

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV465 October 2013

BELGIUM

Class trades unionism seeks political expression

ARAB UPRISINGS:

Syria between Revolution and Counter-Revolutions

DOSSIER

Belgium

Argentina

Brazil

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Syria

Spanish state

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Anti-fascism

USA:

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ARGENTINA

A new stage for the left

CLAUDIO KATZ ·

How do you evaluate the outcome of the recent elections?

CK: It was an election of no surprises because the recent primaries anticipated the decline of "officialismo" and the impossibility of a re-election of Cristina Kirschner. The president has run out of room to define the candidacy of the next president as Lula and Dilma did in Brazil. However with over 32% of the national vote they remain the largest minority and maintain a quorum in both houses. The most important aspect is the emergence of a strong axis of rightist succession, the Frente Renovador (FR), with 43% of the vote in the strategic province of Buenos Aires (37% of registered voters), headed by a mayor of Buenos Aires, Sergio Massa, and composed of a large team of ex Kirchneristas and sectors of the Partido Justicialista (PJ) and traditional trades unionism.

EL: In the new scenario emerging from the primaries the government has in recent months assumed much of the rightist agenda, with confrontational slogans of "choice" and "deepening the model". It has been driven by its rightist ally Daniel Scioli, adopting a tough discourse on the sensitive issue of law and order, despite silence on the state apparatus collusion with drug traffickers. Economically it also began a turn towards re-indebtedness, with payments to the CIADI and agreements with the World Bank and IMF. We'll see if this is the prelude to the adjustment the dominant class demands from the next president. These two alternatives will depend on a strategic choice. Kirchnerismo can remodel the interior of Peronism, accepting a conservative turn, or can gamble on its own construction imagining a future return of Cristina. Until now there are signals in both directions.

How do you see the landscape in relation to 2015?

CK: It is clear that in the camp of Justicialismo the contest has already begun for 2015 between Massa (FR), an upstart mayor, who has recruited key leaders in industry, banking and agriculture and Scioli, who exhibits credentials as vice president and governor. This is presented as a guarantor of an orderly transition, much appreciated by the establishment, who have not forgotten the stormy administrations of Alfonsín, Menem and De la Rúa.

EL: You also have to see how the right of Macri (Union-PRO) will intervene in all this, after the consolidation achieved in the Federal Capital (39% and almost 8% nationally), to make alliances which can tilt the balance in favor of one or another variant of the PJ. We can't rule out a priori the potential role of the candidates of pan-radicalismo, a sort of centre-right republicanism, like Binner (a socialist who scored 42% in the province of Santa Fe) and Cobos (a radical who won 48% in the Province of Mendoza)). If Peronism is finally divided a runoff is likely. Sunday's election ratified this convulsive scenario, with the novel ingredient of a breakthrough for the anti-capitalist left.

I am especially interested in this point: what was the extent of that breakthrough and to what is it due?

EL: With the figures we know so far, the polls having closed about ten hours ago, the combined left has around 1,400,000 votes. This was largely accounted for by the Frente de Izquierda y los Trabajadores (FIT) who won 1,250,000 votes. It should be remembered that previously various forces did not contest the primaries. This big jump was first anticipated by the FIT winning nearly a million votes in the primaries and immediately af-

terwards by certain provincial elections, like Salta-Capital where they got 20%. In the meantime there were the UBA university elections, where the FIT won in the majority of student centers. The sum of votes exceeds that achieved in important elections in the past by the Frente del Pueblo (FREPU) and Izquierda Unida (IU) –alliances of the MAS and the CP- or Autodeterminación y Libertad (Luis Zamora). The result is that the FIT won three national deputies, and a deputy and representatives in seven provincial legislatures, but it is too early to have a definitive framework. Additionally, in the southern province of Tierra del Fuego, an enclave of the electronics and household electrics industry, a metalworker leader with an activist past in the class-based left presented himself as a candidate of the workers and won 22% of the votes and election to the national council.

CK: This has been the highest vote for the left since the pre-Peronism period. The importance of the result and the subsequent creation of a new stage with the left is obvious. The novelty lies in the electoral arena and not in the existence of the militant left; it has maintained a significant presence at the student union level during the time of political predominance of Kirchnerismo.

I interpret this important left vote as a mandate to fight. It received this flow of support against popular intuition of an upcoming adjustment and expectation of a defense of the conquests in the street. An important sector of the population does not want the Kirchnerista experience to end in a swing to the right. There is a change in the levels of consciousness that can particularly be seen in the interior. For decades the only possibility for the left was to elect a deputy from the capital or Buenos Aires province (regions of greater politicization), now this has been extended to the interior (usually more conservative), where the links between the government and provincial oligarchies have been very close. There Kirchnerismo is not the expression of the more liberal sectors (such as the intellectuals of Carta Abierta or the official TV program 6, 7, 8),

but the conservative governors and orthodox justicialismo.

EL: We must consider another determinant of the advance of the left, which is the erosion of the anti-Kirschner centre left which was diluted in pan-radicalismo, or the weakness of the more genuine progressivism that sought to occupy the space abandoned by the anti-Kirschner centre left, not presenting more radical objectives. Those who wanted to punish the government from a progressive perspective had only the option of the anti-capitalist left.

But the left has been present many times at elections and has never managed these results ...

CK: Certainly. This time the FIT campaign focused on specific demands (wage tax elimination, denunciation of Chevron, a wage equal to the family shopping basket, 82% sliding rate for retirees and so on), which contrasted with the vague message of the traditional parties, who appealed to happiness, smiles and the family, as if selling toothpaste. The left changed its old interventions in the elections. They weren't axised around the workers' government or questioning of the bosses' candidates. They understood that in a television studio you cannot talk like you are at a rally and that the social democratic involution does not transit through the use of the tie. They even appealed to the useful vote, highlighting the need to have deputies in Congress with the rest of the benches. This maturing would have been disparaged in another era as an expression of "democratizing parliamentarism".

EL: You have to remember also that the construction of electoral figures is a long process with little renovation and large oscillations. This persistence has rewarded Altamira (FIT) and Zamora (AyL), whose public profile was further enhanced by big events like the days of 2001 or the murder of the young activist Mariano Ferreyra. The mainstream media also played a key role, not attacking the left since its first goal was to weaken its immediate opponent, Kirchnerismo. They worked in favor of the

right-wing but without attacking options on the left. In a context of low social mobilization they suspended circumstantially the typical derogatory or frightening message, which will resume in full when pickets and demonstrations resurface.

Anyway, in my personal opinion, I think there is a lacuna in the discourse of the left and it is an absence of an anti-systemic critique. Our participation in the institutional framework is not just a problem of raising demands expressed by workers and popular sectors, but also to use those instances to educate, to explain that the main obstacle to eradicating the evils that capitalism produces is the capitalist system.

Does this advance of the left break the traditional political dominance of Peronism?

CK: It's almost 6% nationally, with very good results in working class and popular areas (e.g. in the southern oil region of the country the left received 15% of votes). I think for the moment this dominance is eroding. The left is reemerging in a context of Peronist crisis, repeating a constant in the history of Argentina. It has reopened an opportunity that can be consolidated or diluted. The left has disappointed several times in the past and could not hold as an alternative. The classism of the 1970s was offset by the return of Peron, repeated at the end of the dictatorship and was overshadowed by the avalanche of Alfonsín once again in the late '80s, and IU and FREPU diluted into divisions which erupted with force after 2001 and could not collectively build.

EL: I would add to this that there is now emerging a new generation looking for a channel of political rupture, not just a trade union break with Peronism. The first significant electoral intervention of the independent left has been very promising, and has led to an interesting and useful debate in sectors which are beginning to overcome the paralyzing autonomist tradition of anti-electoralism.

But you have published more than one document where you have been very critical of the FIT. Do you maintain that position?

CK: Yes, especially at three levels. The mischaracterization of Kirchnerismo as a kind of continuity of Menemismo (and therefore neutrality in the conflicts where it confronted the right); the reduction of the left to an orthodox Trotskyist front and the disparaging of the radical processes in Latin America. But these differences do not prevent us from recognizing the new political reality that is emerging around the left party. This change forces us to lay down old hatreds and prejudices and requires us to seek new lines of confluence. We think that the FIT should open beyond the organizations that currently make it up and the rest of the left should converge with that opening, through a process of mutual understanding and learning.

EL: There is already much evidence that in a growing process of politicization, as is happening in our country in recent years, we must clearly assume an explicit alliance with the organic left, even with the differences that undoubtedly exist. In our case with the flags of Latin Americanism, non-sectarian and proposing from this alignment a terrain of common action with consistent progressivism.

CK: I think it is essential to work from now on preparing a common candidacy for 2015. Many of the left voters are beginning to think: how would a government of this type be? What if you win the presidency? The answer to that expectation is a strategic link between electoral access to government and the battle for power, from a program that we develop collectively.

Certainly generalizations are insufficient. We must define our way to solve the country's problems, with specific measures in the delicate problems of debt, taxes, price controls, nationalization, oil, and the management of exchange controls.

EL: The EDI is preparing a workshop-debate on the economic situation that we hope to develop with all the left, to clarify the diagnosis and alternatives involved.

Finally: How could this election result affect relations with Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador?

CK – As it has been a midterm election that does not modify the presidency, immediately it should not result in significant changes in foreign policy. But we should note the strongly anti-Chavez tone that the media and the rightwing opposition deployed during the election campaign to secure a future agenda realignment with the United States.

Leaders of the right and centre-right like Macri, Carrio and Binner openly support Capriles and Scioli leans toward the same direction. Criticism of Venezuela is the form of pressure that the establishment has chosen to impose a neoliberal economic turn.

BRAZIL

The winds of June still blowing in Brazil

JOÃO MACHADO ·

In these final months of the year, we are going through a process of intense struggle and confrontation that shows the new balance of forces resulting from June's mass protests.

This takes the form of important social struggles, confrontations and strikes in various sectors, alongside mass street demonstrations and the occupation of local assembly buildings.

Right now two big struggles are key: the strike by education workers in Rio de Janeiro and the oil workers' strike, which combines a fight for wages with opposition to the privatization of the giant Libra oilfield, the first big auction of Brazil's deep-water reserves. The situation took a dramatic turn when President Dilma Rousseff called on the Army and the National Public Security Force [1] to guarantee the sell-off, reviving oil workers' memories of 1995, when then president Fernando Henrique Cardoso called out the Army to break a historic strike.

These developments reveal a deepening polarization of society. Since June there have been a variety of struggles on almost a daily basis. There were the bank workers' and postal workers' strikes, the occupations of municipal assemblies, mass environmental struggles like that in defence of Cocó Park in Fortaleza; now there are student strikes and the occupation at the University of Sao Paulo for democratic demands, as well as demonstrations and blockades over housing, transport and health.

Rio de Janeiro in particular has seen continuous confrontations that have undermined both the municipal and state governments and show no sign of letting up. The city's biggest demonstrations since June have been in support of the teachers' strike; there's been a growing revolt in the communities

against the policy of extermination carried out by the State and the military police, symbolized by the murder of bricklayer Amarildo, but which sees new cases every week – like the revolt in Manginhos favela last week.

Towards a suspension of liberties

The State and local governments have reacted by stepping up repression and seeking to criminalize these struggles and the activists involved. Faced with spreading popular struggles, the authorities adopt a tougher response, but the mobilizations, struggles and protests do not recede. This is a delicate moment, because the policy of criminalizing social struggles (which they have been preparing for over a decade), takes on a new dimension as widespread struggles continue and we draw closer to 2014 with the World Cup and elections.

The massive investments in law and order and weapons (part of the spending on the World Cup), the General World Cup Law introduced in 2011, which plans to make protests during the Cup into crimes of terrorism, the continuing extermination of young people and black people in poor and marginalized communities on the big cities, were already expressions of this underlying suspension of liberties that is emerging in the country.

Now we are in the middle of a repressive and criminalizing counter-attack, in response to the June protests. Some of the signs of this include the increasingly "normal" use of police helicopters to harass and drop tear gas and stun grenades, rubber bullets, arbitrary arrests and raids by riot police on poor neighbourhoods.

Legally speaking, the state governments of the ruling blocks, whether run by the PT and its allies or by the right-wing PSDB and the like, are preparing

to respond through the courts, with the passing of legislation like that in Rio de Janeiro that outlaws wearing masks on protests, or the attempts both in Rio and Sao Paulo to bring protesters under the National Security Law or to charge them with forming gangs.

To dispel any illusions that this policy is only being pursued by certain allies of the PT-led federal government, like Governor Sergio Cabral and Mayor Eduardo Paes in Rio [2], directly PT regional governments have also been persecuting and criminalizing the movement and its activists, as in Rio Grande do Sul and Brasília. While to finish off this sinister picture, there in the background is the Dilma government, invoking the Army to guarantee the privatization of Brazil's deepwater reserves.

The scale of repression has moved up a level, after years of criminalizing the social movements, exterminating young black people, and assassinating indigenous and peasant leaders and those who support them.

Repression in the service of mega-events

This policy of widespread criminalization corresponds to the aim of capital and the administrations that serve it, to open the way for big business ventures and deals around mega-events like the World Cup and mega-projects linked to the federal government's Accelerated Growth Programme (PAC) and to property speculation in the big cities. Part of this project involves breaking the resistance of all sectors of the working class and youth.

For capital, the evictions must go ahead in the favelas; access to the cities must be controlled, confining the poorest sectors to veritable ghettos. In the case of the World Cup, it's similar to what was done in South Africa in 2010; the massive spending on the World Cup must continue in order to service FIFA's private business interests. And so, realizing that there will be another wave of protests in 2014 as the World Cup approaches, the State is doing all it can to hold back by force the human tide coming from the streets.

The strength of the tide coming from the streets

In the streets, alongside the struggles and against the repression!

Given this situation, and as part of the broad growth of social struggles in Brazil, there is an urgent need for a political, democratic campaign for the demilitarization of the police! We need to organize a campaign to put an end to what has been the State's main instrument of repression in recent decades and which is now strengthening its role with these policies of criminalization and extermination in defence of the business system. The true law and order policy of the Brazilian State is to use a brutal state apparatus to protect private business interests. We need to organize committees up and down the country, take this demand into all the protests, forums and other activities of the movement, and hold debates in the universities, neighbourhoods and trade unions. And these actions need to be built in the broadest, most united way possible, to raise the demand for demilitarization across society.

Alongside this campaign, we need broad condemnation of the repression and criminalization of the struggles, the activists and the poor; we fight against all attempts to outlaw or prohibit aspects of the movement, and for the repeal of all repressive laws and other means of suspending or limiting freedoms, whether these are directed at the strike movements and their leaders, at community struggles or at youth activists, be they party members, autonomists or "black block".

No less important at the moment is a broad and active campaign of solidarity with all the strikes, street demonstrations, occupations and social struggles, over transport, housing, education, and health. Most important of all, we need a campaign in support of the oil workers' strike, against the privatization of the deepwater reserves and deployment of the Army.

We are side by side with the oil workers, the Rio teachers, the popular movements fighting for housing and against evictions, the students who occupy

university offices and go on strike, and the indigenous people who struggle for their lands against agribusiness.

Down with repression, demilitarize the police now!

Down with repression, get the Army off the streets!

No privatization of the Libra deepwater oil field!

All support to the oil workers' and Rio de Janeiro teachers' strike!

National Executive of Insurgência [3]

21st October 2013

ITALY

18th and 19th October: two special days in the fightback in Italy

ANDREA MARTINI ·

Autumn 2013 has been yet another autumn of crisis, of factory closures, of cuts and privatisation, of widespread poverty. But the first time in many years this autumn has not seen any action taken by the trade union confederation – not even one of those ritual CGIL marches of a few hours or so that we have become so used to in the years of opposition to the Berlusconi government.

Here we are not even talking about a 'friendly government' because the Letta-Alfano – of broad agreement ("larghe intese") both in its style and in the substance of its social and economic policies makes no attempt at all to distinguish itself from the preceding one year government (of Monti – Tr note).

That is why the general strike initiative taken up for last Friday (18th October) by the main rank and file trade union organisations (the USB, CUB and COBAS) has transformed the character traditionally associated with the autumn strikes organised by the confederation.

Even the 'official' data on the numbers participating in the strike seem to confirm a significant degree of support in a lot of the public sector, in many branches of the health service and particularly in public transport with a good number of cities completely closed down by the protest.

There was a large demonstration with lots of workers from the public and the private sectors as well as migrant worker with large numbers organised by the USB but also with a better than expected turnout from COBAS members.

The day was a long one, especially in Rome, because the traditional morning demonstration was prolonged into the afternoon with a strong platform of speakers in San Giovanni square as well as many 'speakers' corners' among which we think the ones on European politics and trade unions today were particularly good. At the end of the day there was an evening concert with the support of many artists like the Banda Bassotti, the 99 Posse, Ascanio Celestini, Assalti Frontale and so on. Hundreds of activists stayed overnight in the square in tents waiting for the second day of struggle.

On Saturday the 19th there was the steady arrival in the square of thousands of demonstrators organised by the movements defending housing rights and in defence of the environment such as No Tav but also No Muos, committees against the incinerators and around the waste disposal issue.

The Saturday demonstration was an extraordinary success, it was even bigger than the day before. Tens of thousands of demonstrators – the most realistic estimates put the numbers between 50 and 100,000 – marched for hours in a climate of tension and a state of siege created by the authorities responsible for public security. This atmosphere was stoked up even more by all the media which were looking for a repeat of the incidents that took place on the 15th October two years before.

Despite all that and a disgraceful provocation set up by the Casapound fascists amid the complete indifference of hundreds of police and carabinieri, the demonstration ended without any major incidents or disorder which demonstrated the political coherence and real determination of the demonstrators and organisers.

The only relevant disruption actually took place in front of the entry to the ministry of the economy, when a squad from the tax police abruptly attacked the demonstration because someone have thrown some eggs and bottles against an institution which is one of the main bodies responsible for the social massacre that is destroying the future of millions of citizens. On these matters and against the arrests made we are also publishing a communique from the comrades of the Marches region.

After a long route the demonstration reached the square in front of the Infrastructure Ministry which is responsible for both housing policy and the large scale public works that are devastating the environment. Here again the demonstration turned itself into an encampment in anticipation of the promised meeting of a movement delegation with the minister, Lupi, to demand a resolution of all these social and environmental problems. At the time of writing the camp is still going on.

Over and beyond the events of the two days – whose significance we had already foreshadowed in the concluding document of our founding assembly of the 20/22 September – what took place represents something new – a first significant breach in the social calm in a country like Italy where, despite the brutal bosses' and government offensive, there has been a worryingly passive response. Tens of thousands of workers, young people and migrants have gone out and demonstrated without the support of the trade union or political apparatuses, even with the boycott of the railway system which is supposed to be at the service of all as a state body. It took place in a situation of blatant indifference from the world of institutional politics and was opposed by a hostile mass media. Along with the fact that it happened in an atmosphere of a state of siege and of a criminalisation of the movement, in an apparently deserted city, this event is of a political importance that is unprecedented in recent years. Perhaps it is true that on the 15th October in 2011 there were more people on the demonstration but then there was at least the small apparatuses of

the FIOM and of ARCI that helped build the numbers.

Furthermore the deliberate choice made by the organisers of both Friday and Saturday to bring about a sort of relay or link between the two initiatives points to a good way forward, that of a unitary convergence between all the social movements who are fighting on different fronts against austerity and the pro-boss policies. Thanks to the strike on the 18th there is a particular role for organised working people within this unitary front. In fact the decision made by Camusso, Bonanni and Angeletti the day after the demonstrations to call regional protest strikes against the stability law evidently appears to be a result of the confederal apparatuses' concern to try and avoid other sectors of workers joining in with the struggles of the more radical sectors involved this weekend. These other sectors, not involved in the demonstrations, are being hard hit by the crisis and are being deprived by the total passivity of the CGIL, CISL and UIL of any opportunity to take action

We also need to comment on the national demonstration which took place a week before these two 'red' days of the 18th and 19th of October. We are referring here to the 'La Via Maestra' (the best way forward) demonstration that came of an appeal whose first signatories were, among others, Maurizio Landini and Stefano Rodotà.

We have already written about the explicit and implicit ambiguity of this initiative. It has to be said that the demonstration of the 19th has completely overshadowed the impact of the demonstration of the 12th. Not just because the second demonstration was double the size of the first but also there was a different social and political basis to it. On the 12th we saw the discontented march, those people of the left who are the orphans of anti-berlusconism, defeated as a result of the severe weakening of the workers and leftwing movements, a people who still believe that the film of history can be reversed, that there can be a return to a climate of social compromise and political co-management that just is not possible in this historical period.

On both the 18th and 19th we saw people demonstrate who were full of anger and who wanted a different future but who had no illusions about the non-existent possibility of linking up with the centre left and who have a growing understanding of the necessity of direct action and mass self-organisation.

The difference between the 12th and the 18th/19th cannot be reduced to a simple counterposition between moderates and radicals even if the complicity of some of the promoters of the 12th in the criminalisation of the promoters of the 19th October demonstration does not help a possible dialogue between the two mobilisations.

This obviously does not mean that the dozens of thousands who demonstrated on the 12th are necessarily condemned to an impotent moderation. Indeed we need to work hard so that what has come out of the 18th and 19th mobilisations can stimulate some rapid re-thinking and provide a framework for breaking with the illusions peddled by the FIOM or SEL leaderships and for coming to an understanding of who are our true allies and

true enemies are as well as who are our false friends.

Neither does this mean that the political reality of our country has been transformed nor that the 'movement of movements' that demonstrated on the 19th is in itself sufficient to bring about this transformation.

The absence of political protagonists that are capable of positively working with movements of this type can feed depoliticisation and a drift to extremism or movementism. The lack of clarity in the relationship with the labour movement, a justified scepticism towards trade unions that to some degree risks being extended to those sectors of class struggle trade unions, risks a self-isolation and a re-affirmation of a closed counter-position between those who have some rights and certain minimum conditions in the world of work and those who have not.

But all these problems are best dealt with in the heat of a concrete mass mobilisation than an academic discussion around a table.

SYRIA

From Aleppo: ?No one is legitimate but the people - Without the people there is no legitimacy

"Demorcratic secular resistance drowned in the mess of fundamentalist groups"

"OK, there is a bad dictator who is (allegedly) using poisonous gas against the population of his own state – but who is opposing his regime? It seems that whatever remained of the democratic-secular resistance is now more or less drowned in the mess of fundamentalist Islamist groups supported by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, with a strong presence of al-Qaida in the shadows."

Firstly, I think the use of allegedly, even in brackets, is misdirecting, not to say anything else, because we can say now with certainty that most of the research has proven that it is the Syrian regime that attacked with chemical weapons and toxic gas the region of Eastern Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, on August 21, 2013 killing more than a thousand people including a large number of women and children. Medecins Sans Frontieres issued a statement saying that hospitals it supports in Syria treated about 3,600 patients with "neuro-toxic symptoms", of whom 355 have died. It said the patients had arrived in three hospitals in the Damascus governorate on 21 August – when opposition activists say chemical attacks were launched against rebels. This statement provided more evidence of chemical weapons use.

This last massacre, that comes after many other massacres committed by the Assad regime, and the American-Russian agreement of September 14 to remove the chemical weapons of the Syrian regime in a process that should end in mid-2014, did not stop the continuous war launched by the regime for more than two years and a half against the Syrian revolutionary masses. Indeed while US Secretary of State John Kerry was saying that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad could take "credit" for quickly

starting the process of destroying his government's chemical weapons arsenal and thanked Russia for its help, civilians trapped in the besieged West Ghouta town of Moadamiyyat Ash Sham – the site of one of the August 21 chemical weapons attacks – did not know how they will survive the winter. Moadamiyyat Ash Sham has been under almost total siege since November 25, 2012. Town's food supplies had run out three months ago, and the regime has prevented aid agencies from bringing in emergency food and medical supplies, stopping aid trucks at the checkpoints that surround the town. Just as the Palestinians from Yarmouk in Damascus have demonstrated on numerous occasions to break the siege imposed by Syrian regime forces on the area (see video <http://youtu.be/rIq7fMCRiM8>). The security forces did not hesitate to repress violently these demonstrations, killing and wounding some protesters.

Now on the main issue of « the democratic secular resistance drowned in the mess of fundamentalist groups » argued by S. Zizek, it enters the same propaganda of some so called « leftists » currents saying that between two evils, the regime and the jihadists, we should stand with the lesser evil, which is considered by many as being the Assad regime. As argued before and on many occasions by the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria (see previous articles and declarations on this blog), we refuse this dichotomy on a principle stand and we do not have to choose between these two evils. Our role as stated on many occasions is to participate in the revolutionary process on the side of the revolutionary masses and radicalize as much as possible the movement to allow the victory of the objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism.

But more importantly, this position is based on material facts and analysis, on the reality of the ground in Syria where the far majority of the mass popular movement refuses and struggles against these two evils, particularly in the liberated areas. This is what I am going to show through numerous examples (see also previous articles on the resistance and the self organization of the masses).

In this perspective Raqqa, liberated city since March 2013 from Assad forces, has been a very good example of this continuous resistance against both the islamists and jihadist forces on one side and the regime on the other side.

Following the attack by the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) against the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Raqqa end of September, youth popular groups and activists organized a demonstration (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JVJGIz-mZI>) to condemn ISIS actions, and in which they brandished a big cross in solidarity with the Syrian Christian community of the city. They also issued a statement saying that "they demand the respect for religions, Christian and Muslim are one, We have lived and will live as brothers. The people who practiced these action only represent themselves and the Islamic religion is innocent of such acts" (see <http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/slate-on-the-fronts> <http://www.slate.com/articles/feature/syria/2013/09/25/slate-on-the-revolutionary-left-current-in-syria-on-the-events-of-raqqqa/>).

In the popular organizations resistance to the islamists groups in the city of Raqqa, like elsewhere, women have played a leading role. Suad Nofal, a school teacher, for example has been protesting nearly on daily manner for months against the authoritarian practices of the ISIS and to demand the release of political prisoners imprisoned by the islamist group as we can see in this interview (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFpViPfrPhs&feature=youtu.be> — or see this article <http://www.syriauntold.com/en/story/2013/10/17/581911>)

She actually compares the authoritarian practices

of the ISIS with the ones of the regime, opposing both of them (<http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/103006>).

It was also the women of Raqqa that condemned the instrumentalization of religion for the purpose of oppression in the previous months by Jabhat al-Nusra front, which notably replaced the revolution flag, and practiced arbitrary detentions and murders. "Safeguard the state's capabilities," "Respect freedom," "Respect civilians," and "Do not to humiliate" were some other slogans that were repeated as a warning to those trying to steal the revolution.

In other parts of Syria we have also witnessed popular resistance against the ISIS and similar groups. In beginning of October, ISIS shot demonstrators in the city of Aazaz, North of Syria, opposing their rule. One of the slogans people were chanting in the demonstrations were notably: "One, one, one; the regime and al-Qaeda are one" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9463MXrNEh8>). This slogan has actually spread to throughout Syria increasingly. Following this violent repression from the ISIS, The people of Aazaz staged a general strike the days after, in addition to several protests, demanding an end to continued military presence in their city by militants from the ISIS, calling on them to leave civilians to govern the city, and go fight against the regime on the fronts. A statement released by activists vowed that the people of Aazaz would continue the strike until all of their demands are met (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IL-Py-bI9U>)

Beginning of October and in September, different FSA brigades voted to expell ISIS from the city of Homs and Idlib. Joint Command of the "Free Syrian Army and the forces of revolutionary movement" issued a statement few weeks ago asking all foreign fighters in Syria to leave (pro-regime and Al-Qaeda sisters), and promises to work on the revolution's values of "freedom, dignity and social justice" and to "retain the independent Syrian decision" from foreign states (<http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/102268?wpm->

p_tp=1). Fights between FSA batallions and ISIS have actually increased these last couple of weeks.

The Council of Salah Eldeen Quarter, in Aleppo, signed a placard on September 27 2013, saying in opposition to ISIS: "Take Your Islam and Leave Us Our Islam – Islam conquered hearts before lands".

Coordination committees such as the Kurdish Fraternity Committee have accused ISIS of "occupying cities and terrorizing citizens", equating them to pro-regime group Hezbollah, which has been ruthlessly targeting civilians. They did a demonstration in Ashrafiya, Aleppo, on September 20, 2013 against the ISIS and we could see banners notably saying ""Syria will be free, free; ISIS, get out" and "We Syrians Reject Masked Fighters in Our Country," "ISIS is the Regime's State of Iraq and Syria", and "Our Syria is colorful. No to ISIS and its black flag."

All this popular resistance has been translated on a national scale on several occasions through the declaration of the Local Coordination Committees. On September 20, 2013, the LCC declared that « Despite the brutality of the Syrian regime and the weakness of the international community the insistence of the Syrians has increased day by day to go in the revolution so they come out in Friday they named "Only Syrians will liberate Syria" to prove that the will of the Syrian people will remain the most powerful weapon in the face of tyranny. Activists of the committees in Douma, Zabadani and Madaya in Damascus Suburbs, Tafas and Mizeireeb in Daraa sent messages that rejected to replace tyranny with another, especially the practices of "the State of Iraq and the Levant," which it does not differ from the practices of the Syrian regime in repression and suppression of expression freedom, and also they emphasized the legitimacy of the revolution People and proceed with the revolution until victory, refusing half-solutions which do not satisfy the aspirations of the Syrian people, and whatever the difficulties revolutions can make the impossible becomes real. » (see pictures and video against ISIS [http://syriafreedomforever.](http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/???-?-????-?-????-?-?-????-?-????-?????))

[wordpress.com/2013/09/20/???-?-????-?-????-?-?-????-?-????-?????\)](http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/???-?-????-?-????-?-?-????-?-????-?????)).

In earlier September, eleven civilian groups representing the organized structures of the Revolution in a broad area outlying Damascus, rallied strongly around Razan Zaitouneh, a key figure in the grassroots of the Syrian Revolution. The 36-year-old lawyer was threatened and harassed by members of armed Jihadist factions in eastern Ghouta of Damascus, for no other reason than "being an independent and unveiled woman who is among the grassroots leadership cadres of our Revolution," as one activist put it.

More recent examples can be shown as well, such as the Statement of the Civilian Movement in Syria Regarding the Remarks of Mr. Zahran Alloush, Commander of the Army of Islam on October 14, 2013

(<http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/ment-of-the-civilian-movement-in-syria-regarding-the-remarks-of-mr-zahran-alloush-commander-of-the-army-of-islam-on-october-14-2013/>) in which groups and members of the Syrian revolutionary process stated their rejection « of any attempt by any party to impose authoritarianism upon decision-making and upon the work of citizens. We also reject that compliance with any institution not elected by the people, no matter how powerful or wealthy the institution, be rendered a benchmark for the public good or a gauge of patriotism or an indicator of the ability to perform civic duty today ». This statement was issued after Mr. Zahran Alloush (Commander of the Army of Islam) deemed the establishment [of the expanded Douma Civilian Council] to be divisive of unity because it ought to have taken the Consultative Council that is associated with him as its sole reference point.

Many other examples can be shown of the popular resistance opposing both the regime and the Islamist reactionary forces, which is based in their will to pursue the original objectives of the revolution as explained above and on the high level of self organization of the Syrian revolutionary masses (see previous articles on self organization notably

<http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/09/08/self-organization-of-the-popular-struggles-in-syria-against-the-regime-and-islamist-groups-yes-it-exists/> and the recent excellent article of our comrade Yasser Munif on the city of Minbej <http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=12410>). In mid October, following a conference in the neighboring city of Rihanya in Turkey was established the Free Union of Syria composed of more than a hundred military and civilian organizations and formations vowing for a Free and Democratic Syria (<http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/104569>) in which all sects and ethnicities would be treated equally. Although having limits in some of its aspects (the name Syrian Arab Republic is maintained or return to the liberal Constitution of 1950), it can clearly be included in the democratic sectors of the revolution.

« no signs of a broad emancipatory-democratic coalition, just a complex network of religious and ethnic alliances overdetermined by the influence of superpowers »

Following the examples shown above, we directly can say that the affirmation of S. Zizek regarding that there is no sign of a broad emancipatory democratic coalition is wrong, and that the original demands of the revolution are still present in the far majority of the popular movement until today.

Then, it is also wrong to try to resume the revolutionary process and its actors as a « complex network of religious and ethnic alliances overdetermined by the influence of superpowers ». As shown above, the real power in this revolution does not come from foreign powers, on the opposite fearful of its victory and therefore wishing whether to reach a political agreement saving the structure of the regime or regarding Gulf monarchies to transform it into a sectarian war, but from the revolutionary masses solely and only.

In addition these foreign countries have not even been able to provide the basic necessary assistance to the Syrian people such as France and Qatar. This latter Qatar has just committed just three percent

of what would be considered their fair share for the humanitarian effort, while France is struggling to reach half of its fair share (47 percent) (<http://zamanawsl.net/en/readNews.php?id=1620>). Turkey has on its side started the building of a two-metre high wall along part of its border with Syria near an area of frequent fighting to try to stop people from illegally bypassing its checkpoints and prevent smuggling.

Ethnic and sectarian minorities have been involved in the revolutionary process and have paid also a number of martyrs. Signs of fraternity and solidarity between Kurds and Arabs (see <http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/09/08/self-organization-of-the-popular-struggles-in-syria-against-the-regime-and-islamist-groups-yes-it-exists/>) have multiplied these few last months with the rise of military combats between some islamists and Kurdish militias from the PYD. Assyrians, a christian community, have also been participating importantly in demonstrations and in the popular resistance since the beginning of the revolution.

A Church in Yabroud, close to Damascus, brandished a placard wishing a happy Eid to its Muslim Brethers and to the Revolution of Dignity and to a Free Syria (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=609567875749306&set=a.237085119664252.5>). The popular reaction against the attack on the church by the ISIS in Raqqa showed the existence of solidarity between the sects. It is the regime that has destroyed more than 44 churches since the beginning of the revolution. In addition, in a recent communiqué in September, Syrian Christians for Peace (SCP) expressed their deepest concerns about the manipulation of the international community by the Assad regime, which is using the Christian community as well as other minorities in Syria in order to maintain its power (see <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/99416>).

This does not mean that sectarianism does not exist in Syria, actually from both sides of the counter revolution: the Assad regime (see <http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/04/04/sectarianism-and-the-assad-regime-in-syria/>) and among

jihadist and islamist groups such as ISIS and sister organizations.

But it should be reminded that it is the Assad regime that is the main and the most important actor responsible for the rise of sectarianism by particular policies encouraging this evil, notably:

- violent and targeted massacres and repressions on some popular Sunni population, numerous examples exist (Houla, Baniyas, etc...)

- Few months after the beginning of the revolutionary process, the regime decides to accelerate the release of two types of prisoners : 1) common criminals , thieves, petty drug dealers , smugglers , but also criminals authors of violent crimes ; 2) but above all others numbers of jihadists that Syrian intelligence services had imprisoned after having collaborated with them for few years by facilitating their entry in Iraq. These latter have not been the primary target of the Assad regime in combatting the revolution, on the opposite the regime has left them expand while focusing on the democratic sections of the revolution.

- importing sectarian "Shia" militias (Hezbollah, Iraklis, Houtis from Yemen) to fight on the side of the Syrian regime

This responsibility of the regime in the rise of sectarianism does not mean that we do not condemn the sectarianism and crimes committed by reactionary elements, the jihadists and islamists, such as in the beginning of August with the massacre committed by islamists against Alawite population in the Lattakia region.

To struggle against sectarianism, you cannot but struggle against the regime that has nurtured this evil constantly through its policies. The overthrow of the Assad regime will be the first big blow against sectarianism, but it will be with the continuation of the revolution that we can defeat it, because just as explained by Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci: "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of the ruling groups, even when they

rebel and rise up: only permanent victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately".

- And this brings us back to Syria: the ongoing struggle there is ultimately a false one. The only thing to keep in mind is that this pseudo-struggle thrives because of the absent third, a strong radical-emancipatory opposition whose elements were clearly perceptible in Egypt

I have tried to show that the radical emancipatory opposition is still present in Syria and constitutes the far majority of the popular movement in the revolutionary process. It is not because it has not formally organized under a single umbrella just as in Tunisia with the Popular Front or in Egypt with the Revolutionary Path Front that it does not exist. We cannot understand the recent refusal by the Syrian National Council to go to the next Geneva Conference called by the imperialist powers and its more aggressive tone against islamists and jihadist forces, while it defended them few months before, if we don't take into account that these are the direct consequences of the pressure from below, from the popular masses. These latter refuse any agreement that could save this regime, while opposing reactionary elements that want to put an end to this revolution and transform it in a sectarian war.

The third voice is present and growing everyday in Syria, and can be symbolized notably by slogans such as « people still want to overthrow the regime » (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=529877313771003&set=a.529876763771058.10>) « No one is legitimate but the people! Without the people there is no legitimacy" and "One, one, one; the regime and al-Qaeda are one".

And as long as the popular movement exists and its will to pursue the objective of the revolution (democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism) does as, the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria will continue to struggle among and with them, because as said by Russian revolutionary and Marxist, Vladimir Lenine : " The Marxist is therefore the first to take the path of direct revolutionary struggle... the Marxist is the last to leave the path of di-

rect revolutionary struggle, he leaves it only when all possibilities have been exhausted, when there is no shadow of hope for a shorter way, when the basis for an appeal to prepare mass strikes, an uprising, etc... is obviously disappearing. Therefore a Marxist treats with contempt the innumerable renegades of the revolution who shout to him: "We are more progressive than you, we were the first to renounce the revolution! We were the first to submit to the monarchistic constitution." The late Tony Cliff, leading member of Socialist Workers Party in England until his death, added to this citation that a revolutionary cannot accept the defeat of the revolution until objective facts leave no room for doubt. The revolutionaries are the last to leave the battlefield.

Objective factors showing the continuing of the revolution in Syria still exist and are very far from turning to an end. We, the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria will not leave the battlefield and join the opportunists who have withdrawn, whether in Syria or abroad, in their support for the Syrian revolutionary masses. We chant with the people

"Rather death than humiliation" and "people still want to overthrow the regime ».

In conclusion, Syria is not witnessing "nothing special" or a "pseudo struggle", as described by S. Zizek, Syria is witnessing a revolutionary process involving millions of people issued from the popular classes in their far majority who have been organising and struggling against the criminal dictatorship of Assad and also increasingly against reactionary jihadists and islamists groups. The revolutionary struggle of the Syrian people, which has cost more than 100 000 martyrs and millions of refugees and displaced persons, has the potential to not only change the country but the region and the whole world, and this is why all the imperialist powers, whether USA and the West on one side and Russia and China on the other side, and regional states, Saudi Arabia and Iran, do not want to see this revolution succeeds.

Dear S. Zizek, learn from the REAL STRUGGLE of the Syrian revolutionary masses, and abandon your pseudo struggle to show that nothing is happening in Syria. We have a revolution in Syria.

syria freedom forever

SPANISH STATE

Catalonia: a Constituent Process to decide everything

ESTHER VIVAS ·

Some will say that this is utopian, but it is more utopian, from my point of view, to think that those who have led to us to the present situation of crisis, from which, by the way, they obtain substantial benefits, will get us out of it. Breaking with scepticism, apathy and fear is the challenge that we have ahead. Knowledge that "we can" is the first step to obtaining concrete victories.

Ever since the Constituent Process went public last April, the support received has been wide. The Process has connected with broad sectors of society who perceive, in the present context of crisis, the urgent necessity of changing things. Many people without too much political or organizational experience have identified with a discourse that appeals to something as essential as can be: justice.

Other social activists have seen in the Process an instrument to go beyond social mobilization per se and to consider a political-organizational perspective of change. Two years after the emergency of 15M, many perceive that no matter how much we occupy banks, empty houses, supermarkets, hospitals... those in power continue applying a series of measures that sink us into absolute misery. Resting on the essential struggle on the street, without which there is no possible change, the Constituent Process raises, at the same time, a challenge to the political-economic regime, as well as in the institutions. And to change the system by "occupying" these instances and giving them back to the social majority via a constituent process.

For sure there are no magical formulas but experiences like the constituent processes in Latin America (Ecuador, Bolivia, or Venezuela) or, closer to home, Iceland, in spite of their debatable evolu-

tions, are experiences to consider deeply, not to imitate but to learn from their successes and errors. In Catalonia, the debate on the national question and independence opens an opportunity, as we could never have imagined, to be able to decide... and to decide on everything.

High participation

The high participation in public presentations of the Constituent Process, some led by Teresa Forcades and others by Arcadi Oliveres, with an average of between 400 to 700 people in municipalities like Vic, Sabadell, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Lleida, Girona, Vilanova i la Geltrú, Balaguer, Figueres, Blanes, Granollers, Terrassa, or even small municipalities like Santa Fe del Penedès or Fals, shows the capacity of attraction of this initiative, which has, in a few months, made more than one hundred presentations across the Catalan territory.

And more importantly, the interest of those who approach the Process does not reside only in listening to its two main promoters but in participating actively in the construction of this politico-social instrument. In this way, more than 80 local assemblies have already been set up across Catalonia. Also specific assemblies around such issues as education, health, feminism and immigration have started up. All of them are coordinated in a general assembly known as the Promotional Group, which meets monthly.

The forms of action of the Constituent Process also reflect this "other politics". At most public events makeshift money boxes are passed around to collect what it costs to rent the PA apparatus, photocopies and so on. The presentations serve also to attract those present to attending local meetings and assemblies. The groups in the territory are or-

ganized according to their own priorities and are coordinated nationally. The Constituent Process still has some way to go, but it shows the potential of a political initiative able to connect with major social unrest. Although obviously there is still much to be done, perhaps the most difficult part: to consolidate the process and improve the coordination of the assemblies. This is a work in progress.

From bottom to top

The confidence generated by its principal promoters, Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres, is key to its success. But we know that this is an initiative that will only succeed if it is built from the bottom up. I was told the day both presented the proposal: "We two alone cannot do much". Correct. Today, the Constituent Process has more than 44,000 people attached and multiple local and sector meetings. Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres, as has been said many times, do not want to be leaders of anything, but agree to put their credibility at the service of a just cause.

Criticisms of the Christian profile of both have been made, despite the secular nature of the Process.

Which in part is not surprising. The social mobilization of the left, both in Catalonia and in the Spanish state, would not be understood, in part, without the contribution of ordinary Christians. Without going any further, one of the founders of the Field Workers Union was none other than the priest of the poor, Diamantino Garcia. Denying this reality means ignoring this part of our collective history. And both Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres have spoken repeatedly and at length before the Constituent Process, against the ecclesiastical hierarchy, for the separation of church and state and in defence of the right of women to decide on their bodies. Which, incidentally, has earned them widespread criticism by reactionary sectors of the church and its hierarchy.

This Sunday, October 13, the main event of the Constituent Process is being held in Barcelona, just six months after its introduction. I still remember how before the proposal someone commented: "Why go ahead with such a project. This is going to fail". A colleague said: "Failure would be not to try." How right they were.

12 October 2013

Eight questions on trade union independence and politics

1. Can trade unions get involved in politics?

Yes. They not only can, they must. Our FGTB defends a project of a classless society. Defined in broad outline in our Statement of Principles, this project is incompatible with capitalism. Its realization implies the abolition of this system and its replacement by another, socialist and democratic. It is in this perspective that the Statement of Principles demands collective ownership of the major means of production, that our congresses of 1954 and 1956 defended the need for "anti-capitalist structural reforms" (nationalization of credit and energy, notably) and that our Walloon Inter-regional denounces the capitalism which "seriously damages health". Indeed, our anti-capitalist demands can only be imposed by the direct action of the workers organized in their unions. They also require that this trade union action is extended by a political action, at all levels of power. As a trade union, we are a counter power independent of any political party and we will always remain so, even in a non-capitalist society. But we are more than a counter power: in the name of our ultimate objective of a society without class, we fight against the power of the capitalists and for the power of the workers. In this sense, we should be involved in politics.

2. Does that mean our political role is that of prodding the existing parties?

No, this strategy of prodding has led us into a dead end. Since 1975, we have tried to influence those who hold the levers of power. In particular, we rely on those who say they are our "political friends" in Parliament and in government, the social democrats and Greens. Without results. The situation of labour has only got worse. The social benefits and the public sector conquered by the struggles of our parents and grandparents are dismantled, trade union freedoms are attacked. Our "political friends" claim that they still agree with us but are obliged to compromise with the right in government, that "without them it would be worse". We no longer believe it. We do not consider them as parties of the right but we note:

- that they are converts to the neoliberal dogmas of competitiveness and privatization;
- that they are no longer an alternative to capitalist society, that they are content to manage it while advocating some marginal "mini-measures";
- that they have lost their roots and that there is no left wing within them.

These parties have collaborated and continue to collaborate in the construction of a capitalist Europe, which is a machine of war against the world of labour. From the Plan Global to the Di Rupo measures via the Pacte des Générations, they deliberately force down the pill of austerity, against trade union resistance. The "transmission belt" is running the wrong way. They are no longer relays which can be reactive for our project of society. On the contrary: the examples of Greece, Great Britain, Portugal, Italy and Spain show that their managerial policy plays the game of the right and the far right. In these countries, this right has profited from this to form governments which are still more aggressive against the workers. In these conditions,

the strategy of the prod is a deadly trap; We should urgently get out of it.

3. So we need a new political strategy? Which?

Yes, we need a new political strategy because without political relays we are condemned to permanent retreat. At best, we "limit the damage" but over the long term all our conquests are destroyed. Massive unemployment, increasing precarity of work, the carving up of employment, the internationalisation of capital and the despotic role of the European Union means that the relationship of forces in the enterprises is increasingly unfavourable to workers. To deal with this, we obviously need in the first place a more combative and democratic trades unionism:

- which gives us the means of action to change the relationship of forces;
- which dares to pose anti-capitalist demands;
- and which radically opposes all forms of exploitation and oppression imposed on all categories of workers, in the workplaces and in society in general.

But that is not enough. Whether it be refusing the payment of the illegitimate debt, fighting layoffs and unemployment, imposing a just and progressive taxation or demanding that public aid to companies is converted into mortgages (as proposed by the FGTB in Liege), we are seriously handicapped by the absence of a political force which helps us to popularise our demands and which upholds them at the regional, federal and European scale. Our Statement of Principles says that "the trade union movement will accept the contribution of the party or parties who will join its action for the realisation of its objectives". Whereas this contribution of parties is vital today, we note that the PS and Ecolo no longer contribute to our action because they no longer share our objectives. To change the relationship of forces with the employers and the right, we thus need a strong FGTB and a new, anti-capitalist political force, to the left of the PS and Ecolo. To aid the emergence and development of this force so that it becomes the broadest possible, that is the

political strategy we propose. That is the meaning of the appeal we launched on May 1, 2012.

4. The appeal of May 1, 2012 means then that the FGTB wants to create a new political party?

No, we don't want to create a party, it isn't our role. We propose that the FGTB actively favours the appearance of a new anti-capitalist force on the political and electoral field. This is not the same thing. We wish to put our weight in the balance to bring together all those who aspire to an anti-capitalist alternative. We put them before their responsibilities to create a force as faithful to the interests of labour as the existing forces are faithful to the interests of the employers. Ultimately, this force could become a party, but it isn't our responsibility. Also, we do not want to congeal things. On the contrary: for us it is about opening a space and unleashing a dynamic. We have formed a support committee with the parties of the radical left because they have responded positively to the Appeal of May 1, 2012. That constitutes a first nucleus. But the process of political regroupment should become broader. That is why we invite left members of the PS and Ecolo to join the dynamic which is established. We also invite left intellectuals and activists in the associations to join our appeal. It is an ambitious project, which will demand patience, audacity and creativity. To a certain extent we are inspired by the action of the working class militants of the 19th century, who, after having founded the first funds of mutual aid and solidarity, created the POB (the ancestor of the PS) because they understood the need for a political tool to strengthen their struggle. But it is obviously necessary to draw the lessons of the manner in which this political tool ended up escaping them.

5. What should be done concretely?

The first thing to do is to break the privileged links with the PS. That is what the FGTB of Charleroi & Sud-Hainaut did some years ago. It is not about denouncing the PS as an enemy, or slandering it, but of understanding that the privileged links between

the FGTB and the PS, in the context of Action commune socialiste, prevented us from emerging from the strategy of the prod which leads us into a dead end. At the same time, it should then pronounce itself for an alternative political strategy because pure trades unionism without political relays is not a solution. That is what we have done on May 1, 2012 and we ask all the articulations of the FGTB at the professional and inter-professional levels to debate with us to join in this fight. Finally, we need to draw up the anti-capitalist programme that we, as trades unionists, want to see relayed on the political terrain.

6. Doesn't this strategy endanger our trade union independence?

That is a decisive point where we must be very vigilant. We must remain "the direct emanation of the organised working forces", "respecting all opinions, both political and philosophical" as our Statement of Principles says. That involves an absolute independence in relation to all political parties. Indeed, what threatens this independence today is not that we are involved in politics, but that we aren't involved in it. The strategy of the prod leads us systematically to put our programme in the back pocket and leads us to de facto accept the neoliberal programme. We organize mobilizations against austerity and, systematically, the strategy of the prod leads us to sacrifice our demands so as not to endanger the policies of the PS and Ecolo, in the name of the "lesser evil". We arrive at such a point today that some union leaders, in the name of this "lesser evil", no longer want to even organize the fight against austerity. Faced with this, the alternative strategy that we propose allows recovering a real trade union independence. In the context of our strategy, we will draw up our programme and lead our struggles according to one concern: the needs of the workers. We will encourage them to involve themselves actively and democratically, so that this programme and these struggles are theirs. Thus, we reverse the situation. Thus, we regain strength. Thus, instead of the parties dictating their

policies to us, it is us who will demand that the parties fight with us for this programme.

7. So we want to form new political relays for the FGTB?

No, we want to form new political relays for the world of labour as a whole. It is obviously inside our organisation, the FGTB, that we lead the debate. We will not interfere in the functioning of other trade union organizations. But the FGTB is not alone in being faced with the impasse of the political strategy of the prod. The CSC is in the same situation. That is why, basically, our call for another strategy does not only concern the FGTB. The fact that the CNE has wished to associate itself with our line of march is very important. That shows that our strategy, far from being a source of division, can contribute on the contrary to overcoming certain historic divisions in the labour movement. We should be conscious of the opportunity arising thus, and without abandoning our identity, but respecting difference, favour convergence around a common political project. We should see that this possibility of convergence finds its basic origin in the extreme gravity of the threats facing the world of labour. The European dominant class has launched a frontal attack against our social and democratic gains. It can modify it a little at one moment to avoid a social explosion, or an electoral disaster for the established parties. But it has no other road than to continue its work of destruction. More broadly, the capitalist system had nothing to offer but social and ecological destruction for the benefit of a minority of the population. In this context, inevitably, those who look any further than the end of their noses understand that an anti-capitalist programme is the sole alternative possible faced with this situation. We have no claim by ourselves to elaborate it in all its dimensions. We offer a first outline of it, to be completed and enriched with others. But this first outline will contribute to launching the dynamic of regroupment. That is the meaning of our approach.

8. But all this is surely a dangerous utopia when the right and the employers are on the offensive and Belgium is "on the brink of the abyss", which means a serious threat to social security?

On the contrary, to believe that in bending to capitalist logic, hunkering down while awaiting what happens, will help us, is to be especially naive. We have our backs to the wall. We have no other way out but struggle and the international unification of struggles in the perspective of another Europe. As to "saving Belgium", it is often a false pretext to impose social regression. During the long period "without government », the country continued to function and the government took significant measures: participation in the war in Libya, channelling significant sums to the banks and applying the austerity measures decided on by previous governments. After 540 days of negotiations, prime minister Di Rupo, in the name of the compromise "to save Belgium", included a whole series of demands from the NVA (a party which considers that "its economic programme is that of the VOKA" — the Flemish employers), even when this party was in the end not part of the governmental majority! They are reflected since then in all the attacks that we suffer. We have then seen the fear of the vacuum used to impose compromises with the Flemish right, to the great pleasure of the employers.

Here also, we appeal to our trade union independence. Our solidarity is a class solidarity, that of the workers. We know well that any rupture of national solidarity leads to less resources to organise solidarity. Let's take the example of Ford Genk or Arcelormittal in Liege. What do we note? That the regional authorities, responsible for economic policy, did not have the necessary financial resources to oppose the logic of the employers. What does that mean? That even if they want to pursue another policy (which is not obviously the case), the context of the State Reform prevents them from doing so. It is true that a great threat weighs on our Social Security. Its splitting would be a disaster for the world of labour. It must be avoided. But how? By accepting the continuation of the dismantling of social benefits? By supporting the monarchy, the so-called "link of union between Flemish and Walloons"? This choice between plague and cholera is what the Di Rupo government wishes to impose. we reject it and we say to the politicians: "Social Security belongs to the workers; the employers contributions are not "charges" but deferred and collectivised wages; we demand democratic workers' management of Social Security; thus, if your negligence should end in the breakup of the country, the solidarity of the workers will at least be saved".

BELGIUM

The LCR, the radical left and the Charleroi Appeal

DANIEL TANURO ·

There are however some nuances. Generally, most organisations seem to have initially underestimated the importance of the speech by Daniel Piron on May 1, 2012. Many of them only remembered the denunciation of the PS. Then, recognizing their error, the organisations generally tried to take the approach of the trades unionists as an illustration of their own programme and strategy. It was still insufficient because the union left goes further: it intends to itself determine a programme and advance its own strategy for regroupment, so that this programme finds a credible political expression.

"A class party"

The LCR-SAP was well positioned to approach this situation. During its congress in November 2011, the Belgian section of the Fourth International had adopted a political resolution which anticipated the possibility that trade union sectors would seek a new political expression, alternative to social democracy. Notably it stated: "The international process of transformation of social democracy from reformist parties into social liberal parties constitutes a gigantic step backwards for the class independence of workers on the political level. This step backwards weighs negatively on the relationship of forces. We ask the trade union movement to take responsibility by breaking links with the PS/Sp.a and by actively favouring the formation of a new party of labour to defend the class interests of the exploited and oppressed".

Later, this text specifies: "The foundation of a class party requires a struggle of the trade union left against "pure trades unionism". The latter erects an artificial wall between the trade union struggles of

workers and political action, an area reserved to "professionals", that is to the "political friends" who are thus given carte blanche. The formation of a class party involves the overthrow of this wall erected by the bureaucratic apparatuses, so as to allow the exploited to practice politics themselves."

Open letter

Two months later, as the government of Socialist Prime Minister Di Rupo launched its first wave of attacks, the LCR-SAP published an "open letter to trades unionists" which ended thus: "The trade unions no longer have political or media relays. They can only count on their own strength, those of two and a half million members. This is a considerable strength. Thanks to this strength, the unions can impose another policy. But this will not be possible with a unionism of bureaucratic command, nor in a climate of competition between organizations. To win, it is necessary to inform and mobilise the membership in depth so as to implement an action plan leading to the general strike, in the broadest unity between organisations, between sectors, in the north and the south.

"If trades unionism does not choose the road of opposition, it will be at the mercy of the dominant class. The latter wishes to ensure it a future, but solely as service provider. In this case, we will no longer have the trades unions with which the working class has struggled for its gains. We will have a pseudo-union accompanying neoliberal policies, indeed a transmission belt with which the employers and the government will maintain social peace. We already have an example of it, unhappily, in certain enterprises.

"In this case also, the political balance will continue to move towards the right. After some time, an unabashed right wing government will come to power

with the strength to attack trade union organization itself head on, like the new right wing government of Rajoy in Spain.

"If it chooses the road of opposition through struggle, if it assumes openly that it has no more "friends" and fights for another politics, trades unionism should not only mobilize wage earners: it must also follow its logic to the end and pose the question of an alternative politics. The trade union cannot obviously transform itself into a party. It should remain independent of any party and continue to represent the mass of workers, whatever their political, philosophical and religious opinions. However, the trade union can and must favour the formation of an alternative politics. It can and must demand of those who identify with labour at the political level that they unite together around a left programme. It can and must demand that this alternative is as faithful to the world of labour as the current parties are faithful to capital.

"We, the LCR, fight for an anti-capitalist, internationalist, feminist, democratic and ecosocialist programme. We think that the union leadership carries a heavy responsibility: their policy of dialogue has played the game of the employers and led trades unionism into a dead end. We propose another, anti-capitalist, policy: breaking the power of finance by nationalising the credit sector and that of energy. But our fight is not separate from that of the workers' movement. We have no interests different from those of the mass of workers. The latter are in great danger because trades unionism is in great danger. We call them to struggle. We will be in the front line alongside them, to defend trades unionism and social benefits, to impose the pure and simple rejection of the government's austerity plan. And we will take our responsibilities on the political terrain. If the trade union decides it, we are ready to participate in the construction of a political alternative, a party of the world of labour against capital".

Popularisation

This text has had a certain echo. In particular in Charleroi, where a delegation from the LCR was twice received by the permanent committee of the FGTB in early 2012. The LCR then immediately took on the task of popularising the approach of the Charleroi unionists, and has spared no effort in doing so. A blog was created. In June 2012, Daniel Piron participated in a debate between unionists at the spring anti-capitalist school of the Formation Lesoil (a permanent education organization linked to the LCR). In autumn of the same year, the Formation Lesoil organised another significant debate in Liege, historic bastion of the FGTB, between Piron and the metalworkers' leader. Meanwhile, our site and newspaper questioned a number of trade union leaders about their position on the Charleroi appeal. Finally, in March 2013, Daniel Piron was invited to debate the president of the PTB, Peter Mertens, again in the context of the spring anti-capitalist school.

Moving the lines

No other left organisation has produced such an analysis or carried out such activity. The reason is to be found in the significance of strategic schemas based on the separation of the social/trade union on the one hand and politics on the other — with the "leading role of the party" (self-proclaimed) being key. The caricature of this attitude is provided by the Mouvement de gauche of Bernard Wesphael (a dissident Green Party parliamentarian, imprudently supported by Jean-Luc Mélenchon), which has tried to impose itself as the sole alternative and align everyone behind its flag. While supporting the Charleroi Appeal, the Communist Party and the PSL (CIO-CWI) do not however give the impression of having grasped the extent of the change desired by Daniel Piron and his comrades. As for the PTB, in spite of its Stalinist heritage, it seems paradoxically to grasp the stakes better, in particular since April 27, but its desire to establish itself as the relay for the trade union movement as a whole (left and right together) does not facilitate the task when it comes to taking initiatives.

If the trades unionists maintain their orientation, it is probable that the lines will continue to move in the right direction. The LCR-SAP wants that to

happen and, despite its limited forces, will take its responsibilities to see that it does.

JAPAN:

40,000 march against nuclear power in Tokyo

KENJI KUNITOMI ·

150,000 residents who have had to evacuate from the nuclear disaster are have not been able to return to their hometown. Their life conditions are very bad and government policies to support those affected are totally insufficient.

In this situation, the LDP-led ultra-right nationalist and neo-liberal Abe government has been very eager to reactivate nuclear reactors — all 50 of Japan's nuclear reactors are now stopped — and to accelerate export projects of nuclear plants. The Abe government, supported by big capitalists, believes that without nuclear power Japanese capitalism will not survive under the very critical situation global capitalism finds itself in currently.

On Sunday October 13th, 40 000 protesters marched in Tokyo, denouncing the ruling class's nuclear policies and demanding a nuclear-free society. The protest drew together many forces from Japan's workers' movement and social movements, including the Communist Party-led trade union federation Zenroren (National confederation of trade unions), pro-Social Democratic Party trade unionists, and independent radical activists. We

gathered together in Hibiya Park, at the centre of the Tokyo metropolitan area. In the mass meeting before the demonstration, Nobel-prize winning novelist Kenzaburo Oe and residents of Fukushima gave speeches, all strongly criticizing the Abe government's nuclear-dependent policies.

After the demonstration many participants encircled the Diet building and made speeches and chants calling on the government to stop the reactivation of nuclear plants and to defend basic rights those evacuated and affected.

Japan is facing a prolonged economic crisis. Appealing to insecurity and fear, the LDP has managed to appeal to many voters in these circumstances: in the last elections many people voted for the right wing nationalist LDP. But according to opinion polls nearly 60% of voters still support nuclear free projects.

Rallies and street demonstration show the possibilities for protest against the LDP government. The anti-nuclear movement is massive, and continues to be a force in Japanese political life.

ISO Aetearoa/New Zealand

BELGIUM

Class trades unionism seeks political expression

DANIEL TANURO ·

Mayday speeches in Belgium are generally unsurprising but like all rules, this has its exceptions. On May 1, 2012, in Charleroi, a big stone was thrown in the water by Daniel Piron, the inter-professional regional secretary of the FGTB. Before stunned and furious social democratic leaders, and in the presence of several hundred enthusiastic trades unionists, Piron denounced the austerity policies with which the PS has collaborated for 25 years without a break [Belgium can only be governed by coalition governments. Between 1982 and 1987, the social democrats were out of power. Since 1987 they have participated in all the federal coalitions and also lead the Walloon regional government]]. However, the most spectacular aspect of this speech was not the denunciation of the role of the social democrats in coalition governments with the right, but rather the explicit call for the construction of an anti-capitalist political alternative, to the left of the PS and the Ecolo party.

Those who believed it was an individual outburst without consequence, or a manoeuvre to benefit the FGTB in the context of the forthcoming works council elections were wrong. Not only did Piron reiterate his call a year later, in the name of all the professional union federations of his region, but also meanwhile he and his comrades had passed into action. In two directions : the debate inside the trade union movement and the left in general, on the one hand, and the call for political regrouping of left forces on the other.

A broad echo

The appeal by Daniel Piron and his comrades had a broad echo among trades unionists. The factions of the FGTB apparatus linked to the PS and the line of the "lesser evil" have certainly abstained from any public comment, but several left union leaders have expressed themselves openly. While not completely sharing the conclusions of the Charleroi comrades, the characterisation of PS policies as neoliberal is very broadly shared. In his editorials, the president of the Francophone union federation of metalworkers, the FGTB (67, 000 members), Nico Cue, has made a speciality of denouncing these policies and the change of regime which accompanies it. During a public debate with Daniel Piron in the FGTB offices in Liege, Cue confirmed that the union movement "had a huge need of a left political alternative, a real anti-capitalist alternative". "The left organisations should overcome their divisions", he added [1].

Daniel Richard, inter-professional secretary of the Verviers regional organisation of the FGTB, adds: "It is the role of the union, and even its *raison d'être*, not only to defend the works at the level of the workplaces, but also to impose another policy. (...) I think that it is necessary to have, to the left of the PS and Ecolo, a more significant political force, better structured, more credible and unitary than what currently exists. And I encourage a left front, sharing and forwarding at the political level the programme of demands of the Walloon FGTB for example" [2]

More explicit support came from the general secretary of a trade union organization of the Confédération des syndicats chrétiens (CSC –

Confederation of Christian Trade Unions), the Centrale nationale des employés (CNE, 160, 000 members). Known for his anti-neoliberal positions and involvement in the European Altersummit, Felipe Van Keirsbilck told the newspaper "la Gauche" that he was "absolutely in agreement with what I believe to be the two bases of this call from the FGTB of Charleroi. (...) On the one hand, (...) without having partisan links, in the CNE we fully agree in saying that the trade unions need a political expression". On the other hand, "it is clear that a left political force is needed (...) which is sufficiently radical to face the situation. (...) The radicalism of the austerity policies means that we need a political party which is ready to confront the Troika, the neoliberal dogmas, the single system of thought, the policies of the European Commission which are exclusively at the service of capital and the destruction of social benefits" [3].

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From speech to deeds

"If you don't go for what you want, you will never have it; if you don't ask, the reply will always be no; if you don't go forward, you will always stay in the same place". What distinguishes the FGTB unionists in Charleroi is that they follow these three simple rules, as pertinent in politics as in love. Once the works council elections and communal elections were over, all the political organizations to the left of the PS and Ecolo held an initial meeting in January 2013. A representative of the CNE attended the meeting, mandated by their union. A support committee for the appeal of May 1, 2012 was set up. During the meetings, a first concrete project emerged: to organize in Charleroi, one year later, a day of struggle and debate on the need for a political alternative.

On April 27, 2013, 400 people responded to the invitation of the Charleroi FGTB, the CNE and the support committee. The text distributed on this occasion said notably: "This system cannot be reformed. It must disappear. But simply affirming this is not enough. We still need to give ourselves

the means and political relays to concretise our objective. A political relay of a new type which is based on social resistance and strengthens it: that is what we need to build to give hope back to the world of labour. Some think that it would be possible to "weigh" on the PS and Ecolo so that they once again become parties of the left. It's an illusion. We prefer to invite the left activists of the PS and Ecolo to join us in building an alternative together. (...) Our ambition is not to compose and dilute ourselves in power. It is to oppose until the time when we can impose an alternative worth of this name."

The debates were launched by representatives of the two organisations, Daniel Piron and Isabelle Wanschoor. Rank and file activists then witnessed to the ravages of austerity among rail workers, teachers, and the unemployed. Finally, Piron read messages of support from Pierre Laurent (Parti de la gauche européenne), Olivier Besancenot (Nouveau parti anticapitaliste, France) and director Ken Loach ("You are right, we need new parties"). The participants then broke up into working groups to exchange views in a very constructive atmosphere, and discuss the working perspectives to adopt. At the end of the day, the latter were summarised as follows by the organisers: to broaden the initiative, link up with similar initiatives outside Belgium, approach the associations, the cultural and academic world, and above all "all those who suffer today". The support committee was charged with drawing up a plan of action, but also an emergency anti-capitalist plan, to be submitted to a subsequent meeting.

Without precedent

It was necessary to await this day of April 27, 2013 for the mass media and commentators finally to take the affair seriously. It should be said in fairness to them that the approach of the FGTB in Charleroi is unprecedented. The Belgian workers' movement is characterised by the existence of massive trade unions (more than two million members) which leave the monopoly of political expression to

their social democratic or Christian democratic "friends". This division of labour and the under-politicisation which flows from it are the results of history. In 1898, the ancestor of the FGTB was created as the "Trade Union Commission" of the social democratic party, the POB. After the general strike of 1936, this Commission gave way to the *Confédération générale du travail de Belgique* (CGTB), whose affiliates were automatically members of the party. As the president of the POB, De Man, had taken a position in favour of the New Order, the social democratic grip was weakened during the Nazi occupation. Thus, in 1945, the CGTB merged with organisations of underground resistance origin. The FGTB dates from this time. It is formally independent of the PS, but its leaders sit as observers on the Party bureau and the latter controls the *Action Commune Socialiste* which, since 1949, groups all the social organisations of the "socialist column" [4].

It isn't the first time that trade union sectors have broken with social democracy. André Renard, leader of the Liege metalworkers, did so after the general strike of 1960-61. But Renard only created a hybrid movement, neither party nor union (the *Mouvement populaire wallon*), that ended up in the dead end a fight for federalism cut off from anti-capitalist demands, so that its existence was ephemeral. The appeal of the FGTB of Charleroi is the very first time that union bodies of such a level of responsibility have favoured the emergence of a political alternative, and it should be specified that they do it in an explicit rejection of "Walloon isolationism". This development is then qualitative and of great importance. Several factors contribute to explaining it.

Why there, why now?

First, some local specificities should be noted. Two of them are linked. The first: the local PS was up to its neck in corruption, to the point that a mayor and several deputies have been jailed. The second: social democracy has increasingly lost its ability to

control the trade unions. When the old union leadership, traditionally very right wing, retired, a new generation of union cadres emerged almost simultaneously in the leadership of the professional and inter-professional federations. This generation was marked by a series of testing struggles: the fight of the steelworkers in Clabecq against closure, the long strike of AGC glassworkers against job losses (denounced by the PS as "a stain" on Wallonia), and movements of resistance against neoliberal policies in the public sector, notably in rail. A team was formed, which drew on the lessons of these experiences, notably concerning relations with social democracy: in May 2010, the FGTB in Charleroi held a congress of political orientation during which it decided to institute regular links with all the organisations of the democratic left. Since then, it has no longer participated in *Action commune socialiste* and organises its own Mayday demonstration every year

France, Greece, Spain: the international conjuncture has given ideas to trades unionists in Charleroi. In his speech on May 1, 2012, Daniel Piron had cited the example of the *Front de gauche* in France. "Yes, the example of the *Front de gauche* in France has inspired us. Yes, it has given our activists an extraordinary hope. Yes, we identify with the essence of the programme defended by Mélenchon". At the time the presidential campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon enthused numerous Walloon trades unionists. Several hundred of them, notably in Charleroi, came to Lille to participate in his meeting on March 27, 2012. The general tonality of the *Front de gauche* campaign and its programme seemed in synch with the hopes of an alternative in Belgium. In his speech, the regional secretary of the Charleroi FGTB nuanced his support, however: "It is not however the case that we can apply a cut and paste in Belgium. We are concerned moreover at Mélenchon's support for the formation freshly emerged from the ranting of Bernard Wesphael, which divide the left a little more again and all this without any anti-capitalist basis" [5]. Does this denunciation explain why

Mélenchon did not respond to the invitation of the FGTB Charleroi to organize a meeting with him in the context of the communal elections?

But the basic reason for the trade union radicalisation is the exhaustion of the margins of manoeuvre of social democracy. The PS and its Flemish equivalent the Sp.a have participated in all the coalition governments with the right since 1987. It goes without saying that the policies of these governments have been neoliberal. The social democratic leaders claim that their participation allows them to limit the damage, and even to implement some trade union demands, but this is no longer credible, notably because the PS does not conceal its hostility to the mobilisations, demonstrations and strikes that the FGTB organizes against the employers and the government. That is why Daniel Piron was strongly applauded on May 1, 2012, when he said: "Today, comrades of the PS, the politics of the lesser evil will no longer impress our activists. The magic phrase "it would be worst without us" offends their intelligence".

Social regression

Discontent has only grown since the formation of the current government, led by Elio Di Rupo. Belgium had not had a socialist prime minister since the very short (six months) reign of the Leburton government, in 1974. The trades unionists, who really believed that the PS did its utmost in the context of coalitions where it did not have the upper hand, and who thus hoped that a team led by a "socialist" would allow a certain number of advances, were quickly disillusioned. The Di Rupo government, since its formation, has led a vast offensive of social regression which sought to pay the bill for the bailing out of the banks, on the one hand, and to tie the Belgian economy to German levels of competitiveness on the other.

A wage freeze imposed by law until 2018, massive exclusions of the unemployed, lengthening of professional careers, dismantling of the status of civil servants, manipulation of the index and other painful measures contrasting sharply with the im-

potence displayed towards the multinationals (Mittal and Ford), or the fierce defence of the arrangements which make Belgium a tax haven for the rich (notional interest rates, banking secrecy, no registry of wealth). In fact, the attack which has continued since late 2011 has been almost as brutal as that launched by the government of the right alone in 1982-87. And, as at that time, the trade unions who do not accept the neoliberal diktats are deprived of consultation.

Crisis of the "Belgian model"

This situation tends to put the "Belgian model" in crisis. On the Francophone side, the existence of the FGTB underpins the link between the PS and its popular social base, and this link explains in turn the astonishing durability of the PS, which remains the biggest party in Francophone Belgium. More broadly, whether socialist or Christian, this mass trades unionism at a low political level, accepting the pre-eminence of the parties is a token of stability and control over the working class. But this "model" can only function if there is "social dialogue" and the parties relay effectively at least some of the trade union demands. Without that, the situation of the trade union cadres becomes untenable and leaves them at the end of the day only two possibilities:

- either to accept a substantial reduction of trade union weight in society in general and in the workplaces in particular;
- or to challenge the model, which would involve both breaking with the trade unionism of dialogue and seeking new political relays.

This question of political relays was approached by André Renard in the context of the post-war boom. Today, faced with the systemic crisis of globalized capital and the key role of the European Union in the offensive against social benefits, the anarcho-syndicalism of Renard is no longer relevant. The alternative must be both at the political and trade union levels. As the president of the Charleroi FGTB metalworkers, Antonio Cocciolo, has put it: "Greece is a veritable laboratory for the parties of

the European right (...). We are today in Greece almost on the 37th day of the inter-professional strike (...). And (...) we are not seeing a change of political orientation. As a union leader I am obliged to analyse this kind of thing. I think that we need, today more than ever, political organisations close to the workers, to the people, capable of mobilising. On this level, the approach made by the FGTB Charleroi Sud-Hainaut on May 1, Mai 2012 is the culmination of the following analysis and reflection: political relays are needed, a political transmission belt which can help the mobilisation and capacity of union organisations to halt the demolition of social benefits. Yes to trade union organisation! Yes to a strengthening of combative trades unionism! But also on the other hand we need a political, legislative, voice, which can lead the political battle in the democratic institutions taking account of the aspirations of the working people (...)” [6].

A complex process

In the context of the crisis of the Belgian model of dialogue and integration of the workers' movement, the Charleroi initiative can only resonate with the processes of political recomposition underway in the union movement as a whole. But the complexity of the situation and the double cleavage of FGTB/CSC, Flanders/Wallonia means a long process involving mediations as well as tactics allowing the different stages to be traversed.

On the one hand, the echo of the appeal concerns almost exclusively the Francophone part of the country. The Flemish trades unionists of the FGTB are certainly unhappy with the policies of the social democrats and 700 of them have shown this by signing an open letter to their union leadership demanding a break with the Sp.a. But this initiative has remained without consequence, notably because the FGTB is very much in the minority in Flanders in relation to the CSC (where the debate on political relays is only carried on in minority circles) and that the trade union movement as a whole in the north of the country operates in a political

landscape completely hegemonized by the right and the far right.

On the other hand, the support of the CNE is important but the leaders of this union are obliged to take account of the fact that the other professional union federations of the CSC are very far from sharing their viewpoint: they cannot then allow themselves to commit like Piron and his comrades. Also, in spite of the excellent collaboration between the CNE and the FGTB of Charleroi in the organisation of April 27, an old "anti-Papist" base subsists in the socialist union, which the social democrats tend to exploit.

Discordance of the times

Trades unionists in Charleroi are highly conscious of these difficulties. That is why they insist systematically on the fact that their initiative is a long term project, which involves a fundamental debate inside the trade union organizations. To fuel this debate, they have produced a pamphlet in 10,000 copies, in which they respond to eight questions concerning their approach. Tactically, the problem for them is to continue advancing concretely towards their objective — a new left wing political force — without isolating themselves by a premature initiative, notably on the electoral level. Indeed, the question is complicated because there is a social emergency and 2014 will see three simultaneous elections (European, federal and regional) which will be decisive for presenting an anti-capitalist alternative to social democracy and attempting to break its monopoly of the parliamentary representation of the left. That will be all the more important inasmuch as the objective of the PS and Sp.a is to win over the traditional Flemish right from the liberal nationalist NVA by showing that class collaboration remains the best means of imposing austerity, and that the latter can thus be imposed more surely in the federal context than by a new state reform which would threaten the country with institutional chaos. The prize for the social democrats is hold power, for four years — for all the

governments at all levels will henceforth be "de legislature" [7]..

At the same time that they give the maximum of concessions to the right, the PS and Sp.a mobilise the trade union bureaucracy to close ranks around the "useful vote" and the politics of the "lesser evil". They feel threatened on the left by the Parti du travail de Belgique (PTB-PVDA – Worker's Party of Belgium) and wish to avoid opposition to the neo-liberal policy that they will carry out during the next legislature being expressed inside Parliament. A formation of Maoist and Stalinist origin, the PTB-PVDA has succeeded in winning election to the communal councils of some working class areas where it has set up medical centres providing free health care. Some years ago, noting that they had not succeeded in making a breakthrough, they decided to change their image, and to a certain extent their strategy, so as to appear as less "extremist" and divisive of the left. At the same time, they improved their media operations. In spite of a few slips, this has succeeded. At the communal and provincial elections of October 2012, the party did well in several big towns in Flanders and Wallonia as well as in two communes in the Brussels conurbation. In Antwerp it obtained 7.96% (four elected representatives) and beat the Open VLD list (5.57 %, two elected representatives) led by the Justice minister, Annemie Turtelboom. In the Liege region, it won four seats in Herstal, five in Seraing (where it is now the second biggest party after the PS), two in Liege and one in Flémalle. In these two provinces, in particular Liege, its scores allow it to hope to cross the threshold of eligibility at the parliamentary elections.

Articulating the short and medium term

The question is posed of articulating the medium term combat launched by the Charleroi trades unionists and the short term electoral struggle against social democracy. The PTB, because of its success, bears a major responsibility here. Only it can hope to gain parliamentary representation. But it is not sure of doing so, because the pressure for

the useful vote will be enormous. The PS will dramatise to the maximum the threat of division of the country so as to establish itself as the last rampart protecting social security. In these conditions, the interests of the left and of the PTB would be that the latter makes a proposal which takes account of its legitimate concern to maintain its own existence, gains and visibility, while creating the conditions for a broad campaign, involving activists from other political currents, the associative world and the trade union left. Such a campaign would be a support to the Charleroi unionists and an encouragement to others who, while sharing their analysis, today hesitate to commit themselves. What will the PTB do? Follow the sectarian tradition which runs like a red thread through its innumerable political zigzags? Will it attempt to justify itself by reducing the appeal of the Charleroi unionists to the umpteenth attempt at unifying the "little left"? Or will it take the unprecedented opportunity to finally begin to contest social democratic hegemony at the very heart of the organised workers' movement, in the trade union base, by contributing to restructuring the latter around an anti-capitalist axis? In the short term, that is the key question.

As Felipe Van Keirsbilck of the CNE puts it: "The PTB represents something today. We salute it! And we salute also the proof that in the electorate there is an aspiration to a policy other than the micro-nuances of neoliberalism. Now, the scenario is not fixed in advance. If the PTB can consider that the political and historical stakes posed today in Belgium and Europe justify an opening (...) then (its) electoral victory in the communal elections could accelerate the constitution of a significant left force, democratic and ecosocialist, supportive of trade union mobilisations and radical in the sense that it defends the interest of the great majority of the population (...). Now the opposite scenario is also possible. The successes of the PTB can go to its head and let it believe that its campaigns of propaganda, albeit generally very well done, can bring it from 3 % to 5 %, then one fine day from 5 % to 7 %.

If that is the case, it would not take into account the historic urgency which faces us" [8].

The response to these questions is one of the major issues of the social and electoral calendar for 2013-2014.

ANTI-FASCISM

For a European antifascist movement before it is too late...

YORGOS MITRALIAS ·

The deepening and generalization of the crisis to nearly all European countries makes it now possible to apprehend not only the crisis's dynamic and characteristics, but also the priority tasks which a left that does not surrender and keeps resisting ought to take on.

1. That is why we could henceforth evoke a trend towards the "grecization" of –at least– the European south, insofar as countries such as Spain, Italy or even France, one after the other, find themselves confronted with a political scene that has been deeply and drastically changed, just like what has been going on in Greece for the last 2-3 years. To various extents, but in a clearer and clearer fashion, the pillar of their political system, say their traditionally prevailing two-party system, has entered a profound crisis (France, Spain) or more, is collapsing (Greece, Italy) in favor of often unheard of until those days political forces, belonging to both ends of the political scene. In no time, their two main (left and right) neoliberal parties, which had been keeping the power in turns –altogether, they used to gather 70%, 80% or even more of the votes–, have now started to decline or even decompose. They are no longer granted more than 50%, 40% or even 30% of the citizens' preferences.

2. Even though the classical right has suffered too, the consequences of the alienation of citizens mainly impacted the social-democracy. Social democratic parties are collapsing everywhere in Europe (Greece, Spain, Italy and France) and –a sign of the times– they're no longer capable of taking profit of the natural wearing out of the right when it's in power. They strongly decline even when they are in the opposition!

In fact, we are witnessing an unprecedented crisis of social democracy which bears all the characteristics of a... terminal one! The consequence is historic and cataclysmic: having lost one of its two legs, the two-party system, which used to ensure political stability and the smooth running of a system based on the changeover of political power between the neoliberal parties, hangs in suspense and has stopped functioning. Under these circumstances, the regime crisis is not far away.

3. We have to acknowledge that the European left is not in a state such as to embody the hopes of angry citizens who are deserting the parties that once used to prevail. Apart from Greece (Syriza), nowhere in Europe has the left got neither the credibility, nor the organized strength and social foothold, nor, above all, the capacity to inspire the masses that have been turning away from the main bourgeois parties while radicalizing their rejection of the established order.

The consequence of European's left powerlessness in facing the generalized crisis of the bourgeois domination system cannot be summed up to the prediction that the left will not take advantage of this cataclysmic crisis of capitalism. Alas! There is much worse to it. What is already looming on the horizon is that this historic crisis, along with the left's current powerlessness, could all too well lead to whole sections of a confused and disorientated society turning, in the end, to the far right or even neo fascist and neo Nazi forces in an attempt to express their anti system revolt!

4. Is this a mere working hypothesis? No, this is exactly what is happening in a continuously growing number of European countries. Now, it has nothing to do anymore with the "Greek exception" that has

seen the hatching and stunning development of the neo Nazi Golden Dawn. Now it is about a real far right tidal wave, or at least of the reactionary euro skepticism (Germany, UK), even in North European countries so far relatively spared by the debt crisis and austerity policies!

Even more important than the quasi generalization of the phenomenon is the fact that the far right is now operating a historic breakthrough in such a great country as France, which has always marked our continent's history. And even in countries where the far right remains marginalized (Italy, Spain, Belgium...), social crisis and political fragility are such that the situation might as well evolve in favor of the emergence of a far right force in no time, all the more taking into account the risk of contagion.

5. In fact, all the ingredients of an unprecedented since World War II political and social crisis are now put together in Europe so that we are getting closer and closer to the interwar period and its "devils", even though the world has gone through tremendous changes since the 30's...

However, similarities with the interwar period are not limited to the "objective" situation. Unfortunately, we see the "subjective factor", the non social-democratic left, displaying the very same incapacity than the left in those days to understand what is going on in the deepest layers of society, and to react accordingly. The conclusion has to be categorical: it is not the rise of the far right –however impetuous it may be– that causes fear. What is frightening and determines today's and tomorrow's tasks is rather the incapacity or impossibility for the left not only to resolve the crisis to its own profit, but also to stand in the way of this rising reaction and far right!

6. Supposing that the diagnosis is right, what should we do, provided that, of course, we rule out any passive and fatalistic attitude and choose to fight before it's too late? The answer seems obvious: we need to gather as quickly as possible all the available forces throughout Europe, Eastern,

Western, Northern and South, in order to start a long term fight against the rising far right, including neo fascism and neo Nazism.

7. In order to make sense and above all to be able to bring tangible results, this European antifascist gathering must be altogether unitary and radical, massive and democratic. Any sectarian approach, dividing rather than uniting, reveals a deep misunderstanding or understating of the gravity of the situation, which requires the constitution of a unitary front gathering all those, without any exclusions, who are willing to fight the brown plague. The lessons of the interwar period, those of Italy of the 20's and those of Germany of the 20's and the 30's are here to remind us that the shortest way to suicide for the workers' and socialist movement goes through its own sectarianisms and splits in front of the rising racist, fascist and Nazi far right.

8. In order to be able to inspire the antifascists and meet the peoples' expectations in these times of prolonged social war, this antifascist gathering has to be unitary as well as radical. Here we have not only to ascertain that the fights against the peoples' starvers and the far right are organically linked, since the far right supports –in ultimate analysis– the system and its economic foundations. Here we have to take into account the revolt, however confused and partial, of the victims of austerity policies against the system which generates them and the politicians who implement them. For it is the moderation of a certain left, perceived –understandably– as a kind of "softness" and a refusal to put into acts the left's fine words that makes the impoverished and desperate masses turn to fascists and other right extremists nearly everywhere in Europe...

9. This unitary and radical European antifascist gathering must imperatively be democratic as well, based on the citizens' self organization. Why? Because only mobilized citizens can fight and beat the far right and because the indispensable condition for their mobilization is that they themselves determine their fights, their goals and their forms

of action. In other words, they have to take over their fate.

10. But there is more than this. If we want to fight with some chance of success against the far right, we have to do so everywhere, constantly and above all globally, on every ground, without ignoring any battlefield. Because it is not only about confronting the storm troops, the militia and other racist and neo fascist gangs in the streets, but also facing the tremendous ravages caused in the minds and behaviors by the neoconservative counter revolution, the comeback of the worst racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti feminist and chauvinist reaction. And all this because the current rise of a mass far right does not fall out of the sky: it was prepared via the methodic poisoning of our societies by the selfish and anti-human "values" of the neo liberal, patriarchal and, finally, misanthropic and barbarous counter revolution.

11. In other words, nobody can claim to be antifascist as long as he is not in war against the pillars and the *raison d'être* of the far right, that is racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, chauvinism, sexism, as well as the worship of blind violence, machismo and intolerance. A political or other organization cannot practice a consistent form of anti fascism so long as it remains homophobic, jingoist, sexist, or even keeps making its militants goose-step parade.

So, who else than the directly concerned people – the citizens themselves- can give these everyday battles where they work, live, study, express themselves, build up relationships, love each other? The conclusion seems to be obvious: in order to be effective, anti fascism must not be the apparatuses' business. It has to be the business of self-organized citizens wherever they exercise their activities as social beings. An antifascism that would not attack

all the aspects of the ongoing reactionary counter revolution and would restrict itself to fighting only its epiphenomena would be already doomed to powerlessness.

12. However, be careful: given the extreme emergency of an already critical situation, the true dilemma is no more "to act or not to act" against the growing far right threat, but to decide and act quickly, as quickly as possible, for too much time has already been wasted in Greece –as well as in Hungary and elsewhere. Therefore, it's time to stop warning us saying that we must not let the brown serpent get out of its egg. Unfortunately, this warning is no more useful because the serpent not only has already left its egg long ago but it has become a monster parading in the streets and sowing terror at least in many European countries!...

Consequently, let's decide and act quickly! Being the result of an at least atypical initiative, the European Antifascist Manifesto* has the great merit of existing and forcing us to face our responsibilities. Time is no longer for the indecisiveness of the ones neither for the fatalism and the passivity of the others. It is not as well for the sectarianism of those who do not want to understand that only united we could be credible enough to inspire the antifascist will of the large citizens' masses. Now, it is time for antifascist unity and action, it is time for building the European antifascist movement. Today! Tomorrow could be too late...

Spain Campaign

Greece Campaign

France Campaign

Slovenia campaign

24 June 2013

USA:

The Shutdown Showdown – "Here lies the possibility of a genuine Constitutional crisis"

DAVID FINKEL ·

Don't worry about essential services, however, most importantly the work of minding the empire. Military operations are not affected — drones are flying, Cruise missiles remain on standby. The NSA's supercomputers are mining your emails and phone calls just as usual. You can feel as safe and secure as always, as long as the bridge you cross driving to work on the Interstate doesn't collapse...

For the most part, the short-term effects of a shutdown are inconvenient and somewhat harmful, but not visibly catastrophic. So how deep and long-lasting is this impasse — and the bigger one looming over the debt ceiling — going to be? It's not clear, but there are three essential points to keep in mind.

First, what's at stake: it's not about technical details in the Affordable Care Act (e.g. the medical devices tax) or a "one-year delay" in implementing the individual mandate. It's not about budget details, which are negotiable, but about issues of power, which aren't. Defunding "Obamacare" or delaying it a year (a delay which could obviously be repeated over and over) would cripple the Obama presidency beyond hope of repair. That's precisely why the racist-fuelled Tea Party is forcing the issue, and why the Democrats cannot give in even if they're ready to viciously slash Social Security and Medicare for decades to come.

Second, how to resolve it: in these circumstances, there appears to be no way out until the shutdown lasts long enough to begin doing visible economic damage. A government cannot function if a minority faction of one party permanently "blocks supply," i.e. chokes off essential funding. At some point, the Tea Party stranglehold over the

Republican Party — which represents, in the final analysis, the control of a handful of far-right billionaires over the politics of the U.S. capitalist class as a whole — needs to be broken, although this seems unlikely to occur immediately.

Ultimately, U.S. and global capital do not want to risk the consequences of a thoroughly crippled presidency in a delicate world financial climate. Wall Street might ultimately send a signal to John Boehner that he needs to get a Continuing Resolution without poisonous anti-"Obamacare" clauses up for a vote in the House of Representatives, with Democrats perhaps agreeing not to vote against Boehner if his Speaker's position is challenged by the Teapublicans. Such an arrangement would be a highly unorthodox case of "centrist extremism," but could become a ruling class necessity — and the threat of a split in the Republican Party might cause part of the Tea Party to tactically retreat.

Third, what comes next: it's possible that the budget showdown and government shutdown might vent the steam from a potentially more dangerous "debt ceiling" crisis that hits around October 15. The Tea Party's rage over "Obamacare" could slowly burn itself out in the shutdown, allowing the debt ceiling increase (which is the creation of a 1917 law enacted for the funding of World War I) to occur without too much fuss.

But that's not the current trajectory. Instead, the fights over the budget and debt ceiling appear to be combining to create a real tidal wave — and here lies the possibility of a genuine Constitutional crisis resulting from bourgeois political gridlock.

The fact is that a partial government shutdown can last for weeks, or even months, without truly devas-

tating consequences. A U.S. default, even a technical one where no actual bills are unpaid, can't. Not only the U.S. financial system but the world economy rests in large part on the safety of investments in U.S. debt. If the Republican Party imposes the kind of unacceptable conditions on raising the debt ceiling that it has declared on the budget Continuing Resolution – essentially demanding that the Obama presidency commit suicide – pressures will build on the president to take unilateral action to raise the debt ceiling on his own, relying on ambiguous Constitutional clauses declaring the president to be responsible for maintaining "the full faith and credit" of the United States.

Conceivably, Obama could declare a provisional lifting of the debt ceiling in lieu of Congressional action. Would that be illegal – really? More illegal than indefinite detention without trial at Guantanamo? More illegal than "extraordinary rendition" and torture in the War on Terror?

This scenario would put the U.S. political system in uncharted waters. The shame of it all is that the U.S. working class is essentially a passive spectator, even as people's real lives are damaged – when what's really necessary is mass action to shut down corporate capital.

October 1, 2013 [1]

Essf

GREECE

Golden Dawn under attack

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS ·

Contradictions among the ruling classes

First, the strength of the public reaction after the death of the antifascist rapper Fyssas, whose memory is already a living legend for many young people (U.S. rap groups have also begun to express their hatred of the Golden Dawn killers). Admittedly, the rally on 25 September was a victim of manoeuvres that can on this occasion be called sabotage: the call of the KKE (Greek Communist Party) to a rally elsewhere; the prior condemnation by the leadership of SYRIZA of any demonstration from the rally... Nevertheless, between fifteen and twenty thousand people gathered and the majority party set off on a demonstration to the headquarters of the Nazis. People demonstrated that day throughout Greece. The anti-racist movement saw that day the justification for its long day-by-day battle.

While many European politicians and business leaders followed with interest the use of this armed gang to try to rein in the anti-Troika and therefore anti-capitalist protests, part of the European bourgeoisie considered as unwelcome and even dangerous the growth of a para-state group which might later on make the traditional bourgeois parties regret having played with fire. The fact that Greece is due to take on the next presidency of the EU has apparently led to some pressure on the Samaras government in this regard.

The same contradictions exist among the Greek employers. Although it has been proved that the "hordes of horror" have been financed by industry and shipowners, and in some cases for a long time, the statement of the leader of the Greek employers after the murder of Fyssas sounded like an order to the government: to put Golden Dawn and SYRIZA on the same level is not only unacceptable but anti-democratic. Apart from the fact that there several

months ago there was a meeting a meeting between it and Alexis Tsipras, leader of SYRIZA, it seems that the leadership of the Greek employers refuses at this stage the development of a real mafia acting for itself and only partly for big business.

The reasons for the arrests

So on Saturday we had the pleasure - but also the anger, because it happened after so many well-known crimes - of seeing the Nazi leaders and several cadres of their party arrive at police headquarters, handcuffed and escorted by the anti-terrorist units. At the same time, let us not dream: one of the leaders, a psychopathic thug, was able to use his mobile phone while in custody to send instructions to his henchmen. Nevertheless, the charges on the basis of which the court has ordered the arrests are much more serious than just a publicity stunt by the Greek government to reassure its European colleagues. For three days, Greece has been discovering that this gang of killers is a veritable mafia (protection racket centred on shops, arms trafficking, exploitation of immigrants in various forms of commerce ...), and a real little terrorist organization: the anti-terrorist units are at present looking for the arms caches that this criminal network had begun to organize in the country.

And we can see another possible reason for the scale of the operation against the Nazis: the forces of repression had begun to be so infected by Nazi sympathies, with discreet training in military camps, that the government feared it might eventually lose control over the state apparatus! Without overestimating the real strength of this band of assassins - and of course the fact that the mainstream media has suddenly shifted from giving free publicity to Golden Dawn to adopting an almost anti-Nazi position that makes them dramatize the situation excessively - it is obvious that a dynamic was un-

derway, with the complicity of many police officers, that encouraged all the advocates of violence against workers and immigrants to believe that they had a free hand to do as they liked.

And now?

The question that could be posed, three days after the arrest of the leaders of Golden Dawn, is whether the government and the judiciary are determined to go all the way, and whether the killers who have been arrested will be given serious prison sentences. Knowing who Samaras is, with his far-right past, we may doubt it. The other question is whether Golden Dawn has received a mortal blow in terms of its organization. In the last two days, it was good to see that only 150 to 200 morons had responded to the call of the Nazi leadership to mobilize everywhere. The probability of the party being characterized as a criminal group opens the door to a possible ban on it, but for the moment its members of parliament are holding on to their positions and now want to provoke a political crisis ... on the pretext of their so-called fight against the Troika.

Over and above all the revelations, we must not forget the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, the murders or at-

tempted murders perpetrated against many immigrants and left activists, with at least 300 cases of assault waiting to be tried! We're talking about a criminal group, and all the cases that have up to now been hushed up must finally be tried.

Some of the reactions in popular neighbourhoods contaminated by the racist propaganda of the Nazis and the government make one thing clear: the battle of the workers' movement against the policies of the Troika is essential in order to organize the autonomous action of the movement, failing which it can fall under the influence of the Nazis. The construction of an anti-fascist movement on a massive scale is more than ever on the agenda; the roots of the evil are obviously the relentless destruction by the Greek and international bourgeoisie of any right to living conditions that are worthy of the name.

But beyond the mobilization of workers in Greece, faced with the rise of the fascist gangsters, fueled by the social policy of the European bourgeoisie - especially German and French - the responsibility of the European proletariat is crucial. Across Europe, the mobilization - the urgent need to coordinate - against the anti-working class plans and against the fascists is on the agenda!

ARAB UPRISINGS:

Syria between Revolution and Counter-Revolutions

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

TC: Could you assess the present state of the Arab uprising in general before we focus more specifically on Syria?

GA: What is happening now is a confirmation of what could be said from the start; the fact that what began in December 2010 in Tunisia, was not a 'Spring' as the media called it, a brief period of political change during which one despot or another is overthrown, opening the way for a nice parliamentary democracy, and that's it. The uprisings were portrayed as a 'Facebook revolution', another one of these 'colour revolutions'. I, for one, insisted from the beginning that this was a misrepresentation of reality. What started unfolding in 2011 was a long-term revolutionary process, which would develop over many, many years if not decades, especially if we take into account its geographic extension.

From that perspective, what we have had so far is just the opening phase of the process. In some countries they have managed to go beyond the initial stage of overthrowing existing governments; this was the case in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya – the three countries where the regimes were overthrown by the uprising. And you can see that these countries are still in a state of turmoil, instability, which is usual in revolutionary periods.

Those eager to believe that the Arab uprising has ended or was stillborn focused on the initial victory of Islamic forces in elections in Tunisia and Egypt. Against such doomsayers, I stressed the fact that this was actually unavoidable since elections held shortly after the overthrow of the despotic regime could only reflect the balance of organised forces that existed in these countries. I argued that the Islamic fundamentalists' period in power would not last long, if we consider the real roots of the revolutionary process.

This long-term revolutionary process is rooted in the social reality of the region, characterised by many decades of stalled development – a higher rate of unemployment, especially youth unemployment, than in any other region in the world over several decades. These were the real basic causes of the explosion, and as long as these causes are not addressed, the process will continue. Any new government which has no solutions to these root problems will fail. It was predictable that the Muslim Brotherhood would fail: in my book *The People Want*, which was of course written before Morsi's overthrow in Egypt, I argued that the Muslim Brotherhood would fail inevitably.

I wrote the same about Ennahda in Tunisia, which is now faced with a very strong protest movement that puts the future of the government in question.

So there is an ongoing process throughout the region, which, like any revolutionary process in history, has ups and downs, periods of advances and periods of setbacks – and sometimes ambiguous periods. The most ambiguous event in the whole process until now has been the recent experience in Egypt where we saw this huge mass mobilisation against Morsi on 30 June, which was a very advanced experience in democracy by a mass movement asking for the recall of an elected president who had betrayed the promises he made to the people. But at the same time, and here lies the ambiguity of course, you had the military coup and widespread illusions that the army could play a progressive role, including amongst dominant sections of the broad left as well as amongst liberals.

TC: So how does your analysis of the situation in Syria today fit into this overall framework of what is going across the region?

GA: There can be no doubt that what started in Syria in 2011 is part of the same revolutionary process alongside other countries. It is part of the same phenomenon and driven by the same basic causes – of stalled development, of unemployment and particularly youth unemployment. Syria is definitely no exception – in fact it's one of the most acute cases of social and economic crisis in the region. This came as a result of the neo-liberal policies implemented by the Assads – father and son, but especially by the son since he came to power a dozen years ago after his father's death.

Syria is a country which has seen massive impoverishment over the last decade, especially in the rural areas; the level of poverty has been rising and reached a situation where almost one third of the population were below the national poverty line, with unemployment on the rise. On the eve of the uprising the understated official figures for unemployment were 15% overall, and more than one third for young people between 15-24 years.

All this was taking place against a background of huge social inequality, a very corrupt regime – where Bashar Assad's cousin became the richest man in the country, controlling – it is widely believed – over half of the economy. And that's only one member of the ruling clan – all members of which were gaining huge material benefits. The clan functions as a real mafia, and has been ruling the country for several decades.

This constitutes the deep root of the explosion, in combination with the fact that the Syrian regime is one of the most despotic in the region. Compared to Assad's Syria, Mubarak's Egypt was a beacon of democracy and political freedom!

So it was no surprise that after Tunisia and Egypt, Libya, Yemen etc., Syria also went into the movement. And it was no surprise likewise, for those like me who were familiar with the character of the Syrian regime, that the movement could not achieve what it achieved in Tunisia and Egypt through mass demonstrations.

What is specific to this regime is that Assad's father has reshaped and reconstructed the state apparatus, especially its hard nucleus – the armed forces – in order to create a Pretorian guard for itself. The army, especially its elite forces, is tied to the regime itself in various ways, most prominently through the use of sectarianism. Even people who had never heard of Syria before know now that the regime is based on one minority in the country – about 10% of the population; the Alawites.

With a military that is completely loyal to the regime, any illusion (and there were many illusions in the movement at the beginning) that the regime could be overthrown merely through mass demonstrations was false. It was in a sense inevitable that the uprising would turn into a civil war because there is no way to overthrow a regime of this nature without a civil war.

In the history of revolutions, peaceful revolutions are actually the exception, not the rule. Most revolutions, if they didn't start with a civil war like the Chinese revolution, led very quickly to civil wars like the French, the Russian, etc.

This said, the Syrian regime is but one of the counter-revolutions that are facing the Syrian uprising, even though it is by far the deadliest. A second counterrevolution is constituted by the Gulf monarchies, the main bastion of reaction in the whole region. These monarchies reacted to the Arab uprising in the only way they could, especially given that their godfather, US imperialism, was not in a position to intervene as a counterrevolutionary force against the uprisings. They tried therefore to co-opt them, to recuperate the movement. And for the Gulf monarchies, this meant striving to turn social and democratic revolutions into movements led by forces which are no threat to them ideologically. That goes for the Muslim Brotherhood which was heavily backed by the Emirate of Qatar as well as for all sorts of Salafists – from the 'moderate' to the jihadists – backed by the Saudi kingdom or various Wahhabi-Salafi networks in the Gulf countries.

These monarchies have done their best to help and promote the outcome that is in their interests within the Syrian uprising; that is turning the democratic revolution – which would be a threat to them – into a sectarian war. Here you have an actual convergence between them and the first counterrevolution – that is the regime.

At the beginning what you had in Syria were demonstrations, like everywhere else in the region; organised and led by young people, networking through the social media, very brave mobilisations with clear social, democratic and anti-sectarian demands. But from day one the regime claimed that they were led by Al Qaeda, exactly like Gaddafi pretended in Libya; in both cases, that was a message addressed to the West. They were saying to Washington: 'Make no mistake – we are your friends, we are fighting the same enemy, we are fighting Al Qaeda, so you shouldn't stand against us, but support us instead'.

The Syrian regime did more than waging a propaganda war – it let jihadists out of its jails in order to boost the development of this current within the uprising. In the Syrian opposition there is a very widespread belief that that the Al Qaeda groups are infiltrated and manipulated by the regime. This is not a farfetched view actually – there is some level of involvement for sure, even if no one can tell how much.

Then, there is still a third counterrevolutionary force working against the Syrian uprising: it is of course the US – and I would add Israel. The US is counterrevolutionary in the full sense of the term with regard to Syria as it is in relation to all other countries in the region. Washington does not want any state to be dismantled. It wants what it calls 'an orderly transition'; power changing hands but within a basic continuity of the state structure. In Washington and London, they keep talking about the 'lessons of Iraq' and explaining that they were wrong to dismantle the Ba'athist state. 'We should have kept that state and just removed Saddam Hussein, and if we had done so we wouldn't have faced so much trouble.'

You may ask: what about Libya? Well, before the fall of Gadhafi, I wrote a long piece explaining that NATO's intervention in Libya was an attempt to co-opt the uprising, to steer it and manage it while they were involved in negotiations with Saif al-Islam, Gadhafi's son, who was seen by the West as the good member of the ruling family. They wanted him to get his father to step down in his favour which would have very much suited Washington, London, Paris and the rest. But of course the Libyan uprising went beyond that when the insurrection in Tripoli led to the collapse of the whole regime.

For Syria, Washington very clearly says – even during the recent crisis over chemical weapons – 'We don't want the regime to be overthrown, we want a political solution', what Obama also called a 'Yemen solution' one year ago. What did happen in Yemen? The President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, after one year of uprising, handed power with a big smile on his face to the vice-president and remained since then in the country where he still pulls many strings. This is just a mockery, a real frustration for the radical forces in that country. That's also why it is far from over in Yemen, even if you don't hear about it in the news here in the West. The movement is going on in Yemen, as it is in Bahrain and all over the region.

It is this sort of solution that the USA wants for Syria. It doesn't want to intervene militarily like it did in Libya. The recent flare up was because Washington felt under pressure, with its 'credibility' at stake after Obama had set down his 'red line' regarding the use of chemical weapons. But even when they were contemplating strikes, they explained that they would be very limited strikes which would not affect the balance of forces. The *New York Times* ran a long article reporting that Israel wished exactly the same: limited strikes that wouldn't alter the balance of forces within Syria.

Western powers would not lend substantial support – especially military support – to anyone, for they have no confidence in any force among the opposition. As the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff, Martin Dempsey, put it in writing: 'Syria today is not about choosing between two sides but rather about choosing one among many sides. It is my belief that the side we choose must be ready to promote their interests and ours when the balance shifts in their favour. Today, they are not.'

TC: You didn't mention Russia when you talked about counter-revolutionary forces. Would it be accurate to describe them as the fourth column in this case?

GA: I didn't mention them because they are obviously a key force propping up the Assad regime. In that sense, Putin's Russia is part of the first column, not a fourth one.

TC: Is it not true that their involvement has not only an important material effect through their supply of arms to Assad but also an important ideological one in that they disorient some who you would expect to support the uprising?

GA: In the final analysis, the Syrian uprising has very few friends. Even amongst people that one would expect to be friendly to revolutions you can see some hostile attitudes, people taken in by the propaganda of the Syrian regime which portrays the whole uprising as jihadist as well as that of Moscow. And some people look to Russia as if it were still the Soviet Union, even though in terms of its political and social character the United States appears as rather progressive compared to what Putin's Russia is: an authoritarian government, wild capitalism, a flat income tax rate of 13%, robber barons, and so on. There is much more ground to consider Russia as an imperialist country than an anti-imperialist one.

As for those who believe that the Syrian regime is 'anti-imperialist', they just ignore the history of this regime and the sheer opportunism on which it bases its foreign policy. Assad's Syria intervened in 1976 to crush the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese left in Lebanon and prevent their victory over the Lebanese far right. In the 1983-5, it waged or backed wars against the Palestinian camps in

Lebanon. In 1991, the Syrian regime fought the war against Iraq under US command; it was part of the US-led coalition; from the 1990s until 2004, the Syrian regime was the protector of the neoliberal pro-US Hariri government in Lebanon; and during all these years, the Syrian border has been the quietest and safest of all Israel's borders. So there is no sense in which the Syrian regime can be described as 'anti-imperialist': it is a very opportunist regime which does not hesitate to switch sides and alliances in order to further its own interests.

TC: Could you say something about the balance of forces within the Syrian opposition?

GA: From reports by friends whom I trust and who have visited all the areas controlled by the opposition, the two Al Qaeda groups represent no more than 10% of the fighters, while the Salafists probably represent about 30%. This leaves a majority of forces acting under the Free Syrian Army (FSA) banner, although part of them are also Islamic-leaning. This is the outcome of the fact that the main sources of funding for Syrian anti-regime forces have been Islamic and based in the Gulf, from the monarchies to various religious networks. That's talking about the armed groups – as for the popular resistance, in their vast majority people are not interested in any kind of Islamic state but in the democratic and social aspirations which have been the objectives of the uprising since it began.

TC: Could you say something about how the resistance organises and what its main demands are?

GA: The resistance is very heterogeneous. During the first months of the uprising, the original leaders were, as indeed they were everywhere else in the region, mostly young people networking through the internet. They organised themselves through local coordination committees (LCCs) and elaborated a progressive programme: democratic, anti-sectarian, and secular-oriented. Overall a clearly progressive set of demands, which you could not fail to support if you are on the left.

The second stage was the constitution of the Syrian National Council (SNC) – abroad. This is a major difference with Libya where the National Transitional Council was formed inside the country and recognised as legitimate by most of the Libyan uprising, although even there, there were some problems. The SNC was formed abroad by people who had no real role in the leadership of the uprising itself, but had connections. It was created with the interference of Turkey, and that of Qatar. The Emirate funded the SNC, especially the Muslim Brotherhood who were and are still an important component of this official opposition in exile.

But in the same SNC you could find people who belong to the Syrian left like the People's Democratic Party, which originates in a split from the Syrian Communist Party. And the LCCs themselves got represented in the SNC and recognised its leadership of the opposition. Here again one can agree with the bulk of the SNC's programme from a left-wing point of view – it is democratic, anti-sectarian and broadly secular-oriented. Of course we could say it is not social enough but this is not at a radical left leadership, to be sure.

The SNC has now been superseded by the Syrian National Coalition. It remains basically a coalition of forces whose range is similar to that of the forces that were involved in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings. One shouldn't forget that in Egypt a well, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists were there, in the uprising, along with liberals and the left.

Then with the militarisation of the struggle, the mutation of the uprising into a civil war which happened progressively from the autumn of 2011 on, we have seen the emergence of hard-line Islamic jihadist groups including two groups working under the banner of Al Qaeda with differences between them, and Salafi groups. Of the two Al Qaeda affiliates, one has mostly fighters coming from outside Syria and the other is mainly Syrian and there are tensions between them. There have been increasing clashes between the FSA, the armed wing of the official opposition, and the Al Qaeda groups.

It is reassuring to see the hard-line jihadists being more and more rejected by the mainstream opposition but one also understands that the latter cannot wage a war on two fronts – they already have enough problems with the very unequal balance of forces between them and the regime. Unfortunately there is no left wing presence in the armed struggle. The radical left in Syria is anyway very marginal. And the broader left has not tried to organise separately within the FSA.

TC: How have the opposition responded to the regime's attempt to portray them as sectarian?

GA: They have responded in various ways – through statements and proclamations, banners in demonstrations, using the names of Alawite or Christian or Druze figures from history for their Friday mobilisations, etc.

The fact is that there is no possible comparison between the sectarian killings that have been carried out by the regime and its shabbihas – its militias – who perpetrated most mass sectarian killings, and sectarian killings by anti-regime forces. The latter are mostly perpetrated by the jihadists, whom I consider as another counterrevolutionary force.

Of course there are wild reactions from people with poor political consciousness reacting in a sectarian way to the regime's brutality. Well, what do you expect? This is not an army of Marxist intellectuals facing the regime; it is a popular uprising, and without a political leadership able to educate the people. So there are sectarian actions on the part of the opposition in reaction to the massive sectarianism of the regime. We had the same in the Lebanese civil war with much higher symmetry in sectarian killings between both sides – if that were the criteria, everyone should have equally rejected both sides in the Lebanese civil war.

Of course we should denounce all sectarian acts whenever they happen – and they are actually denounced by the opposition and the FSA. But we shouldn't fall into the trap of ignoring the difference in scale between the regime's mass sectarian

killings and those perpetrated by anti-regime forces.

TC: What is the relationship with the Kurdish struggle?

GA: Both the regime and the opposition courted the Kurds at the beginning. The regime did this because it didn't want the Kurds to join the uprising, and the uprising did so because they wanted to get them on board. The SNC included in its programme the recognition of minority rights – not to the extent of acknowledging the right to self-determination – but then that's not even a unanimous demand of the Kurds in Syria, though of course I would be strongly in favour of defending this right.

The Syrian Kurdish movement seized the opportunity and took control of the Kurdish areas. The dominant force amongst the Syrian Kurds is linked to the PKK, which is dominant in the Turkish-controlled part of Kurdistan and has cultivated links with the Syrian regime over the years. But the Kurds are not directly interfering in the civil war; they are busy controlling their own area, establishing de facto autonomy like what happened in Iraq. I could hardly imagine they would lose this in the future – so that's an achievement for them. They keep some distance from the civil war apart from clashes with the jihadists every now and then.

TC: How would you describe the situation in the areas controlled by the FSA? Clearly the humanitarian situation is a disaster but how would you describe it politically?

GA: Yes the humanitarian situation is definitely appalling. In many of the areas where the opposition

has taken over and got rid of the Ba'athist state, we have seen the creation of local democratic committees, with some form of election. This is definitely positive, but it is somewhat normal when the authority disappears in a locality to try to organise something to replace it. One shouldn't portray such committees as 'soviets' or anything like that – that would be completely over the top. These structures can represent an interesting potential for the future, but for the time being they are but measures of self-organisation in order to replace a vacuum of power created by the collapse of local state agencies.

TC: How would you sum up what the left should be doing with regard to Syria?

GA: It is really important to come out in solidarity with the Syrian uprising and not to be shy about it. If we believe in the right of people to self-determination, if we believe in the right of people to freely elect whoever they want, then even if we had an uprising where Islamic forces were leading, this shouldn't change our position – as it didn't for example with Gaza and Hamas, or with the Iraqi resistance which I would remind people was far more under Islamic control than anything you have in Syria.

For all these reasons I think that it is very important to express solidarity with the Syrian revolution, to build links with the progressives among the Syrian opposition, to counter the regime's propaganda as well as that of Moscow, and to denounce Washington's and the West's complicity in the crime against humanity that is perpetrated in Syria.

Socialist Resistance

Feminism on the offensive: a pro-life manifesto

SANDRA EZQUERRA ·

Although we as feminists have defended ourselves against these Sibylline accusations of egoism and/or infanticide, coming from the propaganda machine of the Catholic Church and its secular followers, we should recognize that our attempts at questioning the defence of life as the exclusive instrument of the Right have so far produced very few results. As "anti-choice" as they may be, the anti-choice activists are known by everyone as "pro-life", and as pro-life as it may be, the feminist movement is still identified as "pro-abortion".

However, apart from its calculated polarization, this logic is wrong. Feminism defends life. And it always has done. And that is why at a time when the paragons of traditional morality come out of their burrows to attack once again freedom and the right to decide, in a context where the cuts and the caverns combine to resurrect the vision of women as submissive and full of abnegation, it is more than ever necessary from a strategic perspective to assert feminism as being profoundly pro-life and to get rid of the semantic corset that is being imposed on us from outside.

A feminist pro-life manifesto does not only strengthen the demand for women's freedom and autonomy as key elements of women's struggle: it also allows us, at a time when the Right is back on the offensive, criminalizing us and robbing us of our rights, to assert and substantiate our re-appropriation of life as emancipatory path and guiding principle. Here is a first draft:

A question of rights...

1. Feminism defends the right of women to terminate their pregnancies in a safe manner. As the

World Health Organization stresses, the prohibition of abortion only serves to increase maternal mortality; today, on a world scale, 47,000 women die each year because they terminate their pregnancy in a clandestine way. Thirteen per cent of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortions and the majority of cases occur in countries with restrictive legislation on abortion.

The number of voluntary terminations of pregnancy does not diminish when legislation is harsh; on the other hand, the number of dangerous abortions increases. It is out of respect for the memory of all those women who, while trying to exercise their right not to have a child, have found themselves in unsanitary situations, have risked their lives or indeed died, that feminism is pro-life.

2. According to the UN the term "clandestine and unsafe abortion" refers not only to risks to the health and the lives of women, but also to the negation of their right to information, to life and to freedom. Thus, this type of abortion does not just represent a health problem; it is first and foremost a question of human, social and economic rights.

The many obstacles that prevent women from accessing abortion in a free and equal way - for example the fact of having the means necessary to travel and/or pay for a discreet private clinic, their age, place of residence, country of origin or administrative position - are not only patently hypocritical, they are also discriminatory. If all of these barriers still exist in the present legislation of the Spanish state concerning abortion, they will increase if the Popular Party carries out its threat to reform that legislation. It is because it is determined to eliminate these barriers that feminism is pro-life.

3. The main factors that promote the reduction of unwanted pregnancies and abortions among young

women are the increased use of contraceptives, better access to information and better sexual and relationship education: all that has been demanded for years by the feminist movement.

In spite of the fact that this same Right that calls us "anti- life" is opposed to our young people having safe, free and intelligent sexual relations, it is necessary and urgent to create and transmit a model of sexuality that is rewarding, mature and safe. We will not succeed in doing that by hypocritically advocating abstinence or by silence, but rather by ensuring that young people's choices are increasingly based on information, freedom and mutual respect. It is by its firm defence of the prevention of unwanted pregnancies - and therefore, of abortions - on the basis of the transmission of values of equality and autonomy that feminism is pro- life.

... for everyone, men and women!

4. In his delusional crusade against women's right to choose, the minister Gallardón threatens to make the present legislation even more restrictive than it was in 1985 and he proposes suppressing the criterion of foetus malformation as a reason for abortion. He does so with the argument that all those people who have been born or are "about to be born" with any kind of disability must have the same rights as other citizens.

As feminists , we can already wonder how the right-wing forces at the head of and in the shadow of the government have the impudence to proclaim themselves heroic saviours of a section of society to which they deny any kind of dignified existence through their measures of austerity and privatization in the services, programmes and other forms of support to people with limited autonomy. Is the Popular Party not rather seeking to create a situation where it is families, and women in particular, who take sole responsibility for those that the PP forces to be born, but in whom it loses interest from the very first minute of their lives? The same families and the same women that they drive into poverty because of their fraudulent rescue of the banks and their destruction of the Welfare State? It

is by its firm denunciation of this imposture which pretends to defend social rights from Monday to Thursday while destroying them by their decrees just before the weekend, that feminism asserts itself, today more than ever, as pro-life.

5. The Popular Party not only forces women to become mothers against their will, it also prevents many other women, who want to be mothers and feel prepared for it, to actually become mothers. It does this through the defense of forced sterilization of people with psychic disabilities, despite the opposition of social organizations and the recommendations of the UN. It does so by opposing before the Constitutional Tribunal marriage between people of the same sex, because it considers that only the heterosexual family is the "natural" framework for raising children (sic). And it does so by preventing women living alone and lesbians from having access to public services of medically assisted reproduction in order to have a child without the direct intervention of a man.

The government thus divides women into "good" and "bad" mothers, good and bad women, and it decides who can start a family and who cannot. Gallardón says that motherhood makes women really women, but he forgets to make it clear (such forgetfulness!) that he is only talking about those women who have an adequate sexual orientation, who want to form the correct type of family (nuclear, heterosexual, etc...) and who do not have any kind of mental disability. Only the God of Rouco Varela (Archbishop of Madrid and president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference) knows what might happen if we allow children to be brought up among "queers" and "dykes" or if we guarantee that persons with physical handicaps will have full autonomy in decisions concerning their bodies and their sexuality. It is, finally, in its determination to defend the rights and freedoms of all people, and to do so from Monday to Sunday, that feminism is pro-life.

A more just and a freer society

Feminism is pro-life because its *raison d'être* is to build a more just and a freer society, one which places welfare and common good at the centre of everything; a society which does not condemn its poorest, youngest and most vulnerable women to bleed to death because of a clandestine abortion; a society which does not aspire to domesticate people's bodies and their lives and to force them into moralistic little pigeon-holes; a society that educates its young people in principles of reason, responsibility and truth, so that their actions will not have negative impacts on themselves or on other people; a society that integrates, cares for and gen-

uinely respects people with functional diversity: that accepts freedom for all human beings to make decisions concerning their feelings and their desires and that does not say one thing and do another.

Nevertheless, it is the prohibitive and anti-choice discourse that has the advantage today. We do not have much time: new attacks are being prepared. Let us take to the streets, let us take back possession of what is ours and go on the offensive. Feminism, today and always, is pro-life.

Sandra Ezquerra is a sociologist and a feminist activist.

GREECE

"Crush the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn, overthrow the Samaras government and the austerity plans"

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras and the coalition government of New Democracy and PASOK have been forced to attack the neo-Nazi organisation Golden Dawn, after having waited a very long time in a criminal manner.

The factors which have forced it to make this U-turn, because we all remember that until yesterday their tactic was to cover for the neo-Nazis, are obvious.

There was first the blood of Pavlos Fyssas. His murder was a very serious major event. It touched and moved the majority of workers and youth. It was an incident which could not be swept under the carpet as has been the case with hundreds of deadly attacks against immigrants, which were downplayed with the participation of the bourgeois parties, the state apparatus and the mass media.

There was the anti-fascist, anti-racist movement. The anti-fascist demonstrations which broke out immediately after the killing threatened, against a background of strikes and of social anger, to create a new front of struggle against the government.

There was the fact that, at the political and social level, Samaras had his back to the wall. He had to deal with the teaching strike and the perspective of a renewal of the strike of hospital employees and municipal workers. He had to implement new austerity measures and sign a new memorandum on this subject following the demands of the troika and creditors. The political base supporting the government was crumbling. Golden Dawn began to question the hegemony of New Democracy inside the right wing social bloc. The leadership of New Democracy was criticised within its own party and also by the media favourable to it.

It was these factors that finally led Samaras to attack Golden Dawn. He was forced to attack the neo-Nazi party which until yesterday was treated as a "brother party" by his main advisors, in the context of their strategy of reorganising a right wing social bloc as a mass anti-worker, anti-strike, anti-left current.

The movement of resistance of workers and youth, and especially of the anti-fascist and anti-racist movement, should exploit this governmental operation to bring pressure with the aim of concretely and definitively crushing the neo-Nazis. In order to attain this objective, it is very important to dismantle the links established by the Nazis inside the police, army, legal system, church and big business which have financed Golden Dawn.

The demand to have clarity in all areas is a precondition for defending and advancing democratic rights and popular liberties for the working class and popular masses as a whole.

There is a public debate underway where we should stress one element, the Nazis don't have the right to claim democratic rights. That is because they use them and wish to use them to form political military forces which act in the shadows, in the most anti-democratic manner, against immigrants, against whoever is "different", against the trade unions and against the left. This mortal threat, whose nature has been proven by, among other things, the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, has no right to hide behind the "fig leaf", as they themselves call it, of democratic rights, rights that we have gained through our combats in the years following the fall of the military junta.

During this period, we should not forget, as the media wish us to, the overall picture, the background

of all the political developments residing in the brutal attack of the dominant class and the creditors and the austerity policies with the aim of crushing the social gains of the workers, popular masses and youth.

Samaras and the ND, Venizelos and the PASOK seek to pose as guardians of democracy, so as to obtain the political strength they need to impose a new memorandum. That is why they continue to use the ignoble tactic of attacking the "two extremes", which until yesterday gave legitimacy to Golden Dawn by putting it on the same foot as the left and more specifically SYRIZA. The criminal threats of the government against the residents of Chalkidiki and against the administrative staff of the universities who are on strike should alert us to this. We should not allow the reduction of the actual democratic rights of the social majority in struggle in the supposed name of democracy.

Because of all this, the new strategy which has been promised is very dangerous.

In the name of isolating Golden Dawn, there is an effort to create "political unity" of all parties so as to establish the famous "constitutional arc". All left currents should avoid this trap. The fight to isolate the Nazis and the struggle to effectively liquidate Golden Dawn form an integral part of the fight to cancel the memorandum and defend the workers and their social rights against the austerity policies.

The great victory against the Nazis will be the victory against the right wing bloc and against the pro-austerity forces. That will be a political victory of the left, which will prepare the way for a socialist emancipation of society.

That is the direction to which we should firmly commit ourselves, demanding today the real and complete crushing of the neo-Nazis.

CHILE

Looking back at popular power 1970-1973

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

You have just published two books on the Chilean experience from 1970-1973. It was probably the last great experience of an attempt to reform capitalism, and we know of its terrible ending. During this experience, there was not only a governmental policy but also a popular mobilization. Can you talk about this popular experience?

The point of reviewing this period is to see how — as in all the great sequences of revolutionary upheavals — there was a phenomenon of transcendence of the big parties, trade union federations and political leaderships. In the specific context of what the Chilean parliamentary left called "the institutional road to socialism", there was a transcendence of the legal and political framework. The gamble by Allende and the coalition which won the elections in 1970 was precisely the possibility — in the midst of the Cold War — of a peaceful or "legal" transition to socialism, different from both the USSR and the armed struggle (as in Cuba). A transition envisaged as gradual, by stages, respecting the Constitution of 1925 and the existing state, a state which was supposedly "flexible" enough to integrate radical reforms. He also gambled on the armed forces being "constitutionalist", that they would respect universal suffrage and the electoral result. These strategic gambles of the "Chilean road" were denounced by the revolutionary left of the time, the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) notably, as "bourgeois reformist". And it is precisely the institutional framework (when the Popular Unity coalition remained in the minority in parliament) which would be progressively overtaken by the dynamic of the class struggle, by the workers' movement, even if this workers' movement remained very broadly framed by the two big

governmental parties — The Chilean Communist Party (PCC) and the Socialist Party (PSC) (to which we should add the Christian Democrats who had a real trade union base). There was then a contradictory, dialectical dynamic between the government and its mobilized social base, between the big parties of the parliamentary left and their activists; the political and trade union leaderships who from 1972 onwards little by little were overtaken by the dynamic of the social struggles and by the forms of self-organization — still embryonic — in the poor neighbourhoods (*poblaciones*), in the workplaces, known as "popular power".

What does it take for the workers, the people in general, to mobilize and begin to act by themselves, at a given moment? How do we get to that point?

It should be remembered that Popular Unity came to power not simply in the context of a given election, but that this electoral victory was the product of a rising tide of social mobilization since the mid-1960s. Allende's election as president came in the context of collective mobilizations. For example, those of the Committees of Popular Unity (CUP), which were supposed to then be transformed into something more than electoral committees. Some 14,000 committees were created, mobilizing tens of thousands of activists. Allende's election as president in 1970 was not the end of struggles, it was the extension of struggles. Workers used the election of Allende not to wait for what he would do, but to accelerate their mobilizations, especially by strikes and factory occupations. We see for example the increase in the number of "illegal" strikes, which would accelerate again in 1971-1972, to the extent that the bourgeoisie and the big right wing parties understood that it was also on the economic level, on the terrain of the class struggle, that the move-

ment which accompanied Allende had to be fought. So the response was not to rely uniquely on the president — even if he remained of great importance to the great majority of workers until the end. The workers and trades unionists thought that it was necessary to defend the government, but above all through the process of transformation, with the tools the workers had: factory occupations, street demonstrations, self defence of neighbourhoods, and so on.

One of the big projects of the Allende government was the constitution of the "area of social ownership" made up of nationalised companies. There was nationalisation — and expropriation without compensation — of immense copper mines, then in the hands of the big multinationals and of imperialism, nationalisation of the big industrial monopolies — 91 — of the banking system. But numerous employees were not included in this social area which also envisaged an original system of co-management and participation. The latter then said: "we also want to join this nationalised sector, we want the right to participate, to benefit from better wages, to no longer depend on the boss and so on" and thus, in the name of the first measures taken by the government, they set about going beyond the narrow legal framework of the reforms proposed by Popular Unity, to occupy their workplaces to force their nationalisation.

Did this phenomenon of "popular power" begin in the sector which had not been nationalized?

There was a combined dynamic. The big workers' bastions (in manufacturing for example), integrated in the nationalised sector, gradually began to criticise the limits of the system of co-management proposed by the government and the main trade union federation, the CUT: the state nominated a director and there was a system of co-management with workers' representatives and "production committees". In some of these enterprises, where there was a strong presence of the left wing of Popular Unity, of the PS in particular [1], or the MIR, unionists began to question and deepen the

system of co-management. At the same time, in the enterprises which had not been nationalised, the request for integration became ever stronger. It was expressed through pressure on the government — demonstrations, barricades in the big peripheral main roads of Santiago — or, very often, by factory occupations denouncing employer abuses. These "tomas" also took place increasingly in reaction to the attacks of the bourgeoisie and far right. The moment of the qualitative leap was October 1972. In the superb documentary film *The Battle of Chile*, Patricio Guzmán called this moment "The insurrection of the bourgeoisie" — it's a good image: there was then an employers' lockout on a mass scale, a blockade of the country by the lorry drivers union (financed directly by the CIA) supported by the liberal professions. The limits and weaknesses of the legalism endorsed by Allende emerged clearly for many activists; the government seemed paralyzed — it began then to call on the military to maintain "order" and try to resolve the problem. The response of the workers was to occupy many enterprises — in some the workers initiated partial and transitional forms of workers control — and help the fuel supply of the surrounding neighbourhoods, creating forms of alternative public transport and so on. Here we see the emergence of the so-called "industrial cordons", horizontal or territorial coordinations essentially located in the big peripheral roads of Santiago but also existing, in a lesser sense from Arica in the north (in the electronics sector) to Patagonia (Punta Arenas) via cities like Concepción or Valparaíso. Hence throughout the country, the same phenomenon of self-organisation and territorial coordination which surged from below, thanks to the work of trades unionists and activists.

How did these "industrial cordons" function?

There were several dozen coordinations in Santiago. There is a historiographical discussion on the figures, but several tens of thousands of employees were involved (around 100,000 at the national level). I worked for several years in Santiago on the press, carrying out dozens of interviews, but

it remains difficult to establish the exact number of these structures, for some were very active and others only exist "on paper", in left propaganda. It was nonetheless a significant phenomenon, even if it remained a minority one, but it involved key sectors of the economy and very active fringes of the union and political field.

The most powerful of these industrial cordons was that of Cerillos-Maipú, in the most industrialized area of Santiago (with 250 enterprises and thousands of workers). Its linear territorial organization is very clear, because the enterprises were built along road and rail axes. As I explain in my book, there was thus a "cordon in itself", existing objectively in the geography of the town, which led to a "cordon for itself", a mobilized organization, emerging from the self-organization of the working class. In Maipú, a great number of medium sized enterprises, which were not integrated in the area of social ownership, were union bastions of the MIR and the left wing of the PS (which was very dynamic). From June 1972, thus before the great crisis of October, this industrial cordon began to organize. That indicates that this form of organization was latent inside the working class and that explains how during the October crisis these organizations multiplied.

These cordons generally emerged from the initiative of left activists and trades unionists. In the most mobilized enterprises, they were the fruit of genuine workers assemblies, which elected one or two delegates to the industrial cordon assembly. My investigation on the ground indicates however that we should relativise the image of a "Chilean soviet" because these were only embryonic forms of dual power (as understood by Lenin or the Bolivian Marxist Zavaleta Mercado) — which also explains in part the rapidity of the coup d'état. The cordons often found it difficult to go beyond the defensive and transitional stage, because of the majority political orientations of the left, of inter-partisan conflicts inside the enterprises and the problems of communal and national coordination. These meetings were open to all but in general it was essential-

ly party activists and left trades unionists who were involved.

Were these assemblies a form of transcendence or development of the popular unity committees, or something different?

Something very different, because the popular unity committees were in decline from 1971, in the absence of political orientation from the Popular Unity leadership. The cordons were then genuinely anchored in the industrial working class, they demanded workers' control, the acceleration of reforms, while defending the government against the bourgeoisie. They entered into contradiction with the CUT, which had a weak territorial organization. The cordons thus made up for this organisational deficit.

How did the workers' assemblies function in a factory? Was there a general meeting of all workers or only a part of them?

It's a much differentiated story, factory by factory. A monograph study has been done on the big textile factory Yarur by the historian Peter Winn [2]. Yarur, a working class bastion where the level of organisation was such that these were real assemblies where all the workers came, discussed politics, the orientation of production in the factory, but also the class struggle at the national level, participation in the cordon, the limits of the governmental left or Allende's institutional road and so on. In other factories, it was more limited and the assemblies only involved the most organised and conscious workers, often those belonging to the left wing of the PSC. According to the political geography in the factory, there was not the same dynamic. For example, a study realized at the time in more than 30 enterprises confirms that where the Christian Democrats or the PCC dominated the level of participation was much weaker, it was the union bureaucracy that gave the line and the construction of the cordons was not a priority [3]. We see the basic role played by the PCC in the period to channel, to "moderate" but also rein in these initiatives from below which went beyond the framework of the

CUT and the stageist orientations of the government. The PCC first condemned firmly the industrial cordons as a division of the workers, a "leftist" or "adventurist" initiative, whereas it was however the cordons which in October 1972, then in June 1973, in the great moments of crisis, allowed Allende to remain president. Here we see clearly the role of whole sector of Popular Unity, in particular the PCC because of its union implantation, in reining in the initiatives of self-organization and what I call "constituting popular power" for this undermined the negotiations underway with the Christian Democrats in parliament. On the contrary, the left wing of the PS, the revolutionary Christians, the MIR called for "advancing without compromise" and "creating popular power" without this being however followed by concrete actions. Between propaganda and action, there were sometimes many gaps!

What was the rate of unionisation in 1970-1973? And the influence of the political parties?

The rate of unionization was very different according to the sectors. In the public sector, unionization was virtually obligatory, thus the rate of unionization reached more than 85%! In the private sector, unionization was significant — around 20 % — according to the sector. The CUT was hegemonic and fundamental for the mobilizations, but it didn't represent all the union movement, since in the small and medium enterprises there were numerous unions not affiliated to the CUT, because of the labour code. The CUT had around 700,000 members in 1970 (of a population of 9 million). Inside the federation, there were three main currents: the PCC — very strong, structured and disciplined, strongly marked by Stalinism (it had more than 250,000 members) which was the main support for Allende; the PSC, much more divided, with a strong left wing capable even of calling for an insurrectional general strike, more inter-class in nature (around 180,000 members) and we should not forget the Christian Democrats, the second biggest trade union force. The far left was then above all

the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), which was very new (formed in 1965), marked by the theory of "prolonged people's war" and faced with the hegemony of the big workers' parties, inserted in the most marginalized sectors of the working class, which were less controlled, indeed abandoned, by the CUT, with around 10,000 to 15,000 very active militants and a broader circle of sympathizers. There were also small organizations like the PSR (Revolutionary Socialist Party) or the Liga comunista which was then recognized by the Fourth International. The more the limits of the Allende project appeared and the possibilities of a legalist transition entered into crises, the more the influence of the MIR led by Miguel Enriquez developed, in particular inside the left of Popular Unity. The MIR policy oscillated then between a critique of Allende's "reformism and bourgeois legalism" and attempts at an alliance with the PS left. The MIR even for a time provided protection for Allende.

In the debate you led at the NPA's summer university a Chilean comrade stressed that inside the structures of popular power, which in practice went beyond the Popular Unity project, the great majority of workers were at the same time "Allendistas". How do you explain this situation, of advance practice combined with ideological submission?

Until the end Allende remained for the great majority of the workers' movement "the comrade president", a symbol much beyond the electoral level. He even had an increasingly strong influence on Christian Democratic workers, who saw that the government had taken measures favouring employees — increased wages, nationalisation of copper, participation and workers' co-management. The charismatic aura of Allende was not challenged up until the end, despite the limits of his programme or the illusions on the "constitutionalist" armed forces. The dialectical contradiction is that popular power developed in the name of the defence of the government, but on the basis of demands specific to the workers... which went beyond this same gov-

ernment, like all other parties. For example, the slogans of the industrial cordon Cerillos y Maipú of 1972, was for the extension of the nationalized sector, some demanding a constituent assembly and the closure of the "bourgeois parliament", echoing the Concepción popular assembly of May 1972, fuel supplies under popular control, and a political intervention in the army to expel the reactionaries. They thus had demands going well beyond the framework that Allende had fixed, but it was always in the name of the objectives of the governmental left. Witness also the letter to "comrade president", on September 5, 1973, from the provincial coordination of the industrial cordons of Santiago (contained in the book "Venceremos"), which said in substance "if you do not have confidence in the masses, if you continue to hesitate and seek parliamentary alliances with the Christian Democrats or to integrate the military in the government, you will be responsible for the cold massacre of the working class". But it was still a request that Allende show stronger support for the forms of popular power. That also highlights the fact that the so called "rupturist", revolutionary sector — the MIR, the left wing of the PS and the radicalized Christian sectors — had not succeeded in proposing an alternative project to Allendism, to the strategy of a legal, peaceful transition to socialism. Twice, Allende integrated the highest command of the armed forces into his government, including alongside the top leaders of the CUT, also made ministers. It was Allende who made Pinochet head of the army in August 1973, persuaded that he was a "legalist". And it was the army which was given the task by Popular Unity of assuring fuel supplies or "controlling" the circulation of arms, which allowed it a year before the coup to surround the factories and evaluate the resistance.

If the MIR activists were right on a series of things — they predicted the coup more than two years in advance, they stressed the need for political work among the soldiers as well as the need to strengthen the forms of popular power — this revolutionary organization was not able to present a national po-

litical alternative in the eyes of the broad masses, which could have changed the course of history.

Can you say more about the Concepción popular assembly?

Divergences accumulated within the left, following the permanent attempts by Allende and the CP to find agreement with the Christian Democrats so as to continue to legislate and consolidate their model, while the left — an essential point — was in the minority in parliament. Faced with this, there was a rise in social struggles which made the local and regional sectors of the PS, and MAPU — radicalized Christians who had left the Christian Democrats — and the MIR call to accelerate things, to "advance without compromise", to break with the state and the dominant order. Following big demonstrations in May 1972, a popular assembly took place in Concepción called by trade union and social organizations, neighbourhood committees, and all the left except for the Communists. The assembly called for the unification of the forms of popular power. Sometimes, a posteriori, we have seen here a kind of popular dual power. In reality, this was a big deliberative assembly, of alert, on the part of the left of Popular Unity and the far left, more of a questioning of the government than of dual power. At the beginning it was to be a debate between parties, but the trade unionists and social activist imposed their voices, on the contradictions of the period, criticising their political leaderships and so on. The assembly was immediately denounced: by the PCC as leftist manoeuvre, manipulated by imperialism, and by Allende himself as a dangerous division for the popular government.

You have talked about industrial cordons. There were also what have been called "comandos comunales". Can you say how they differed from the cordons?

The comandos comunales were essentially a demand of the MIR and certain sectors of the left of Popular Unity. They were supposed to group, beyond the working class, all the dominated sectors of the popular classes, the "poor of the town" as the

MIR put it, the students, small traders, and the peasants. This was to be a pre-figuration of future revolutionary communes. That was the theory, defended in particular by the MIR. In practice, we see that it was difficult to go beyond the stage of an organization of the so-called "marginal" urban sectors, the *pobladores* and the problems of fuel supply in these neighbourhoods. The lack of a link between working class and these important fractions of the social movement was another difficulty for this revolutionary process: how to build the unity of this social camp which was very heterogeneous and had separate historic practices? The left of the PS on the contrary wished to give priority to the cordons. Often this debate reflected the different social insertion of the parties: the PS was very strong in the industrial cordons and the working classes, the MIR, which had a weak industrial insertion, had developed commandos comunales, based on the

poor neighbourhoods, as in Nueva La Habana. A posteriori, we can analyze this as an erroneous orientation of the MIR, which always wanted the industrial cordons — the most advanced form of constituent popular power — reintegrated in the CUT, because in its conception the comando comunale was the true form of popular power. Indeed what really functioned were the industrial cordons, at least in Santiago and some medium sized towns... Of course we should also analyze what happened in the countryside, but that is another debate and that means more research. Whatever, the MIR did not grasp fully the need to centralize, coordinate these industrial cordons, which were among the "lost treasures" - to paraphrase Hannah Arendt – of the Chilean revolution ... and which, 40 years after the coup and the repression, deserve to be brought out again so as to draw the lessons for the future.

PORTUGAL

Government defeat and high abstention in Portuguese municipal elections

LUIS BRANCO ·

Despite its victory, the Socialist Party has lost 170.000 votes since the last municipal elections in 2009 and also the symbolic capitals of Alentejo province (Évora and Beja) and the 5th municipality in the country, Loures (Lisbon suburb), reconquered by the Communist Party. The PCP was the only party immune to the strong abstention that went up from 41% in 2009 to 47% last Sunday. The weight of mass emigration (mainly young people) is certainly an important explanation of this growth in abstention.

The Left Bloc failed its top objectives for this election: it was defeated by a 500 vote margin in Salvaterra de Magos (a small town where it had one mayor) and also in Lisbon, where the national coordinator did not get elected to the mayor's council (by only 52 votes). The Socialist Party had its biggest victory ever in the Portuguese capital (51%). Nationwide, the Bloc elected 8 city council members (one less than in 2009) and 100 assembly members (37 less than 2009) and was unable to re-

sist the abstention boost and the polarization between PS and PSD in some cities or PS and PCP in others. [2]

Nevertheless, it had an important role on some citizens' lists in Coimbra or Braga and in a broad coalition in Funchal, that won the mayoral race and was determinant in defeating for the first time in 38 years the ruling authoritarian power of Alberto João Jardim in Madeira island.

On the electoral night, prime-minister Passos Coelho said that austerity will continue as planned, despite the historic defeat of his party. The next weeks will bring the protest back to the streets, with two big demonstrations set to October 19th and 26th, the first by the CGTP trade union in Lisbon and the other by the citizens' movement "Que se Lixe a Troika", in every big city.

With more austerity cuts and the troika's second bailout on the right wing's agenda after their electoral defeat, the political pressure will increase to bring down the government and have early elections in the next months.