperialism", but for the same reason that made Western opinion makers in their vast majority display a patent lack of sympathy for the cause of the Syrian popular uprising. This reason is above all the lack of confidence in the Syrian uprising, as US Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey openly confessed most recently. A consideration that is all the more compelling in that the most recent experience in Libya was a total fiasco in that regard: NATO's intervention only helped turn Libya less West-friendly than it had been under Gaddafi during the last years of his reign. And, of course, Libya offered the major enticement of being a major oil exporter, which Syria is not.

The second reason to welcome the vote by the British Parliament is that it was clearly related to the requirement of a UN legitimisation – which prompted the UK government to submit a draft resolution to the UN Security Council in its attempt to convince a majority of MPs. Despite the obvious limitations of the UN and of existing international law, it is better that international relations be institutionalised under some form of the rule of law, however deficient that law is, than be dominated by the "law of the jungle" whereby powerful states, the US above all, feel free to decide unilaterally against whom and when to use force. The idea that the rule of law is a straightjacket by which Russia and China can prevent truly humanitarian actions from taking place is predicated on the view that Western military interventions are generally motivated by noble intentions. They are definitely not. Suffice it to note that the two Western military interventions since the end of the Cold War that most blatantly violated international law – Kosovo 1999 and Iraq 2003 – both used humanitarian prettexts as covers for

imperial designs and led to catastrophic humanitarian results.

The third reason to welcome the parliamentary vote is the one most directly predicated on my resolute support to the Syrian popular uprising. The military action that is being contemplated by Washington is about dealing the murderous Syrian regime a few military blows in order to "punish" it for the use of chemical weapons against civilians. I have hardly any doubt that the Syrian regime did resort to such weapons in its barbaric onslaught on the Syrian people. True, it will be hard for the UN inspection team, which was allowed to reach the scene of the crime only several days after it was perpetrated, to find any smoking gun. But the fact that the Syrian regime possesses chemical weapons and the means to strike with them (to mount a large scale rocket and artillery attack, as did happen) is beyond doubt, as is its cold-blooded-serial-killer aptitude to use them on civilians. Witness this recorded use of an incendiary bomb dropped by a fighter jet on a civilian target (a school playground): in this case at least, no one can reasonably dispute the fact that the regime has the monopoly of air power in the Syrian civil war. But this begs the question: is killing up to fifteen hundred people with chemical weapons more serious a crime than killing over a hundred thousand with "conventional" weapons? Why then does Washington want to strike now suddenly after placidly watching the Syrian people being slaughtered, its country devastated, and survivors in the millions turned into refugees and displaced persons?

The truth is that the forthcoming strikes are only intended as a means to restore the "credibility" of the US and its allies in the face of an alliance of the Syrian, Iranian, and Russian governments that has taken full liberty in escalating the war on the Syrian people despite all US calls for compromise. The strikes are necessary in order to reinstate a US imperial standing that has been much humiliated over the last few years in Iraq, in Afghanistan, by Iran, and even by Israel's Netanyahu. These strikes will not help the Syrian people: they will increase the

destruction and death toll without enabling the Syrians to get rid of their tyrant. They are not intended for this latter goal. In fact, Washington does not want the Syrian people to topple the dictatorship: it wants to force on the Syrian opposition a deal with the bulk of the regime, minus Assad. This is the so-called Yemen solution that President Barack Obama has been actively pursuing since last year, and that Secretary of State John Kerry has been trying to promote by cozying up to his Russian counterpart.

However, by denying the mainstream of the Syrian opposition the defensive anti-aircraft and antitank weapons that they have been requesting for almost two years, while Russia and Iran were abundantly purveying the Syrian regime with weapons (and recently with combatants from Iran and its regional allies), the US administration only managed to achieve two results: on the one hand, it has allowed the Syrian regime to keep the upper hand militarily and thus to believe that it can win; hence, the regime has had no incentive whatsoever to make any concessions. On the other hand, benefitting from generous funding from Wahhabi sources and after an initial push from the Syrian regime itself (including the release of Jihadists from Syrian jails in the early phase of the uprising by a regime eager to portray the popular revolt as Sunni fundamentalist), Jihadist networks that were already present in neighbouring Iraq (where the Syrian regime itself contributed to their development) were able to impose themselves as an important component of the Syrian uprising.

That is why the Syrian people don't trust Washington in the least. Witness this reportage in the Washington Post:

Syrians would prefer to overthrow Assad without foreign help, but if the West does carry out strikes, the Free Syrian Army intends to take advantage of any disarray in the ranks of regime forces to advance its own positions, said Louay al-Mokdad, political and media coordinator for the FSA.

"We are going, for sure, to make the most of this operation to increase our situation on the ground, to try and control and liberate more areas," he said. "This is our right. Our fighters on the ground should use anything, even a change in the weather if it will help them, and if your enemy faces another side, we should use this."

However, those who support intervention expressed concerns about how the strikes would unfold and what effect they would have – if any – on the raging war that has killed more than 100,000 people.

"People here are very worried the strikes will be intended to help the regime," said Abu Hamza, an activist in the Damascus suburb of Darayya, where some of the fiercest battles of the war have left a town of nearly 500,000 a ravaged, emptied ruin. "Of course I support it if it means ending the bloodshed, but there has been killing for 2.5 years, so why should we believe the United States is serious now?"

"People lost trust in the U.S. government," he added. "They think the U.S. will only act for its own benefit."

Had Western powers really cared for the Syrian people – or even had Washington been more clever in creating the conditions for the compromise it has been seeking – it would have been easy for them to

equip the Syrian opposition with defensive weapons, thus enabling the uprising to turn the tide of the war in such a way as to precipitate a break-up of the regime. Short of a decisive shift in the Syrian civil war to the disadvantage of the regime, the latter will remain intransigent and united around the Assad clan, and the war will drag on with its terrible consequences.

It is this reality that refutes the argument of many well-meaning people that arms should be denied to the Syrian opposition because the death toll will be increased. On the contrary, it is precisely the regime's advantage in weaponry that keeps the war going and the death toll increasing. Let me here repeat the words of the French revolutionary Gracchus Babeuf (1795) that I quoted in my latest book:

But what civil war is more revolting than the one that puts all the murderers on one side and all the defenceless victims on the other? Can you accuse someone who wants to arm the victims against the murderers of committing a crime?

In the face of the horrible crimes being perpetrated by the Assad regime with the support of Russia, Iran and Iran's allies, it is the duty of all those who claim to support the right of peoples to self-determination to help the Syrian people get the means of defending themselves.

USA:

Solidarity Members Reflect on the Anniversary of the March on Washington

SOLIDARITY ·

A bit of historical perspective is in order, because while it may be true as Martin Luther King, Jr. stated that "the arc of history bends towards justice," it does not do so smoothly. After the U.S. Civil War, African Americans would not be pushed back into formal chattel slavery, but after the defeat of Reconstruction, by the end of the 19th century their political and economic gains in the South had been virtually wiped out by the rise of Jim Crow and a regime of routine terror enforced by legal codes and lynch law.

Today, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, legal desegregation and voting rights will not be officially abolished, but the plague of "Voter ID" laws and voter registration restrictions is nothing more nor less than a campaign to reinstitute white supremacy, with lying rhetoric about "our colorblind society" in place of the white sheet masks of yesteryear. Economic inequalities and lack of opportunity for Black America, both North and South—which was as central to the 1963 March on Washington as the dismantling of southern segregation—are as embedded in today's capitalist society as then for tens of millions of African Americans, despite the growth of the Black middle class and professional layers.

While this year's march has received critical commentary for being a tightly controlled and politically constrained affair—no criticism of president Obama or attorney general Holder allowed!—it should also be remembered that the 1963 March itself was hardly free of contradictions.

The John F. Kennedy administration, to which the Civil Rights Movement looked for legislation, was

escalating U.S. intervention in Vietnam toward the catastrophe it would soon become. The leading organizer of the March, the justly praised Bayard Rustin, was himself on a trajectory to become a pro-war Social Democrat and supporter of Lyndon Johnson's and Richard Nixon's Vietnam horrors. On the podium, the Justice Department controlled the sound system and was prepared to pull the plug at any mention of "insurrection." The United Auto Workers leadership of Walter Reuther, prominent supporters of Civil Rights in society at large, contentedly accepted an apartheid-like job reservation system in the plants, unable to imagine that it would fuel Detroit practically burning down four years later.

Malcolm X at the time famously denounced the whole event as a picnic and a farce. Yet not long afterward, as Malcolm broke with the sectarian abstentionism of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, he would reexamine his views and take a more welcoming view of the Civil Rights Movement, seeing it as it really was: above all, a mobilization of the Black community standing up for itself and prepared to confront brutal repression. America in 2013 is not what it was in 1963, just as 1963 was not 1913 or 1863. But the necessity of a mass mobilization to preserve what's been won, and to extend it, is equally urgent.

Let's view the August 24 March as part of that remobilization. And let's not forget some of the positive changes that have occurred. In 1963, Bayard Rustin with all his organizing genius remained in the background, because he was gay. This year, one speaker after another voiced support of the LGBT movement as part of the civil rights struggle. In 1963, no one thought to speak about immigrant

rights. In 2013, immigration reform was proclaimed from the podium as a central part of the overall struggle. If the arc of history bends positively, it's only because mass social movements, with all the imperfections and limitations that will always exist when millions are in motion, push it that way.

The following are observations collected from a few of the Solidarity members who were present at either the 1963 March or the recent demonstration commemorating that event.

David McCullough (Atlanta):

"In August, 1963 I was in Washington where I grew up, on the way back to Berkeley after a year of graduate study abroad. My parents, government workers like so many in Washington, were very nervous about the demonstration, as if it could lead to riots. All Washington was closed down that day. The government shut all office buildings; everyone stayed home, as the new media urged them to do. Thus it was a piece of cake to catch a bus down to the Mall and join in. The roads were empty.

I wandered around the Lincoln Memorial, where the speeches were to be. Down Constitution Avenue came the main line of march. I was impressed when I saw someone I thought was Jackie Robinson, the baseball star, in the front lines. That made it clear, in my mind, that this was both a huge occasion and a mainstream event. Those who shunned the march simply misunderstood a moment of their own history.

Having no politics nor affiliation with any group, I looked around for some shade and found a group of young people under the trees whom I could relate to. They were lively and serious at the same time, singing and speaking out. They were SNCC kids from the South. Compared to the churchy and respectable masses, they seemed hip and committed.

I moved close to the Memorial for the speeches, only a couple of which rang a bell – Martin Luther King's and one of the young leader's, maybe John Lewis. More memorable was crossing arms and

singing civil rights anthems with thousands of strangers, a big step in anyone's life on the way to collective action.

After the march, I was invited by an old college friend to have a beer with someone she knew, an African-American government official, fairly high up, at his home off 16th street. This gentleman opened my eyes to some things, such as the pervasive segregation of housing in Washington. My family lived a couple of miles away on the other side of Rock Creek Park, but this man could not buy a house on that side of town. The best he could do was where he was.

One thing that was clear from the March on Washington was that the people – those marchers were clearly the ordinary people of America – and the government lived in different worlds. It was that way then and is that way today."

Karin Baker (Western MA):

"I appreciated the large number of people who were motivated to come out to the event, and the composition of the crowd (which was at least 90% people of color). Attendees were energetic and seemed to be celebrating the moment. The tone from the organizers and speakers may have been liberal, but I noticed pockets of militancy from BAMN (By Any Means Necessary), Dream Defenders, and some speakers, including a young Filipina immigrant speaker. I also noted the visible presence of t-shirts and posters reflecting concern about both Trayvon Martin and voting rights; there seemed to be a general awareness of pressing issues and the need for organizing and action. The overall level of organization of the event was also impressive.

I was concerned, however, by some other aspects of the event. Unfortunately, many of the speakers seemed wrapped up legislative solutions to problems, and they repeatedly encouraged the crowd to pressure legislators and mobilize voter turnout. Maybe this was predictable, but more discouraging was the enthusiastic response these kinds of comments got from the crowd. There also just seemed to be a general lack of focus in the crowd, and occa-

sionally a sense of complacency about what has been accomplished since 1963; this was balanced by the equally strong presence in parts of the crowd about the issues mentioned above, but it was still unfortunate to see that the urgency and militancy was not more widespread."

Dianne Feeley (Detroit):

"I thought the August 24th March on Washington was an incredible demonstration for civil rights and unity in the face of the neoliberal agenda. In terms of estimating the crowd, I see the media plays it safe in saying tens of thousands. I thought it was about 250,000. Michigan alone chartered 150 buses!

I was impressed by the crowd. African Americans made up about 75%, with union contingents bringing a significant number of Latinos and whites. Contingents from the Black community included the historically Black colleges, fraternities and sororities, Black churches as well as the National Action Network, the NAACP, the Urban League and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. The UAW turned out massively and provided marshals in the Metro stations and at the entrances of the Mall to direct people. Other unions I noticed because of their sea of T-shirts or because of their banners and signs were SEIU, health care workers, teamsters and the building trades, including LUNA. Many people came with their families. There was a sprinkling of Quakers, environmental activists, Planned Parenthood and local peace centers.

I made a point of speaking with a number of people I met at the march and on the way there and back and would like to share some of what those people talked about:

Douglass, who is vice president of a local NAACP chapter, came to the march with his wife and three-year old son. He felt it was important to be at this historic civil rights event and was happy at the enormous size of the crowd. Even though his son might not remember being there, he felt it would be important that later on in life he would realize that his parents had taken him to the march. Douglass

saw the 50th anniversary as a massive show of solidarity against a system that used racism, sexism and classism to reinforce inequality. His hope was that not only would people be able to come together and better understand the interrelated problems, but begin to come up with solutions. He felt the division between the rich and poor was widening. When I asked what he saw as the most important issues to address, he named jobs and health care. He also noted that many people have low-wage jobs so their families are living below the poverty level. This also means they are cut off from adequate health care.

Dorothy, a retired state worker from Detroit, decided to come to the march because she feels the corporations have taken over public life, including the Supreme Court. She pointed to how every public institution in the city of Detroit has been taken over by a state-appointed official who will privatize and sell off the city's assets. The only tool left is to mobilize people in defense of rights. She feels very strongly that the younger generation is able to get out information over the internet—a kind of people's version of the rightwing think tank ALEC!

Thelma, 69, came with her granddaughter. She said she'd almost made it to the original march when her church organized busses, but her father didn't feel comfortable with letting her go. This time she was determined to be there, and to take her granddaughter. As a retired federal worker, she pointed to how many changes have occurred over the last fifty years. When she was in high school, few African Americans had government jobs, except if they were elevator operators or worked in the mail room. But even though there has been change, she still felt Blacks were not being given the opportunity to acquire jobs skills or get prized internships that could lead to good jobs. Emphasizing the importance of jobs for the Black community; she identified the need for affirmative action. She also felt it was central to expose problems women faced at work and pointed to the recent revelations of rape within the military, which she saw as the tip of the iceberg.

Alexa, 16, came with her grandmother on the Metro from Northeast DC. Alexa felt it was important to celebrate the Black community's civil rights history. She had talked with her friends about the murder of Trayvon Martin and felt it was definitely racially motivated. Had he been a white teenager, he would not have been killed.

Byran, an African-American teenager from the Detroit area about to go to college—perhaps to study nursing—rode to the march on the National Action Network bus with his mother. He wanted to be at the march in order to be in touch with his culture and to experience a "coming together" of people around problems in a positive setting."

Dan La Botz (Cincinnati): [1]

"The Fiftieth Anniversary March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 24 was a mostly African American working class event of tens of thousands. They came to celebrate the struggles and victories of a half century ago and to put on the agenda for today the issues of racial profiling and stand-your-ground laws, the country's unemployment rate and growing economic inequality, and new restrictions on voting rights. Some of those on the dais before the magnificent Lincoln Monument, like Representative John Lewis, had spoken there in 1963, while others like Newark Mayor and New Jersey Senate candidate Cory Booker were, as he said, not even born then. Where fifty years ago the civil rights leaders had come to implore the Democratic Party politicians, at this march the Democratic Party politicians came to try to mobilize politically—and immobilize socially—their ever more discontented if still incredibly loyal base.

The presence on the platform of key figures of the Obama administration, such as Eric Holder, and of the leading Democrat in Congress, Nancy Pelosi, gave the event a quasi-official character in stark contrast to the 1963 march that maintained its distance from the administration by having no political or governmental speakers. While many in the crowd of the 50th anniversary march have good reasons for feeling frustration and anger about gov-

ernment policies and the state of the country, the tone of the event was one of pride in black struggles of the past and pleasure in being present with tens of thousands of others like ourselves who believe in a more democratic, just and decent society. The rally and march, however, did not create the impression that a new movement was being launched, as I had hoped it might, though it did at least show that the unions and civil rights organizations still exist and can still march to the capital to petition for jobs and justice.

The words one saw most often and the most common image was Trayvon Martin, the young man's whose death has made him the symbol of racial profiling and persecution, killed for no good reason, his killer set free by a system that simply cannot respond with justice to the murder of a young black man. Trayvon was everywhere, on caps and t-shirts, on placards and banners. Many of those present had no doubt participated in protests of the verdict of not guilty in the trial of Martin's killer George Zimmerman or in protests against stop-and-frisk policies in New York, but those activists did not set the tone for the 50th anniversary march.

While there were clusters of militants here and there, the crowd had been brought to Washington by the labor unions and the African American civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Action Network (NAN) who place their hopes in the Democratic Party to solve their problems. Not surprisingly given the makeup of the crowd, there were no signs and banners criticizing President Barack Obama or his policies. On the contrary, the crowd cheered loud and long for Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic Party's House minority leader, herself a veteran of the 1963 march. The union members who were there clearly took pride in following in the footsteps of those who came before, but one had little sense that they had come to open new paths to the Promised Land.

I have seldom been in a mass political demonstration of hundreds of thousands where one felt such

fellowship and good will. This was more a picnic in the park than a protest against the powers. If there was no militancy in the rally and the march, there was a great sense of pride and common purpose: these were people who want the country to be better, are willing to work to make it so, and are prepared themselves to shoulder their portion of the burden, and more. Yet, in a certain sense, that was the problem. While people spoke out against racial injustice, there was no sense of a rejection of either the corporations or the government and its policies.. With the exception of small numbers of radicals and socialists, the march saw itself as influencing the system—not challenging it.

The left was present, of course. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) had endorsed it, and at the rally one saw banners of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party and a spirited march of a few hundred against the new Jim Crow led by the International Socialist Organization. While the ANSWER Coalition and the ISO had printed thousands of placards that one saw scattered throughout the crowd, those who carried them did so because they supported the slogan "Dr. King's Legacy: Jobs not War" or "End Mass Incarceration and the New Jim Crow," not because they supported socialism. We on the left were a drop in the bucket of the sea of black working people who continue to place their hopes on making the system work, rather than on the hope of creating a new system.

Yet all the problems remain, not only the injustice of the justice system, but also the continuing eco-

nomic problems of high unemployment and growing inequality as well as the attack on voting rights. Health care remains an issue, for Obama Care (never really what we needed) has not yet come and will not come to many states; the public schools and teachers remain under attack; the immigration issue remains unresolved; and everywhere American working people face the government's austerity program, cutting public services and public employees. The military interventions continue and threaten to expand and the national security state continues to grow, eavesdropping on millions. The Democrats on the dais stand on the wrong side of almost all of these issues, their only real concern to protect voting rights because the Republican attack on their voters endangers their political positions.

This massive March for Jobs and Justice fifty years later was a missed opportunity to launch the movement we so badly need. Yet we can count on the irrationality of the economic system, the unfairness of the political system, and the continuing desire for justice on the part of all of those walked in Washington to give us one more chance. Let it be soon, for every day that passes there is another Trayvon somewhere, another foreclosure, another unemployed worker, another homeless family on the street. Let it be soon, and when it comes, let it be powerful and 'Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'"

Solidarity

SYRIA

We Stand Behind the Syrian People's Revolution - No to Foreign Intervention

Over 150 thousand were killed, hundreds of thousands injured and disabled, millions of people displaced inside and outside Syria. Cities, villages, and neighborhoods were destroyed fully or partially, using all sorts of weapons, including warplanes, scud missiles, bombs, and tanks, all paid for by the sweat and blood of the Syrian people. This was under the pretext of defending the homeland and achieving military balance with Israel (whose occupation of Syrian land is, in fact, being protected by the Syrian regime, which failed to reply to any of its continuing aggressions).

Yet, despite the enormous losses mentioned above, befalling all Syrians, and the calamity inflicted on them, no international organization or major country – or a lesser one – felt the need to provide practical solidarity or support the Syrians in their struggle for their most basic rights, human dignity, and social justice.

The only exception was some Gulf countries, more specifically Qatar and Saudi Arabia. However, their aim was to control the nature of the conflict and steer it in a sectarian direction, distorting the Syrian revolution and aiming to abort it, as a reflection of their deepest fear that the revolutionary flame will reach their shores. So they backed obscurantist takfiri groups, coming, for the most part, from the four corners of the world, to impose a grotesque vision for rule based on Islamic sharia. These groups were engaged, time and time again, in terrifying massacres against Syrian citizens who opposed their repressive measures and aggressions inside areas under their control or under attack,

such as the recent example of villages in the Latakia countryside.

A large block of hostile forces, from around the world, is conspiring against the Syrian people's revolution, which erupted in tandem with the uprisings spreading through a large section of the Arab region and the Maghreb for the past three years. The people's uprisings aimed to put an end to a history of brutality, injustice, and exploitation and attain the rights to freedom, dignity, and social justice.

However, this did not only provoke local brutal dictatorships, but also most of the imperialist forces seeking to perpetuate the theft of the wealth of our people, in addition to the various reactionary classes and forces throughout those areas and in surrounding countries.

As for Syria, the alliance fighting against the people's revolution comprises a host of reactionary sectarian forces, spearheaded by Iran and confessional militias in Iraq, and, to much regret, Hezbollah's strike force, which is drowning in the quagmire of defending a profoundly corrupt and criminal dictatorial regime.

This unfortunate situation has also struck a major section of the traditional Arab left with Stalinist roots, whether in Syria itself or in Lebanon, Egypt, and the rest of the Arab region – and worldwide – which is clearly biased towards the wretched alliance surrounding the Assad regime. The justification is that some see it as a "resilient" or even a "resistance" regime, despite its long history – throughout its existence in power – of protecting the Zionist occupation of the Golan Heights, its constant bloody repression of various groups resisting Israel, be it Palestinian or Lebanese (or Syrian),

and remaining idle and subservient, since the October 1973 war, concerning Israel's aggressions on Syrian territories. This bias will have serious ramifications on ordinary Syrians' position regarding the left in general.

The United Nations and the Security Council, in particular, was unable to condemn the crimes of a regime, which the Syrian people rejected continuously and peacefully for more than seven months, while the bullets of the snipers and shabbiha took demonstrators one by one and day after day and while the most influential activists were being detained and subjected to the worst kinds of torture and elimination in the prisons and detention centers. All the while, the world remained completely silent and in a state of total negativity.

The situation persisted with small difference after the people in revolution decided to take up arms and the emergence of what became known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) – whose command and soldiers came, to a large extent, from the regular army. This led to the horrific escalation of crimes by the regime.

Russian imperialism, the most important ally of the Baathist regime in Damascus, which provides it with all sorts of support, remains on the lookout to block any attempt to condemn those crimes in the Security Council. The United States, on the other hand, does not find a real problem in the continuation of the status quo, with all the apparent repercussions and destruction of the country. This is despite the threats and intimidation utilized by the US president, every time someone in the opposition raises the question of the use of chemical weapons by the regime, up until the latest escalation, when it was considered crossing a "red line."

It is clear that Obama, who gives the impression that he will go ahead with his threats, would have felt great embarrassment if he did not do so, since it will not only impact negatively on the president, but also on the image of the mighty and arrogant state that he leads in the eyes of subservient Arab countries and the entire world.

The imminent strike against the Syrian armed forces is led by the US in essence. However, it occurs with the understanding and cooperation of allied imperialist countries, even without rationalizing it through the usual farce, known as international legitimacy (namely the decisions of the UN, which was and remains representative of the interests of major powers, whether in conflict or in alliance, depending on the circumstances, differences, and balances among them). In other words, the strike will not wait for the Security Council due to the anticipated Russian-Chinese veto.

Unfortunately, many in the Syrian opposition are gambling on this strike and the US position in general. They believe this would create an opportunity for them to seize power, skipping over the movement and of the masses and their independent decision. It should not be a surprise, then, that the representatives of this opposition and the FSA had no reservations on providing information to the US about proposed targets for the strike.

In all cases, we agree on the following:

The western imperialist alliance will strike several positions and vital parts of the military and civilian infrastructure in Syria (with several casualties, as usual). However, as it was keen to announce, the strikes will not be meant to topple the regime. They are merely intended to punish, in Obama's words, the current Syrian leadership and save face for the US administration, after all the threats concerning the use of chemical weapons.

The US president's intentions to punish the Syrian leadership does not stem, in any way or form, from Washington's solidarity with the suffering of children who fell in the Ghouta massacres, but from its commitment to what Obama calls the vital interests of the US and its homeland security, in addition to Israel's interests and security.

The Syrian army and its regional allies, led by the Iranian regime, will not have enough courage, most probably, to fulfil what seemed to be threats by their senior officials that any western attack on Syria will ignite the entire region. But this option remains on the table, as a final option with cat-

astrophic results.

The imminent western imperialist assault does not intend to support the Syrian revolution in any way. It will aim to push Damascus into the bargaining table and allow Bashar al-Assad to retreat from the foreground, but keeping the regime in place, while greatly improving conditions to strengthen the position of US imperialism in the future Syria against Russian imperialism.

The more those participating in the continuing popular mobilization – who are more aware, principled, and dedicated to the future of Syria and its people – realize these facts, their consequences, results, and act accordingly, the more this will contribute to aiding the Syrian people to successfully pick a true revolutionary leadership. In the process of a committed struggle based on the current and future interests of their people, this would produce a radical program consistent with those interests, which could be promoted and put into practice on the road to victory.

No to all forms of imperialist intervention, whether by the US or Russia.

No to all forms of reactionary sectarian interventions, whether by Iran or the Gulf countries.

No to the intervention of Hezbollah, which warrants the maximum of condemnation.

Down with all illusions about the imminent US military strike.

Break open the arms depots for the Syrian people to struggle for freedom, dignity, and social justice.

Victory to a free democratic Syria and down with the Assad dictatorship and all dictatorships forever.

Long live the Syrian people's revolution.

—

Revolutionary Socialists (Egypt) - Revolutionary Left Current (Syria) - Union of Communists (Iraq) - Al-Mounadil-a (Morocco) - Socialist Forum (Lebanon) - League of the Workers' Left (Tunisia)

Originally published on Al Mansour.

ITALY/SYRIA SOLIDARITY

Chronicle of an intervention (long) foretold

PIERO MAESTRI ·

To be clear: we are completely and unambiguously against any military intervention by the United States and its allies against Syria. For the past 20 years we have been at the forefront in denouncing these kind of interventions; from Iraq to the former Yugoslavia; from Afghanistan to Somalia; from Libya to Mali and many others. We mobilized against them and, in particular, denounced and opposed the political, military and financial contributions of our governments to such actions.

It may seem pointless to remember it, but it is not: in the first place because it is good to remind ourselves and the people who listen to us; and, secondly, because there are others who can not claim such consistency (such as those parts of the "radical left" who give support to centre-left governments involved in Nato military missions....).

The last few days appear to have paved the way for a possible escalation of direct military intervention against Syria and the probable bombing of that country, by the U.S.A. and its allies.

The terrible attack with chemical weapons in Ghouta area of Damascus seems to represent for international diplomacy and the hypocritical Western governments an event which they can not be seen not to deal with and to which they need to "respond" in some way.

Of course we cannot really know for sure who is responsible for the use of gas against the Syrian people - but in the end this tragedy does not fundamentally change what happens in that country (and the criminal responsibility of Assad and the Ba'ath regime, not only for the last two years of repression and massacres), although it could lead to an escalation of the ongoing war.

We have seen too many lies and propaganda hoaxes to trust to Kerry, Cameron and their friends. At the same time we smile with disgust at the fake innocence of those who would want us to believe the revelations of the Assad regime which immediately found an empty barrel of chemical weapons in tunnels supposedly dug by the rebels. As if this too were not propaganda with an equal lack of credibility.

Although direct US intervention might now start, it is clear that such an outcome has not been actively pursued by the Obama administration which continues to have reservations and which stills ends contradictory signals to the Assad regime and its allies.

Obama continues to talk about the "need for a consensus of the international community," but this is a meaningless phrase in the mouths of those who see themselves as the legitimate moral and political representative of this fictitious "community".

At the same time Obama is looking for clear signals from Russia and China, as to what they might do in the event of military intervention, with an expectation that they might simply present formal protests with no major disruption of diplomatic relations, as has already occurred several times in the past few years, whilst continuing to provide weapons and technical support to the Syrian regime.

Despite the lack of desire to embark on an adventure with unseen short or long-term consequences, the U.S. and its allies may end up opting for a limited intervention like the bombing of Somalia and Uganda but on a larger scale, rather than a mission like the one in Kosovo.

Such an intervention would worsen the tragic situation in Syria, for several reasons.

Firstly, as always happens, despite claims of surgical strikes, military action will bring new grief to the Syrian people they are claiming to liberate. As happens on a daily basis in Afghanistan and as happened in Iraq, Kosovo, Libya, etc. thousands of refugees will be forced to flee from the bombed areas.

Secondly, although causing damage to the military forces of the regime, the intervention would not be able to completely destroy them (which they do not want to do anyway) and they would still receive supplies and support from Russia and Iran.

Thirdly, the regime may consolidate its position and base of support both within Syria and amongst its allies.

Fourthly, there will definitely be a resurgence of armed conflicts -- even between the various elements of the opposition, as different groups seek to secure a better position in the aftermath of the military intervention and finally, there is greater risk of regional contagion, which would extend directly to Lebanon and then to other regions, perhaps to Egypt.

For all these reasons we are against military intervention in Syria, directed by those who present themselves, without legitimate claim, to be the world's policeman.

When saying that we are against foreign intervention in Syria, we must also remember that this is already in progress, by different entities. Whilst the various Syrian opposition groups are supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the NATO countries themselves, Assad's regime has enjoyed substantial support from Russia and Iran, as well as direct military assistance from Hezbollah militia, proving decisive for the regime in a number of important battles.

These different agendas have, on one hand, allowed the Assad regime to continue to survive and continue to kill, destroy, imprison its opponents and, on the other, they have in some way "killed" the Syrian revolution, allowing better equipped minority

groups to have hegemony on the field, diminishing the role not only of the secular and democratic forces, but also, in many cases, the local committees of the revolution itself, whilst causing tensions with the Kurdish people and their parties.

The current situation of stalemate, with the regime unable to return to a situation prior to March 2011 and the opposition parties unable to win militarily – benefits all these actors who can continue to manage their political-strategic games against the Syrian population.

Honestly we cannot not really place any trust in a non-military intervention by an "international community" that cannot even organize effective humanitarian aid that at least protects refugees and children through a "peaceful invasion" of unarmed forces that support and help the population.

We do not accept any political or diplomatic solution which sacrifices the symbol – Bashar – but puts in his place another figurehead to guarantee regional stability and support for Israel and the United States.

For this reason we do not make calls for "dialogue" or for international conferences which, today, would be convened by the very states who share the main responsibility for the destruction of Syria.

Declaring ourselves today strongly against any form of military intervention, however limited or targeted, by the United States and its allies, we nevertheless maintain a clear, sincere and strong denunciation of the crimes of the regime and we support the aims of the Syrian revolution.

In Italy this means we stand side by side with the Syrians who fight against such crimes and demonstrate for freedom and dignity in Syria. We know that many of them do approve a possible U.S. intervention and sincerely think it will bring a respite to the suffering of the Syrian population, but, as we said, we do not agree with this belief. In any case there are political reasons that make any global intervention dangerous and problematic for all Syrians.

We hope that many will stand up, in Italy and Europe, opposing a new western war in the Middle East but also refusing to be silent in the face of the crimes of the Assad regime. That is why we must build initiatives to support the Syrian people and

the democratic revolutionary opposition forces and not simply abandon them.

Italian original Cronaco di un intervento molto annunciato.

FRANCE/SYRIA SOLIDARITY

Against any military intervention. Total support for the Syrian revolution.

NPA-L'ANTICAPITALISTE (NPA-A) ·

The regime of Bashar Al Assad incessantly raises the level of the massacres which it organizes against its own people. Thus the recent bombardments in civilian areas around Damascus, using chemical weapons, once again lead to horror and rage against the hypocrisy of the great powers which leads to these crimes against humanity. The NPA makes a point once again of assuring the insurgent Syrian people of all its solidarity, and its admiration of its determination to overthrow a regime which is indefensible from any point of view. We denounce the direct complicity of the governments of Russia and Iran which encourages the crimes of Al-Assad. But we reaffirm that the great Western powers, by refusing to deliver the weapons demanded for so many months by the collective structures of struggle set up by the people, also bear a heavy responsibility for the perpetuation of the murderous regime, while contributing to the development of religious obscurantist currents which constitute a second mortal enemy for the Syrian people.

Now, the USA, France and the United Kingdom announce their will to intervene directly in the conflict by targeted bombardments. We absolutely reject such a policy, which President Holland puts himself at the forefront of without any democratic consultation. Indeed, it can only have counter-productive effects, faced with a criminal and adventurist regime, and could on the contrary reinforce its international propaganda and ultimately increase the suffering in Syria. It is up to the Syrian people to free itself in complete self-determination, with all essential international assistance but without the operations and direct interventions of states which primarily defend their own interests. Faced with a regime which has cut all the bridges of compromise, the Syrian people and its representatives who fight for democracy, social justice, and national dignity with respect for all its components will not be able to compromise on the fall of the clan of Bashar Al-Assad, and the rejection of any foreign supervision!

Leucate, August 28, 2013

French original "Contre toute intervention militaire. Soutien total à la révolution syrienne".

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



| OBITUARY

Idalberto Ferrera Acosta (1918-2013), Cuban Trotskyist

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT · 19 September 2013

Last July 2, 2013, Idalberto Ferrera Acosta, age 95, died in Havana. Idalberto devoted his entire life to the Revolution. In 1933-1934 he joined the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, the Cuban Trotskyist organization. He was a militant in the union and political movements in Guantanamo and Santiago de Cuba. The actions of Cuban Trotskyists were very important in the 1930s because they had significant influence in the unions in several regions in Cuba, particularly in the East (Guantanamo, site of the U.S. Navy base, and Santiago de Cuba) and in Havana [4]. Idalberto Ferrera made active contributions.

In Guantanamo, during the 1950's, with his partner Guarina Ramírez and his three sons (Juan León, Ricardo and Idalberto), he joined the political and armed struggle headed by the Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26J) [5]. Meetings of clandestine M-26-J were regularly held in his home at Number 1453, Calle de Manuel de Céspedes, Guantánamo. His family and comrades enthusiastically joined the early years of the Revolution while they openly defended their Trotskyist ideas. The issues of self-organization of the people, freedom of organization and deepening of revolutionary structural changes were in the center of their combat.

In 1960 or 1961, he settled with his family in a popular Old Havana neighborhood, in a humble apartment in Calle Monte where he lived until the end of his days. Idalberto Ferrera and a group of Cuban Trotskyists rebuilt a Trotskyist organization named Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) (Trotskyist). The activities of this party were legal at the begin-

ning. Its members were involved in productive tasks (in agriculture and industry) and in the defense of the Cuban Revolution. The POR (T) received support from Latin American militants who offered their support to the Cuban Revolution. At the time, Idalberto Ferrera was Secretary General of the POR (T) which published the newspaper *Voz Proletaria*. POR (T) was affiliated to an international Trotskyist organization: the Fourth International Posadista. This organization had previously severed links with the International Secretariat of the 4th International led at the time mainly by Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank and Livio Maitan.

In 1962, the 4th International Posadista and the POR(T) took an extreme position during the Missile Crisis and demanded that the Cuban leadership and the USSR launch a nuclear attack against the U.S.A. to destroy imperialism. The demand was published in all the international Posadista media as well as in a special issue of the Cuban Trotskyist paper *Voz Proletaria* "Let the Soviet Army Strike the First Blow", Havana, October 23, 1962. [6]

Several times along 1962-1963, Idalberto Ferrera and his comrades, both in Havana and Guantanamo, were victims of police intimidation instigated by the PSP [Partido Socialista Popular], the Stalinist party that was gaining influence in State echelons and was attacking Trotskyists as enemies of the Revolution.

Jose Lungarzo (metallurgic workman and Argentinian Trotskyist) was arrested on October 30, 1962 and deported to Argentina on December 21, 1962.

Finally, in 1965 the POR(T) was banned.

In March 1965, several comrades of Idalberto Ferrera, including one of his sons, Idalberto Ferrera Acosta, who had been sentenced to several years in prison, were released after a few months in prison [7]. Among the concrete causes for the incarceration was the publication of the Cuban edition of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and the activities of the POR(T). Che Guevara, returning from Africa, intervened in favor of the Trotskyists and obtained their liberation. Che set a condition: the dissolution of the POR(T).

The situation deteriorated strongly in 1967. The international Posadista media affirmed that Che had died in Cuba [8]. Juan Posadas stated in October 1967 that "Guevara did not die in Bolivia" [9]. Obviously these allegations as serious and unfounded could only complicate the situation of the Cuban Posadista Trotskyists.

In the 1970s, pressures by the USSR and its followers in Cuba were very strong and in many areas. In 1973, Idalberto, his son Juan Leon and Jesus Andres Vazquez were sentenced again.

The accusation record of the Public Ministry of the Revolutionary Court No. 1 against Idalberto Ferrera Acosta, Juan León Ferrera (one of his three sons) and Jesús Andrés Vázquez reads as follows: *"The defendants (...) were members of the political bureau of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario Trotskista and their main tasks were the preparation and reproduction of Trotskyist propaganda of a diversionist and defamatory nature against the Cuban Communist Party and Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz; the creation of Trotskyist cells in the provinces; proselytism activities to attract new militants and sympathizers; and close links with the Fourth Trotskyist Posadista International abroad from which they received instructions for their activities and followed them to the letter. They received from abroad all kinds of Trotskyist propaganda and also sent to the different sections of the Fourth Trotskyist Posadista International political and economic information about the country. This was aimed at the ideological weakening and confusion in the Marxist-*

Leninist approach of the Cuban Communist Party as the ruling body of the Cuban Revolution. All these actions as well as creating conflicts and divergence between Cuba and the Socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union against which they directed all types of lies and slander saying that the Communist Parties in Cuba and in other countries were bureaucratic castes that ruled to serve their interests, exploiting the working class." [10]

In 1993, I met Idalberto Ferrera, his partner Guarina, his sons Juan Leon and Ricardo and his grandchildren. They still lived in Calle Monte just a stone's throw of the East Station that joins Havana and Santiago. He was 75 years old and had not lost any of his revolutionary convictions. He was in systematic contact with his old Trotskyist comrades, in particular with those in the east of the island (Santiago and Guantanamo) and wrote –just as did his son Juan Leon– analytical works. Even before the collapse of the USSR, the Castro leadership had launched a rectification movement. Idalberto and Juan Leon sent frequent proposals to the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party on how to deal with the crisis. They showed me the delivery receipts they got from the Central Committee Secretariat.

Almost every year until 2011, I returned to see Idalberto, Guarina, Juan León and other members of his family. In each one of our encounters Idalberto commented on the international political situation, tried to analyze in it everything that could represent possible revolutionary victories. Usually we did not agree on the assessments of the struggles, because I believed he had a tendency to embellish them. He was eager to receive information about the evolution of Trotskyist organizations in the world. He regularly received comrades from different parts of the world. He was indefatigable: in 2008, being 82 years old, he worked five afternoons a week as a switchboard operator. He and his family always lived modestly. They lived and acted for political action and for social emancipation. They were very concerned about the role of bureaucracy in Cuba and the obstacles that stood in the

way of a real socialist experience on the island. If my memory serves me well, it was in 2008 that he could travel abroad for the first time (he was 90 years old) to visit Caracas in August and attend a homage to Leon Trotsky organized with the support of Hugo Chavez' government.

Among the biographical elements he told me there is one that I believe particularly reflects his political commitment and the specific features of the Cuban process. He told me that his years in prison in the 1960s were among his most treasured experiences. He was incarcerated in La Cabana (an 18th Century fortress in Havana) with some of his comrades and –he said- with hundreds of right-wing inmates. As an unjustly incarcerated militant, Idalberto struggled in prison to defend and reinforce the ongoing revolution. This is how, independently from the prison authorities, he organized with his comrades educational conferences and debates in defense of the revolution. He said that more than 100 inmates participated. He also pushed so the prisoners could work for the revolution in the fields or wherever they could be useful. With their action, Idalberto and his comrades tried to convince undecided convicts of revolutionary ideas. And according to Idalberto, they were very successful.

He stressed that, on the other hand, the re-education courses organized by the prison authorities were a failure. The impact of the actions of Idalberto and his comrades was such that the right-wing and counterrevolutionary prisoners began to physically threaten the Trotskyists saying they were

infiltrated Castro agents. One day, the prison warden gathered all the inmates in the yard, asked Idalberto to stand next to him and threatened all the right-wing prisoners with retaliation if they touched but one hair of comrade Trotskyist Idalberto Ferrera whose militant courage he recognized in front of the "true" traitors of the homeland. Idalberto finished his anecdote telling me, "This is the difference between a Stalinist gulag and a Castro prison." The story Idalberto told me in the late 1990's could be a little embellished, but Juan Leon confirmed what his father had said.

At the end of his life, Idalberto had not abandoned his critical attitude towards the Cuban regime, nor his struggle for the emancipation of the peoples. He was convinced the conquests of the Cuban Revolution had to be defended and deepened; and this implied fighting bureaucracy. He made mistakes of appreciation: his position during the Missile Crisis in October 1962 and the accusations of his international movement on the disappearance of Che are examples. He was unjustly incarcerated at different times in 1960 and 1970. Since the 1930's to the end of his life, he was a convinced revolutionary militant. He is one of those militants, men and women, who remain faithful to the struggle along their lives.

A CubaNews translation. Edited by Walter Lippmann. Wednesday, July 24 2013 12:18.

Translated by Alberto Nadal [From French to Spanish from which this was then translated to English, w]

ECONOMY

Banks versus the People: Parts 6-9

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT · 9 September 2013

[1]As Wolfgang Münchau writes, the IMF's motivation must not be misjudged: "The IMF does not say that austerity is too hard, too unfair, causes too much pain in the short term or hits the poor more than the rich. It says simply that austerity may not achieve its goal of reducing debt within a reasonable amount of time" [2]

Meanwhile, if IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde hinted that the beginning of some austerity measures should be spread over a longer period of time, and that it might be possible to increase some public spending in order to stimulate the economy, this is because she is under pressure from IMF members from emerging countries (especially the Brics, led by China and Brazil), which are fearful of the boomerang effect of the drop in European imports, and criticise the importance of the IMF's financial engagement in Europe. The IMF's Managing Director expressed this point of view in Tokyo, at the annual assembly of the IMF and World Bank in October 2012. The IMF document and Christine Lagarde's recommendations made European leaders react with discontent. For example, in Tokyo, Wolfgang Schäuble, the Finance Minister of Merkel's government, publicly criticised Christine Lagarde for her untimely remarks. [3]

Wolfgang Münchau considers that the reservations expressed by the IMF on the depth of the austerity measures will in no way modify the attitude of European leaders who are sticking to a hard line position: "European policy makers are paranoid about their credibility, and I expect them to hold on to austerity until the bitter end, when the policy implodes" [4]

The tension between the IMF and the European Commission was expressed publicly again on 14

November 2012. Christine Lagarde contradicted the optimism expressed by Jean-Claude Juncker (Luxembourg), who is President of the Eurogroup, concerning the outlooks for Greece. The IMF seems to want to put pressure on the Commission in order to increase its influence on the direction that should be taken in Europe. Emerging countries and the United States have been taking action within the IMF to influence the solutions adopted concerning the European crisis, especially since they are being asked to make a financial contribution.

The IMF looks back on the historical failures of brutal austerity policies

Much has been written about another IMF study, a chapter in its World Economic Outlook report, which was published just before its annual assembly in October 2012. In this chapter, the IMF studies 26 public debt crisis episodes since 1875, in which public debt was greater than 100% of GDP. It analyses the policies that were applied to resolve these crises. One of the episodes analysed was that of the United Kingdom after the First World War. British public debt stood at 140% of GDP. The British government applied a radical policy of fiscal austerity combined with a stringent monetary policy. By making large cuts to expenditures, the government achieved a primary fiscal surplus of nearly 7% of GDP (before the payment of interest) throughout the 1920s, in order to reduce British debt by strictly paying it back. However, public debt did not decrease: in 1930, it was 170% of GDP, and three years later in 1933, it was more than 190% of GDP.

Martin Wolf, the chief economics commentator at the Financial Times, states that the real objective of the British government policy "was to break organised labour. These policies resulted in the general

strike of 1926. They spread a bitterness that lasted decades after the second world war." [5] This is exactly what is being done in Europe today. [6]

Wolf suggests that European policymakers and the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy want to push down wages drastically by using unemployment as a weapon. He states that: "Meanwhile, Spain's real GDP is shrinking. Efforts to tighten fiscal policy are sure to reduce it further." He continues his analysis by stating that the Italian government has been inspired by the same policy. He concludes with a statement that may seem unusual coming from a star journalist at one of the principal financial dailies on the planet: "But fiscal austerity and efforts to lower wages in countries suffering from monetary strangulation could break societies, governments and even states." In fact, as Martin Wolf has been insisting for months, it is because of austerity measures that countries are heading straight for disaster. As proof of his analysis, he points to the overwhelming electoral defeat of Mario Monti in March 2013 in Italy.

As Wolfgang Münchau writes, European policymakers are going to continue pursuing and aggravating these policies.

Why are European policymakers pushing for such harsh austerity policies?

It would be a mistake to believe that European policymakers have become blind. Their motivation is neither to return to economic growth, nor to balance the asymmetric relationships within the eurozone and the EU, so as to create a more coherent whole in which prosperity would reign. Corporate leaders, who shape government action, would like to push forward their great offensive against the hard-won social rights obtained in Europe after the Second World War. From this point of view, the policies pursued recently have been very successful. With the austerity policies that have increased unemployment, workers find themselves in an increasingly precarious position, their capacity to resist and fight has been radically decreased, wages and the various social benefits have been reduced

while the tremendous disparities between workers within the EU have been maintained so as to increase the competition between them.

One of the objectives pursued by European policymakers is to improve the capacity of European companies to increase their market share throughout the world. To accomplish this goal, the "cost of labour must be radically cut", as they would say. That would imply inflicting a major defeat on European workers. Other objectives are also being pursued: pushing even further the offensive against public services, avoiding as much as possible a new crash in the banking sector, further strengthening the executive powers (the European Commission and national governments) over the legislative powers, imposing tighter constraints through treaties that set in stone policies that favour the Capitalist agenda...

The political and electoral price to pay may be high, but generally speaking the major political families that dominate European politics have made the bet that even if they lose in the current elections, they will win in the next ones and return to power. In any case, moving over to the opposition does not mean losing a whole set of privileges already acquired in the central State government apparatus, and European institutions, not to mention the local powers they may have (in big cities, regional governments, and so on).

What is complicating the European policymakers' project is the Obama administration's decision to pursue radical austerity policies in the footsteps of the Bush administration. In particular, fiscal cuts in public and social spending are going to be even deeper in the United States. These reductions will not help European companies win market share there. Only Japan seems to be willing to adopt what is only a half-hearted stimulus policy, but this must still be confirmed.

Conclusion:

In light of the objectives described above, there is a total convergence between the IMF and European

policymakers. Furthermore, since December 2012, when the Obama administration announced that it intended to tighten austerity measures in the United States, we have no longer heard any critical declarations by Christine Lagarde or other leaders aimed at the IMF concerning the policies pursued in Europe.

We must not misjudge the deeper meaning of the IMF's declarations: if it has taken a bit of distance with respect to European policymakers, it is not to convince them to abandon the structural adjustment policies that are favourable to privatisations and a more intense offensive against the social rights won after the Second World War. It would like to have more influence on the decisions made, and impose its own. We shall see in the upcoming months whether or not it continues asserting that it would be a good idea to slow down the rhythm at which European policymakers want to balance their budgets. While the research produced by some IMF departments contains arguments that contradict dominant policies more or less clearly, the IMF's actions throughout the world have not changed an iota. These are the actions against which we must combat with all our force.

Part 7: The Mockery of Banking Discipline

"Markets have become too huge, complex, and fast-moving to be subject to twentieth-century supervision and regulation. No wonder this globalized financial behemoth stretches beyond the full comprehension of even the most sophisticated market participants. Financial regulators are required to oversee a system far more complex than what existed when the regulations still governing financial markets were originally written. " [7]

This remark by Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve bank from 1987 to 2006, has been repeated by all the leaders of the highly industrialised countries. They have imagined that the banks and other financial corporations would discipline themselves whilst satisfying their own egotistical interests.

Alan Greenspan adds: "Today, oversight of these transactions is essentially by means of individual-market-participant counterparty surveillance. Each lender, to protect its shareholders, keeps a tab on its customers' investment positions. Regulators can still pretend to provide oversight, but their capabilities are much diminished and declining." [8] The supposed will of banks, and other financial market actors, to self-discipline themselves is a smoke-screen allowing them to do whatever they like. Alan Greenspan, all the leaders of the industrialised countries, an army of experts and financial pundits are all unashamed liars who think they can treat the citizens like idiots, repeating 'ad nauseam' the old song of self-regulated markets. "Since markets have become too complex for effective human intervention, the most promising anticrisis policies are those that maintain maximum market flexibility—freedom of action for key market participants such as hedge funds, private equity funds, and investment banks" [9]

The financial catastrophes of 2007 – 2008 and their dramatic and durable effects are a stinging denial to these incantations. Financial market actors are totally incapable of regulating themselves and have neither the desire and certainly not the will to do so. As the history of capitalism and its crises clearly shows. So the policy makers have adopted a different line "Self-discipline to reply to problems is over, laissez-faire is over, the markets are always right is over." [10]. In fact, six years after the beginning of the crisis, five years after announcing a return to controls, there has been nothing more than a captivating spin. Leaders and lawmakers, in cosy complicity with the banks, have taken very few real and restrictive measures concerning financial companies.

One serious measure in an ocean of laxity

Since the 1st November 2012, in the European Union it has become prohibited to buy Credit Default Swaps (CDS - see below) to hedge against sovereign debt default if one does not possess this debt [11]. The penalties for doing so have been left

to the discretion of each State. This gives a lot of leeway to banks and other financial societies who would dare to brave or break this regulation. It is about the only significant measure that has been taken to introduce some order into the financial sector.

What is a CDS?

The Credit Default Swap (CDS) is a financial derivative product, created at the beginning of the 1990s, during an intense period of financial deregulation, which is not subjected to any public control. Its original purpose was to be a creditor's insurance, provided by the seller of the CDS, against default on obligations repayments, whether the obligations are issued by a public administration or by a private company. However, it is possible to purchase CDS cover for this kind of risk without holding the corresponding obligation (a practice that has been prohibited in the EU since November 2012 for the minimal 5 to 7% of the CDS market concerning sovereign debt). This is like insuring your neighbours house against fire in the hope that it will burn down, so as to collect the indemnity. The other risk linked to CDSs is the lack of financial means available to indemnify all the big CDS holders. Should there be a series of bankruptcies by private companies having issued obligations, or default by an important bond issuing country, it is quite probable that the CDS sellers will be unable to cover their promises.

The disaster experienced by AIG, the biggest North American international insurance company, in August 2008 (nationalised by President George W. Bush to avoid its total collapse) and the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers are the direct result of their important spread on the CDS markets where they were very active.

The Dodd-Frank Act in the United-States and the half-hearted European measures

In the US, a new law, which is half-hearted when compared to the regulations imposed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 (see below) was adopted during the first Barack Obama term. This is the Dodd-Frank Wall street reform and consumer protection act (which includes the Volcker rules) [12]. Although this law was passed in 2010 the application is delayed. The banks and their lobbyists along with Congressmen and Senators, both Democrats and Republicans, who are under their influence, have managed to severely limit this already half-hearted legislation. [13].

The separation of deposit banks and investment banks during the Roosevelt administration.

One of the important measures taken by the Roosevelt administration and the European governments (notably under pressure from the European popular movements after the Second World War) was to limit and to strictly regulate the way banks could use public money. This principle of protecting deposits resulted in the separation of deposit banks from merchant banks. The Glass Steagall Act is the best known example of this measure. It was applied for decades, with local variations, in European countries.

After this separation the peoples deposits that had a State guarantee could only be handled by deposit banks. At the same time their field of action was restricted to household and business loans, excluding bond issues, stock exchange activities and all other financial instruments, these activities were the domain of merchant banks that had to find their resources on the financial market

In the UK, the Vickers commission presented its recommendations to the authorities in 2011, but

their response is still awaited. The governor of the Bank of Finland, Erkki Liikanen, presented his report commissioned by the EU in October 2012. These two reports go in the same direction as the Dodd-Frank act and the Volcker regulations: [14] starting to ring-fence different banking activities. Neither of them suggest returning to the Glass-Steagall act or to the similar regulations that were in force in Europe at the same time. Nobody suggests a frank separation between deposit and investment bank activities, or the dismantlement of what is known as universal banks, also called full-service financial firms.

These banks are active in all the banking sectors from retail banking to commercial and investment banking, including underwriting and asset management. They intervene within their national territories and outside their countries through their different branch offices and subsidiaries. The great danger here are losses in one of the high risk related activities having to be supported by the deposits in the other, base activities, so putting savers funds in danger. This was the primary concern of Roosevelt and the European governments in the 1930s and 1940s, which resulted in banking regulations that made watertight sectors of these different activities. The Dodd-Frank act, the propositions of the Vickers and Liikanen commissions, the French banking reform law project put before the National Assembly in December 2012 [15], are half-hearted; creating uncertain separations which will prove to be inefficient and limited (if they are ever applied). The commercial and investment sectors within banks do not hesitate to divert savers' funds towards their riskier activities and they will continue to do so because no serious and restrictive measures have been taken against them. [16]

In addition, since deposit banks and commercial and investment banks belong to the same general banking structure, any losses of the commercial and investment sectors will be supported by the retail section (e.g. in France the losses of Natixis bank were paid for by 'Banque Populaire' and 'Caisse d'Epargne' within the BPCE group).

The banks put on the pressure to continue as they see fit

Although the Vickers and Liikanen recommendations are very conciliatory towards the bankers, as is the case in the US, the heads of private banks in the EU are organising intense lobbying so that these propositions remain on the shelf. Challenges, a French financial weekly magazine, reports the reaction of the French banking sector to the Liikanen report. "Most of these kind of reports have ended up in the waste paper basket" said one banker who accepted to speak to Challenges, "Liikanen hardly knows what a bank is" quipped another. "Finland only has subsidiaries or branches of foreign banks". Challenges goes on to present a differing opinion from Martin Wolf, editorialist at the Financial Times: "This is a step forward. But the next ones must be further forward, not backward.". [17] The *Financial Times* has also investigated the banking system. In its columns, Christian Clausen, CEO of the Swedish bank Nordea and president of the European Banking Federation, said that the Liikanen report was completely wrong to propose separation between retail banking and trading activities. [18]. Members of the different elected bodies and high ranking civil servants on both sides of the Atlantic, are facing intense pressures. Banks are able to count on the solid support of their highly placed allies, starting with Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank and ex-director of Goldman Sachs.

The voices of a few oversight authorities are starting to rise against laxity.

Among the oversight authorities a few voices are rising to criticise the absence of effective banking regulations. Andrew Haldane, director of the department of financial stability at the Bank of England, spoke out, at a financial directors meeting, in London in October 2012, criticising the fact that the 29 SIFIs (Systemically Important Financial Institutions - see below) take advantage of the dangers their crashes would produce in order to obtain,, cash flow from, among others, the BCE, the

Federal Reserve and the Bank of England in favourable conditions. He considers that the credits advanced to them by the public institutions amount to an annual subvention of \$700 billion.

The G20's list of SIFIs (Systemically Important Financial Institutions)

In November 2011 the G20 established a list of 'Systemically Important Financial Institutions (SIFIs)'. Just like 'Lehman Brothers' these banks are considered to be too important for their governments to let them to go bankrupt, they are 'too big to fail'. By their size, and the effects that would result if one of them failed, they have become preponderant in the international financial system. In 2011, among the 29 banks listed eight were of US origin (JP Morgan, Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Bank of New York Mellon, Wells Fargo, State Street), four British banks (HSBC, Lloyds, Barclays and Royal Bank of Scotland), four French (Societe Generale, Credit Agricole, BNP Paribas and BPCE), three were Japanese (Sumitomo, Mitsubishi UFJ FG, Mizuho FG), two German banks (Deutsche Bank and Commerzbank), two Swiss (UBS, Cr dit suisse), one each from Italy (Unicredit), Spain (Santander), the Netherlands (ING), Sweden (Nordea), and China (Bank of China) and one Franco-Belgian (Dexia). In 2012, the G20 withdrew three banks from the list (Dexia, Commerzbank and Lloyds), and added two (the Spanish 'BBVA', and the British 'Standard Chartered').

Andrew Haldane claims that the higher ratio of assets to equity which will be generalised in 2018 – 2019 is totally insufficient and will, in no way, reduce the effects of a bankruptcy. He recommends the drastic reduction of the size of banks. Thomas Hoenig, at the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, an institution created during F. D. Roosevelt's presidency of the United States to regu-

late the banking system, states that the separations put into place between the different banking activities are in fact porous. He supports the adoption of 'Glass-Steagall' type regulations to radically ring-fence merchant banking from retail banking. He also estimates that the levels of equity required as from 2018 – 2019 should be increased by at least threefold. [19]

Epilogue:

Victory of the bankers thanks to the oversight authorities

In January 2013, the Basel committee [20] postponed the application of one of its principal measures, the liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) regulation, requiring banks to constitute reserves capable of affronting a crisis for thirty days. The measure was to have applied as of 2015, but it has been postponed until 2019! The financial press clearly announced this decision on its front pages as a victory for the banks and a step backwards for the authorities. A Financial Times title on 8 January 2013 said, "European banks gain after Basel rules eased"[Financial Times, "European banks gain after Basel rules eased", 8 January 2013.] The Economist headlined: "Bank liquidity. Go with the Flow. Global regulators soften their stance on liquidity" [21]. Not only has the application of these rules been postponed to 2019, in other words 'put off indefinitely', but the banks may include in the LCR; structured and other toxic products. It's all poppycock.

More news to please the bankers came a few weeks later. Michel Barnier, European Commissioner in charge of financial affairs announced that he will not follow the principal recommendation of the Liikanen report concerning the separation of deposit banking and trading activities. Headlines in the the Financial Times on 30 January 2013 read: "Brussels retreat on key bank reform" [22]. The paper explains that the European commission has retreated in its proposition to protect deposit banking activities from the undesirable effects that may arise from highly speculative and risky trading ac-

tivities.

Conclusion: It is necessary to break away from the dictatorship of the banking system. Through a radical shift in policies, it would be possible to protect the deposits of ordinary people, to finance socially useful production and guarantee employment and the working conditions in the sector. These changes would require a public service for savings, loans and investment.

Banking (the service that protects savings and supplies loans for social uses such as productive development) is too important to be left in the hands of a small number of private bankers (the 1% as the 'Occupy Wall Streets' now call them), who, by definition seek only to maximise their profits. Speculation and all activities that support it must be prohibited, and so must all transactions related to tax havens. Since banks use our money, enjoy state guarantees, and must provide the fundamental services society needs they must be socialised and placed under citizen's control. [23]

Part 8 :Banks bluff in a completely legal way

If a bank posts significant losses (a major corporation goes bankrupt and cannot pay back a loan, or more often, due to losses on financial products traded on the derivatives market, such as ABS-RMBS, and CDOs, in particular linked to the real estate crisis or bad bets on how the exchange rate or interest rate will evolve, and even sometimes losses on government bonds...), it must absorb these losses with its capital (its equity). [24] If its capital is inadequate, then it should go bankrupt! In theory, according to the rules of prudence, a bank cannot lend more than 12.5 times its capital. This rule is based on the postulate that with an 8% equity-to-assets ratio, [25] a bank cannot go bankrupt, because it is very likely that its losses will be less than 8%, therefore it will be able to survive. We are going to show that in reality, banks can develop activities (take risks) that go far beyond this ratio. Instead of 1/12.5 (8%), the equity-to-assets ratio is often no better than 1/20 (5%). In addition, several very large banks have a 1/25 (4%) ratio, or even

1/33 (3.33%), all the way to 1/50 (2%). We are going to show how this can be done in a completely legal way.

The Basel Committee (see text box) has introduced the idea of dropping the leverage ratio to 3%, which is scandalously low. Authorising a bank to "lend" 33 times its capital, leaves in place a situation in which a (small) loss of 3.33% of its assets would result in bankruptcy. Such a decision is almost a guarantee that the banking crises are far from over.

The Basel Committee and the Bank for International Settlements

The Basel accords were drafted by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision. This committee has changed since the 1980s, and today its members include central bankers from the G20 countries under the supervision of the Bank of International Settlements (BIS, see below) in Basel. It has four main missions: to strengthen the security and stability of the financial system, to set minimum standards for prudential banking oversight, to spread and promote best banking and financial surveillance practices, and to promote international cooperation for prudential oversight. The BIS is an international organisation established in 1930, which promotes international monetary and financial cooperation. It also plays the role of the bank for central banks. Its mandate covers four areas of activity: a forum for the discussion and analysis of the monetary policies of central banks, an economic and monetary research centre, a prime counterpart of central banks for their international transactions, and an agent or trustee in connection with international financial operations. It has members from 56 central banks including those of the G10. Several committees and organisations dedicated to monetary and financial stability and monitoring the international financial system have been created within its walls, like the Basel Committee and the Committee on the Global Financial System (CGFS). [26]

Before examining this question in more detail, we are going to explain why banks are looking for high leverage, the great impact it has on swelling bank assets, the banks' increasing need for borrowing, and the risks inherent in such activities.

Leverage

With the neoliberal deregulation that began in the 1980s, there was a radical drop in the ratio between the equity (capital + reserves) that banks had to hold and the volume of their debts (the equity + debt = bank liabilities). For 1000 euros of capital, the number of euros that banks could borrow increased considerably, which is what is known as leverage. The banks progressively increased this leverage with the authorisation of oversight authorities. The goal was to increase profitability for shareholders, who were investing in the bank by increasing the amount of money banks borrowed. Why is the highest possible leverage an objective for the big banks? How does this process increase the bank's profitability for the shareholders?

Maximising ROE

The notion of ROE (return on equity) gives us a key for understanding this question. In a nutshell, a bank's equity is made up of the capital put up by shareholders. [27] 25 years ago, in theory, equity represented about 8% of a bank's assets. For example, a bank that had €100 billion in assets (in the form of household and corporate loans, sovereign debt bonds, corporate bonds, and other financial securities), would have had €8 billion in capital.

In these conditions, to achieve an ROE of 15%, it would need to make a net profit of €1.2 billion (i.e., 15% of 8 billion). To make such a net profit on assets worth €100 billion seems to be quite easy, as it represents only 1.2% of the total amount.

The ballooning of bank assets to increase ROE

Starting in the mid-1990s, a whole new range of financial products developed very rapidly, including different types of derivatives and structured products. The big banks wanted their share of this buoyant sector. They were convinced that if they did not launch operations, they would lose ground and perhaps be taken over by their competitors. The yield on these products is relatively low – generally less than 1%. Therefore, a bank that has shareholders who want the ROE to increase from 20 to 30% is pushed to increase its assets exponentially while at the same time loaning more and more money to maximise leverage. In the example mentioned above, the bank's assets would increase by 300% in ten years to reach €300 billion, whereas the capital would not be increased. It would still represent €8 billion, or 2.66% of the total assets. This tremendous asset growth was made possible by the bank increasing its debt load.

Between 2002 and 2011, banks increased their assets by 250%

According to the IMF [28], worldwide bank assets increased from \$40 to \$97 trillion between 2002 and 2007. Between 2007 and 2011, they continued their upward climb to \$105 trillion. [29]

If we consider the entire European banking sector, assets expanded from €25 trillion in 2001 to €43 trillion in 2008, or 3.5 times the GDP of the EU! [30]

Given the severity of the crisis, we could have expected a rapid restructuring of the banking sector with the shrinking of bank assets and the closing of the weakest banks. That did not occur – the volume of assets has not decreased since the crisis erupted in 2008. [31] Whereas the volume of their assets was €43 trillion in 2008, it was €45 trillion in 2011. While European GDP experienced a slight decrease, European bank assets continued expanding and represented 370% of European GDP in 2011! [32]

Between 2007 and 2011, Deutsche Bank's (the biggest bank in the world) assets increased by 12.4%, those of the British bank HSBC (number 2 in the

world) by 22.2%; those of the biggest French bank, BNP Paribas, by 16%; Crédit Agricole's by 22%; those of Barclays by 12%; the biggest Spanish bank, Santander's, by 37.1%; those of the principal Swedish bank, Nordéa, by 84.1%; those of Commerzbank, the second-largest German bank, by 7.3%; those of the Italian bank, Intesa, by 11.6%; and those of the second-largest Spanish bank, BBVA, by 19.1%. Of the 18 main European banks, only three experienced a decrease in assets: the Royal Bank of Scotland (-28%), ING, the main Dutch bank (-3.3%), and the largest Italian bank Unicredit (-9.3%). [33]

Consequences of increasing leveraging

The first consequence is that banks have taken increasingly high risks, [34] which has resulted in a series of bank failures. Second, the bank bailouts by public authorities have meant that the people of Europe and the US have had to mop up the losses. In many countries (Ireland, Iceland, Spain, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, Cyprus, and Greece), public debt has skyrocketed since 2008 due to bank bailouts.

Nonetheless, as indicated above, six years after the beginning of the biggest banking crisis since the 1930s, governments and oversight agencies are proposing to "rein in" leveraging to 1/33. In other words, a bank that has 1 euro in equity capital can borrow 32 euros and engage in business activities of 33 euros. This kind of "control" will inevitably lead to other banking crises.

Several phases led up to the general use of leveraging.

Basel I: encouraging the deregulation banks expect
First phase: from 1988 onward, the Basel I Accords stipulated that banks must be in a position to rely on equity amounting to 8% of their operations. This means that if they have 1 euro in equity (generally shareholders' money), they are allowed to loan 12.5 euros. This also means that in order to loan 12.5, when they only have 1 in equity, they can borrow 11.5. Compared with regulations that had been im-

plemented since the 1930s, such a measure was already a significant move towards increasing bank activities by pushing them to lend more. Now in light of the Basel II Accords (which are discussed below), 8% seems to be a high requirement.

We should, however, qualify what has been described in the previous paragraph. Actually, the amount they can loan (on the basis of one euro in equity) is not 12.5, but 25 (as is the case for BNP Paribas), or even 50 (as is the case for Deutsche Bank or Barclays), while adhering to the Basel I recommendations (and indeed to those of Basel II, currently in force). How can this be? Because they can play on the denominator of the equity to assets ratio, since the ratio does not apply to all assets. Indeed Basel I (just as Basel II and Basel III, which are discussed below) makes it possible for banks to reduce the value of their assets depending on their exposure to risk. The value of assets is calculated on the basis of the risk they are exposed to. Securities on sovereign debt from OECD members are not supposed to be exposed to any risk at all. Loans to AAA and AA- rated banks are considered to entail a 20% risk. Basel 1 set up five categories of risk depending on the debtor: 1) States or public authorities, 2) corporations outside the finance industry, 3) banks, 4) individuals and small companies (retail), and 5) others.

How a ratio of 4% can be turned into a ratio of 10%

If the Banxia bank has 4 in equity and 100 in assets, that would represent a ratio of 4%, whereas it must attain a level of 8% under Basel 1 (and Basel 2, which applies in 2013-2014). How can it attain that ratio without changing anything? By weighting its assets as a function of the risk taken. A theoretical case will help us understand this situation: Out of those 100, it holds government bonds from countries whose rating is between AAA and AA- representing an amount of 30. It can then subtract those 30 from its total assets. Why? Because the legislation in force considers that loans to countries rated between AAA and AA- does not require any capital to offset possible losses. That leaves 70 in

assets for which it must hold a sufficient amount of capital. Its capital / assets ratio (4/70) is now 5.7%, which is still inadequate.

Let's continue the process. Of the remaining 70, 30 consist of loans [35] to banks or companies rated between AAA and AA-. In this case, since the Basel 1 (and Basel 2) rules consider that these loans represent only a 20% risk, the Banxia bank can consider that that 30 in debt only counts for 6 (20% of 30). Therefore, Banxia no longer needs to come up with equity for assets equivalent to 70, but assets of 70 minus 24 – that is, 46. The equity / assets ratio therefore improves greatly, attaining 8.7% (4 in equity for 46 in assets weighted for risk).

Now let's assume that of the other 40 in assets, 2 are loans to companies or banks to which the rating agencies have assigned poor scores – that is, under B-. In this case, the risk is 150%. These 2 debt assets then count for 3 (150% of 2). The equity required to counter this risk has to be calculated in terms of 3 and not 2.

Let's suppose that of the 38 in remaining assets, 10 represent loans to SMEs. In this case, 10 counts for 10 because banks' SME debts cannot be lightened, since the Basel authorities consider that they represent a high risk. The "risk" is 100%.

The remaining 28 in assets consist of loans to individuals. The risk for loans to individuals is 75%, and therefore these 28 assets count for 21 (75% of 28).

In this theoretical case, the equity calculated in terms of risk end up representing 40 (0+6+3+10+21) for total assets of 100. The equity / assets ratio is 4/40, or 10%.

Bingo! The bank with equity that only accounts for only 4% of its total assets can declare that its actual ratio is 10%, and it will be congratulated by the oversight authorities.

Do you think this is all just theoretical? That what has just been described does not really correspond to what the banks and oversight authorities actually do? Think again. In the next part, you will find a

very real example, and there are many such examples. In the meantime, below is a table that summarizes the applicable rates for weighting risk, both in Basel 1 and Basel 2.

Table of risk weightings [36]

As indicated above, the Basel Committee places a lot of faith in the rating agencies. Yet it is a well-established fact that these agencies have been wrong time and again. They assigned ratings of AAA to AA- to companies like Enron, Lehman Brothers, AIG, RBS, and Northern Rock right up to the day they went under. Similarly, the rating agencies gave AAA ratings to toxic structured products like CDOs until 2007-2008, before they collapsed.

However, the Basel authorities have also adopted discriminatory measures regarding loans to SMEs (which of course are not rated by rating agencies, and therefore represent a 100% risk according to the established standards) and to households (a 75% risk according to Basel), which has caused banks to reduce direct credit to these participants in the real economy. A large share of loans to households has been securitized – that is, removed from banks' balance sheets and sold to other financial institutions. The reason for banks' restricting credit to SMEs and households since 2008 is that the loans they grant to them are too heavy in terms of asset weighting. Private banks have prevailed on the Basel authorities to encourage the development of securitized financial products rather than direct loans to people in the productive economy.

9th part :Banks - Fudged health report

Neoliberal euphoria and Basel II

The Basel II accords were drafted at a time of neoliberal euphoria when capitalist bankers had obtained the cancellation of the few prudential rules that still remained from the 1930 Great Depression. Basel II coincided with Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, the US central bank, [37] speechifying about the ability of financial markets to regulate themselves and recommending the sup-

pression of any constraint that still shackled the said bankers' 'creativity'.

The Basel II accords were implemented in 2004-2005, just before the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2007, and are still valid in 2013-2014. The Basel III accords that were drafted in 2010 as the crisis was deepening, and revised in 2011, [38] are still only at the stage of interpretation and negotiation. They are not to be fully implemented until 2018-2019. This is why it is really worth beginning by taking the time to understand the Basel II accords, whereas most commentators focus on the Basel III measures as though they were already effective. Supervising authorities, governments in cahoots with major private banks, and most of the media attempt to convince citizens that constraints have been imposed on the finance industry.

This is a lie. As we shall see even the Basel III measures will not really change the slack regulations that allow banks to act as they please. Indeed banks will still be able to cook their books and fiddle their health reports thanks to the system whereby their assets are weighted relative to the degree of risk. They will also be allowed to legally trade off the balance sheet, and thus be prompted to take more risks. These two facts alone are enough to undermine the array of small measures that have been widely and loudly advertised. To show how harsh the Basel III standards are, banks grumble and try to get the authorities to soften the measures or delay their implementation. This is just taking the public for a ride. Leaders and supervisory authorities show how complicit they are with large private banks.

Before we turn to Basel III, let us examine the Basel II accords that are currently effective.

Basel II: licence to kill

Basel II increased the deregulation that had been condoned by Basel I. Two major points are to be highlighted in Basel II: 1. capital requirements were lowered; 2. banks were allowed to devise their own method for calculating their assets to achieve the required equity/assets ratio.

Basel II and lower capital requirement

Capital requirements were lowered at the banks' request: they only amount to 2% of weighted assets, now! Yes, that's right, only 2% of assets, weighted according to the level of risk, is required. Beyond the 2% of hard capital (i.e. capital brought by shareholders or retained surpluses) in order to reach the 8% target, Basel II allows banks to include as equity a number of elements, such as subordinated debt securities, which are only remotely related to capital. It is up to national authorities to define what banks can take into account beyond the 2% of hard capital in order to reach 8%. In other words: the 8% requirement stipulated by Basel I has been retained, but the method of calculation has been radically changed:

- on the numerator side (equity), the categories of debt that banks can include have been extended way beyond hard capital;
- on the denominator side they have been allowed to define the way they weight assets according to risks.

In part 8 we saw how Banxia could fiddle its assets. Now Basel II also makes it possible to fiddle with the equity side and what the bank can add to reach an 8% ratio.

In the lingo of the Basel accords we speak of Tier 1 and Tier 2. [39] Basel II considers that Tier 1 (i.e. 4% of risk-weighted assets) consists of two parts: 2% of hard capital and 2% in which the banks can take various elements that are not part of the company's equity strict sensu into account. French or Belgian banks (with the blessing of their national regulators) have included for instance hybrid securities (half-capital, half-bond). Tier 2 embraces even more remote elements. Japanese banks in the 1990s for instance had been allowed by their national authorities to include their latent stockmarket capital gains in Tier 2. A few years later when the Japanese housing bubble broke out, they found themselves below the regulation ratios overnight. Yet this did not lead the Basel committee to draft a stricter definition of what could be included in Tier 2 or even in Tier 1. Not before 2010 did it announce

more demanding standards to be implemented in 2018 or 2019, if ever!

To get an idea of what a bank is allowed to use to reach the 8% target, here is an extract from Dexia 2008 annual report:

'BIS eligible capital consists of two parts:

Tier 1 capital which comprises share capital, share premium, retained earnings including current year profit, hybrid capital, foreign currency translation and minority interests, less intangible assets, accrued dividends, net long positions in own shares and goodwill;

Tier 2 capital which includes eligible part of subordinated long-term debt, less subordinated debt from and equities in financial institutions.

Tier 1 capital is required to be at least 4% and Total eligible capital at least 8% of RWAs.' [40]

We find similar statements in Dexia 2012 annual report. [41]

Basel II: Banks decide on the asset value to be considered

Basel II is based on total trust in bankers: each bank can decide on its own model to assess risk. This is what practically all major banks do.

As set out in the Basel II 2006 revision, 'the Committee permits banks a choice between two broad methodologies for calculating their capital requirements for credit risk. One alternative, the Standardised Approach, will be to measure credit risk in a standardised manner, supported by external credit assessments. The other alternative, the Internal Ratings-based Approach, which is subject to the explicit approval of the bank's supervisor, would allow banks to use their internal rating systems for credit risk.' [42] Obtaining such approval is fairly easy for large banks.

The standardised approach calls upon standards devised by the Basel committee that supports the influence of rating agencies. In the theoretical example introduced in part 8, we used the standardised approach. Bank claims on States or public sector entities that are rated between AAA et AA- are weighted as 0% risk (par. 53). As a consequence,

the corresponding assets should not be counted at all. This in turn means that banks do not require equity to write off possible losses on these claims. Claims on banks or corporates [43] that are rated between AAA et AA- are weighted as 20% risk, so banks can deduce 80% of assets corresponding to such claims. Claims on banks and corporates rated between A+ and A- are weighted at 50%, claims on banks and corporates rated between BB+ and B- at 100%. If their rating is below B-claims are weighted at 150%. Claims on individual persons are weighted at 75%, and on small and medium size businesses at 100% since these are not rated by rating agencies.

Dexia: a telling illustration of a soft option adopted by the Basel Committee and national supervisory authorities

The case of Dexia is a telling illustration of how dangerous the system of risk-weighted assets is, whether using the standardised approach or the internal rating approach.

In June 2011 Dexia passed the stress test imposed by the European supervisory authority on 90 major European banks with flying colours. [44] Four months later it had to be bailed out for the second time in three years. The report Dexia presented to pass this test is revealing.

While the total amount of (non weighted) assets reached 567 billion euros, risk-weighted assets only amounted to 141 billion euros. In the theoretical example of part 8, risk weighting had made it possible for a fictitious bank, Banxia, to reduce its assets from 100 to 40. Dexia did much better than this in June 2011 when its assets shrank from 100 to 25. Hats off to the Dexia conjurers! 'Reality' surpasses fiction!

In its report to the European authority Dexia claimed that the equity / risk-weighted assets ratio reached 12.01%. Enough to dazzle regulators! If non weighted assets had been taken into account, the ratio would have been only 3%, which would have been closer to reality. If the supervisory authorities did not allow banks, including Dexia, to

add financial products that are not capital to their hard capital, their ratio would have been even more disturbing. We ought to emphasize that if the Basel III regulations (to be fully implemented in 2018-2019) had been in force regarding the equity / NON weighted assets ratio and the equity / weighted assets ratio, Dexia would still have passed the test. Which shows that Basel III does not provide any solution.

Banks: the art of deception

The case of Dexia is by no means isolated. In 2011, according to the Liikanen report, equities amounted to between 2 and 6% of non weighted assets of major banks. In the case of the Deutsche Bank, equities amounted to hardly more than 2% (which involves a degree of leverage of 50). For ING and Nordea (Sweden), equities came to just under 4%. For BNP Paribas, Crédit Agricole, BPCE, Société Générale or Barclays, they represented about 4% (degree of leverage of 25). For the Spanish banks Santander and BBVA, Italian banks Intesa Sanpaolo and Unicredit, or the Belgian KBC, they reach about 6% (with a degree of leverage of about 16). [45]

Yet all these banks passed the stress test in June 2011 presenting an equity/weighted assets ratio of over 10%.

On the basis of their 2012 annual report, published in 2013, we calculated the equity /weighted assets ratio and that for equity /non weighted assets for two major European banks with a reputation for stability: BNP Paribas and the Deutsche Bank. As the following illustration shows, the results are liable to worry even the most trusting.

If the *Financial Times* is to be believed – and it is certainly not in its interests to create panic in the markets— the Deutsche Bank's situation is even more worrying and scandalous than the above diagram suggests. The leverage ratio of Europe's biggest bank that appears to be 2.7% (or 1/37) is really only 1.6% (1/62)! [46] This implies that if the Deutsche Bank were to register a «Â minor » loss of 10 billion € out of its 2000 billion € of assets, it

would be on the verge of bankruptcy; if the loss was 32.2 billion, all its capital would be swallowed up! In the same article, the *Financial Times* claims that the UBS's ratio (the major Swiss bank) would come to 2.5%, that of the Société Générale (France) 2.8%, and that of Barclays (the United Kingdom) 2.5%. [47]

Basel III will not introduce true financial discipline

The general principles of Basel III were adopted in 2010 and are to become effective worldwide as of 2018 or 2019, they include only one significant change: instead of the 2% hard capital demanded by Basel II, banks will have to put up 4.5% of hard capital [48]. To this will be added a further 3.5% of assets that will be loosely calculated to reach the 8% previously required by Basel I and 2.

However the fundamental fact to remember is that assets will continue to be calculated according to the risk they present. This completely invalidates all claims about Basel III providing solutions to the banking crisis. Clearly, the requirement of 4.5% hard capital in proportion to risk-weighted assets is a joke, opening up endless possibilities for cooking the books.

A study carried out by the Basel Committee in 2012-2013 concluded that the same type of assets may be risk-weighted within a range of 1 to 8 depending on the bank. Bank X may estimate that it needs only 1/ 8 the capital that Bank Y considers necessary to cushion the risk on interest rates in a given portfolio of derivatives. Out of 15 major banks in 9 different countries, the average variable of difference is from 1 to 3, all assets included [49]. A Barclays bank study shows that risk-weighting is used by banks to reduce required equity to a minimum. Barclays reports that 20 years ago banks considered that weighted assets represented on average 53 % of their total assets, whereas in 2012, they represented only 32% [50]. The European Banking Authority (EBA), has published a study showing that half of the risk-weightings calculated by banks are not based on any objective factors. The study was carried out using the accounts pre-

sented by 89 banks from 16 EU states. It also shows differences of 70% in the evaluation of the same type of risk from one bank to another [51].

Nevertheless, the Basel Committee ignores the evidence and maintains the present system of risk-weighting. Even though certain other official bodies, such as the OECD, have begun to produce documents in favour of abandoning the risk-weighting of assets. In a recently published OECD report, the authors propose counting assets without weighting them for risk, in order to obtain a reliable equity/assets ratio [52].

Furthermore, several regulators recognize this. Andrew Haldane, director of the Department of Financial Stability at the Bank of England, affirms that the increase in the ratio of equity to the banks' balance-sheets which is to be generalised as of 2018-2019 is totally inadequate and unlikely to diminish the risks and effects of bankruptcy. Thomas Hoenig, of the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, an institution created during the Roosevelt presidency to regulate the banking system, also considers that the level of equity to be required from 2018-2019 needs to be multiplied by at least three [53].

Like the author of the OECD report cited above, Andrew Haldane and Thomas Hoenig are in favour of abandoning risk-weighting in the calculation of assets and wish to see an absolute ratio (i.e. with no weighting) between equity and assets. Dan Tarullo, one of the governors of the Federal Reserve, has declared that an equity/non risk-weighted assets ratio fixed at 3% (as decided by the Basel Committee) is insufficient. The US authorities intend to impose a ratio of 5% on their biggest banks, which goes to show that the Basel Committee's decision, within the framework of Basel III, to fix a ratio of 3% [54] really is minimalist. Let us also bear in mind that the Vickers Commission, charged by the British Government in 2011 with making recommendations to answer the banking crisis, suggested a ratio of 4%. The British prime minister found this too restrictive. Last but not least, the Financial Times

blazoned an editorial on the subject, proposing a 6% ratio [55].

Conclusions

From the beginning of the 1980s the private banking sector has unshackled itself from the restrictions imposed and maintained following the 1930 banking crisis. The regulatory authorities and the governments, henchmen to neoliberalism, have slackened the reins and the banks have made the most of it, taking their revenge on the social achievements won by popular struggles as they went. The current crisis, which began in 2007-2008, has not pressed the authorities and regulators into establishing real control over private capital. The measures taken to put a resemblance of order back into the financial sector are totally insufficient to avoid new crises and incapable of restraining unbridled profit-seeking.

There must be complete and radical rupture with these methods, which put the burden of saving the banks onto the shoulders of their victims. It is time to finish with the reasoning whereby this system offers impunity and golden parachutes to those who create chaos. The governments are at the beck and call of the big banks and put the administrations at their service; there is an ongoing relationship of complicity. The number of ministers of finance or prime ministers who come directly from the banking sector and return to it afterwards has continually increased since 2008.

The newly announced measures of Bank control are no more than cosmetic, they are purely and simply a cover-up. Strict and unavoidable rules and regulations must be imposed that reach well beyond those of Basel III, in particular. But frankly this crisis should motivate measures that touch the very structure of the financial and capitalist systems.

Banking is too serious a matter to be left in the hands of private bankers, it must be socialised (this implies expropriation) and put under the control of the population (bank employees, customers, associations and public services), it must be subjected to

public service rules [56] and its returns be used for the common good.

Public debt taken on to bail out the banks is definitely illegitimate and must be repudiated. A citizens' audit must determine which other debts are

illegitimate or illegal and allow an anti-capitalist alternative to take shape and mobilise

These two measures must be included in a larger programme [57].

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