

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV477 October 2014

SYRIA

**A review of the origins and development of the
revolutionary process (part 2)**

ISRAELI STATE

**Zionist Left support for the bloody assaults on
Gaza signifies its erasure from Israel's political
map**

DOSSIER

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

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TUNISIA

The question of power in the revolutionary process

DOMINIQUE LEROUGE ·

If one adopts such a definition, the period in Tunisia between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011 has undoubtedly been a revolution. The wave started by the youth in impoverished regions of the interior of the country was quickly relayed by trade unionists often themselves closely linked to various associations. The result was the UGTT trade union federation coming out in favour of the struggle against the regime. Faced with the extension of the movement, Ben Ali was abandoned by critical sectors of the Tunisian bourgeoisie and imperialism. All this made it possible for Ben Ali to flee after 29 days with a relatively limited cost in human lives.

2011: An unfinished revolution

But the enthusiasm accompanying the beginning of this process has contributed to hiding two major weaknesses:

- A reduced self-organization;
- The inability of the left to propose an alternative policy.

This dual limit has made possible a rapid blocking of the revolutionary process by politicians from the former regime, as symbolized by the accession of a former minister under Bourguiba, Beji Caïd Essebsi to the post of Prime Minister on February 27, 2011.

In this framework, the bulk of the state apparatus remains unchanged, as well as the economic and social policies in force under Ben Ali. As Fathi Chamkhi, a member of the national leadership of the Front Populaire, writes: "bringing down the dictatorship is one thing, overthrow of the regime is another". In autumn 2011, the balance sheet drawn

by some of those who made the revolution smacks of bitterness: certainly, freedom of expression and organization have been established, but gradually the same policies are reappearing and there is no improvement in the living conditions of the population.

During the elections of October 23, 2011, half the population abstained (including many youth and potential left voters). Simultaneously some voters from the popular classes turned to the Islamists of Ennahda.

Installation of the Islamist regime

Following the elections of October 2011, the government headed by Ennahdha took office on December 24, 2011. Two small parties also participated in the government [2], hence the name of troika which was given to it.

For just over two years, Tunisians have faced:

- A creeping Islamicisation of society, with particularly attacks against the freedoms and rights of women;
- A use of mosques as a place of political propaganda and recruitment for the most extremist currents;
- A systematic infiltration of the state apparatus by Ennahdha;
- An acceleration of neoliberal policies;
- The development of state and para-state political violence through Islamist militias.

Three major political alternatives are emerging:

- 1) Essebsi proposes to return to power after the next election. He founded the party Nidaa Tounes for this purpose early in 2012, in which are found many veterans of Ben Ali's party as well as other activists from the centre or even the left;
- 2) The Front Populaire, constituted in October 2012, wants to be an alternative to Ennahda and

Nidaa Tounes. But the Front does not constitute a concrete immediate perspective: on the one hand, its approach does not rely on a process of self-organization, on the other it has limited forces, is not homogeneous and often has a hesitant approach.

3) The UGTT is not a candidate for power. It wishes however to compel the government of Ennahdha to relinquish power peacefully. On June 18, 2012, the UGTT proposed the search for a broad consensus between all political forces to achieve this.

Since none of these three possibilities is in a position to constitute an immediate alternative, the Islamists have had a free hand to tackle the popular resistance, the UGTT and the left:

- In November 2012, the police suppressed the popular uprising in Siliana [3];
- On December 4, 2012, the national headquarters of the UGTT was attacked by Islamist militias;
- On February 6, 2013 Chokri Belaid, one of the main leaders of the Front Popular, was assassinated;
- On July 25, 2013, Mohamed Brahmi, a second national leader of the Front, was also murdered.

The departure of the Ennahdha government is an immediate requirement

The assassination of Chokri Belaid, on February 6, 2013, had already highlighted this slogan. But, Ennahdha had finally managed to benefit from it. Certainly, Prime Minister Jebali had ended up resigning on February 19, but on March 13, another Ennahdha leader was appointed. Result: the previous policies continued to apply.

Faced with the incompetence of the government and the dissatisfaction of a growing part of the population, the Tunisian bourgeoisie began to wish for a departure of Ennahdha from power. The same went for the major imperialist powers who decreed at the end of June a financial embargo on Tunisia. This development was strengthened with the coming to power of President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt on July 3, 2013.

Following the murder of Mohamed Brahmi on July 25, 2013, Ennahdha found itself completely isolated and its immediate departure from power was supported by a very broad majority within the Tunisian population. It remained to be known what force could replace the government headed by the Islamists.

A power based on the self-organization of the people is not specifically on the agenda:

- Even after the murder of Mohamed Brahmi, no popular committee was really set up;
- The Front Populaire remains a heterogeneous force, hesitant and of limited size.

As for the more structured forces:

- Unlike in Egypt, the army is not a candidate for power,
- The same is true of the UGTT.

Faced with the absence of any other practical alternative, two groupings successively emerged:

- The first was formed on the morning after the murder of Brahmi under the name of the Front de salut national (FSN – National Salvation Front). It brings together the essential political parties opposed to Ennahdha - including Nidaa Tounes and unfortunately the Popular Front, as well as various organizations, including the UGET, the PDU and the ATFD [4]. The NSF wants to impose both the resignation of the National Constituent Assembly and the departure of the government, to be replaced by a provisional government which would take a series of emergency measures including the struggle against Islamist violence and the organization of the next elections.

- The second grouping is formed by four organizations, hence its name of the "quartet": the UGTT, the Tunisian League of Human Rights, the Order of Lawyers and the employers' federation UTICA.

Unlike the FSN, this "quartet" wanted the replacement of the Islamist government to be a "government of technocrats" resulting in a "national dialogue" between all the forces, including Ennahdha,

in continuity with what has been proposed tirelessly by the UGTT since June 18, 2012.

To achieve this, the quartet made a step in the direction of Ennahdha by not requesting the resignation of the national constituent assembly. But the latter in return must finish writing the new Constitution and vote on it before the end of the year. On October 5, 2013, after multiple delays, Ennahdha eventually decided to accept the demands of the "quartet". The FSN then gradually fell asleep.

Political outcome of the "national dialogue"

On January 26, 2014, the new Constitution was finally passed by a national constituent assembly where Ennahdha held 41% of the seats. Contrary to what had been long feared, this Constitution did not represent any regression compared to that previously in force:

- No reference to Islamic law (sharia);
- No challenge to the legal status of women (Code of Personal Status).

Better, some advances are contained in the new Constitution, for example freedom of conscience, with a ban on religious authorities making it possible to physically eliminate someone by characterising them as an apostate (takfir).

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On January 20, the government Ennahdha gave way as planned to the government of "technocrats". Most of the new ministers were very much related to international financial institutions and multinationals. They accelerated neo-liberal policies, and the international financial embargo was lifted.

Other symbols of the desire to ensure continuity with the past:

- The new Prime Minister Jomaa participated in the previous government,
- The former minister of the interior maintained his post,
- The Minister of Religious Affairs is a notorious Islamist,

– A former Ben Ali supporter received the portfolio of Justice, human rights and transitional justice.

The Front Populaire said: "The government of Jomaa is a government in which we refuse to vote the confidence. This government is not our government, even if we do not call today for its fall". The measures on which the new government had been mandated have been gradually implemented: police and military actions against Islamist violence, challenging of some partisan appointments in the administration, political neutralization of many mosques, and organization before the end of 2014 the legislative and presidential elections.

Elections in autumn 2014 and their possible consequences

The legislative elections will be held on October 26, 2014 and the presidential poll on November 23, 2014. As regards the legislatives, a poll published in July 2014 indicated the following trends [5]:

- A significant decline for Ennahdha, who nevertheless remained in second place with 22% of the votes (against 37% in 2011),
- A relative stagnation of the Front Populaire at 7%, which kept it in third place,
- In these conditions, Nidaa Tounes led with 45% of the votes.

If the vote reflected this poll, the government elected would be therefore led by Nidaa Tounes. Three orientations are imaginable for this party:

- Either limit itself to winning back an increasing number of veterans of the party of Ben Ali,
- Or revert back to its previous game of alliances by linking up with the parties of the centre from which it has distanced itself recently [6].
- Or be the pivot of a broad coalition including Ennahdha, a solution that seems to be favoured by at least some Western governments.

Whatever the formula, Nidaa Tounes and the great powers consider the period opened in late 2010 as a simple parenthesis that it would be appropriate today to close. The conditions seem to have been met

for a neoliberal stabilization of Tunisia, rid of its dictatorial and Mafiosi aspects of the Ben Ali period.

It remains to be seen whether those who have been the driving forces of the revolution will be in a position to mobilize effectively against such a policy which makes no response to two of the main watchwords of the revolution of 2011: social justice and dignity. Faced with the constant deterioration of the material conditions of existence of the population, the attitude of the UGTT will be decisive:

- Will it avoid confrontation with the new government as well as the employers with which it has allied for more than a year to force Ennahdha from power?

- Or will it make defence of the interests of employees the heart of its activity, as many of its activists demand?

We also await knowledge of the situation of the Front Populaire in the aftermath of the elections. Inasmuch as it is possible to rely on polls available

in early July 2014, the electoral weight of the Front seems to have changed little since its proclamation on October 7, 2012:

- It has never exceeded 10% in the polls, even after the assassination of two of its leaders,

- The Front scored three times less than Ennahdha and six times less than Nidaa Tounes in the July poll.

- The Front Populaire could nevertheless have more than twice the number of deputies than the total obtained in 2011 by the organizations which formed it.

The post-election period will be a crucial period for the Popular Front. It should articulate:

- Its action within the institutions,

- Its ability to be useful to the development of the inevitable and necessary social struggles,

- The clarification of its orientation and its project of society,

- Its construction as an organization.

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC TOUSSAINT

"Alexis Tsipras is right to call for an international conference on debt"

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

• Manuel Valls and Matteo Renzi are asking for more time to reduce their countries' deficits, offering in exchange reforms that would make their countries more competitive. Is this a real challenge to the European austerity consensus? Can this bring about some advantages?

I think their request will be refused. The European Commission wants to continue to apply its brutal austerity policies over the whole of the European Union, in particular to the peripheral countries (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the central and eastern European countries), but also to countries like France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany. If the French and Italian governments managed to persuade the European Commission to abandon austerity policies, that would be welcome, but it's impossible. Even as they are making these requests to the European Commission, Mr. Hollande and Mr. Renzi are keeping up the pressure on the labour market, making it more precarious. In Italy, for example, Mr. Renzi is attacking the remaining social achievements that Mr. Berlusconi failed to destroy. What's more, we know that the Valls government in France is favourably inclined towards the big corporations, banks and insurance companies.

• Alexis Tsipras has called for an international conference for the abolition of the debt of the Southern European countries that are affected by the crisis, similar to what was done for Germany in 1953, when 22 countries, including Greece, cancelled a large part of the German debt. Is this a realistic possibility today?

This is a legitimate demand. Unlike Nazi Germany, Greece has not caused any conflict on European soil. The Greek people can strongly insist that the Greek debt is illegal or illegitimate and should be cancelled, just as the German debt was in 1953. [3] However, I don't think that SYRIZA and other European political forces can convince the European institutions to get together around a table to do the same as was done for Germany in 1953. Although this request is legitimate, and this is why I have supported the Tsipras candidature to the Presidency of the European Commission [4], it will not be possible to bring the governments of the main European economies and the EU institutions to the table on this agenda.

The experience of the last ten years has shown that unilateral sovereign acts can get results. The creditors that reclaim the payment of an illegitimate debt and impose violent measures that attack fundamental human rights, including economic and social rights, must be refused. I think that Greece has strong arguments for forming a government that would have popular support for working in this direction. Such a popular leftist government could establish a debt audit committee that would include a large popular democratic participation. This audit committee would unilaterally suspend repayments and finally repudiate the part of the debt that it identifies as illegal and/or odious.

• In Greece, SYRIZA is topping all the polls and several of its leaders have declared that any debt negotiation will be done within the Eurozone context and will not be a unilateral decision. What do you have to say about this?

Yes, I know the official SYRIZA position. Personally, I try to show that another way is possible. It's clear that most of the Eurozone governments and the ECB will not agree to an important reduction of Greek debt. So, in spite of SYRIZA's willingness to negotiate, I think it will be impossible to come to terms with all. This requires a more radical approach - there is no other possibility - just as was done by Iceland after 2008, Ecuador in 2007 – 2009 and Argentina between 2001 and 2005.

Since then, those governments have made a series of mistakes and abandoned their radical positions. This why they are in great difficulty today, as is the case of Argentina, that I have recently visited. The Argentine parliament has passed a law that means Argentina must, from now on, act in a sovereign fashion in the management of its debt. It was agreed to create a Congressional Audit Committee that will sit for three months; we will see whether this does come about.

• You have said that reducing public debt is necessary, but not sufficient to bring the EU countries out of the crisis, that other strong measures will be necessary in different sectors. Can you, briefly, tell us more?

First of all, nationalize the banks - I prefer to use the term socialization. I think that the Greek banks, and the banks of other countries, should become public and be put to the service of the population, in a framework of strict regulations imposing the rules and the objectives fixed by the population. Controlling the circulation of capital is also essential, in particular that made by the big financial institutions. I am not talking about remittances of 1,000 or 2,000 euros, but large sums, which would require authorization by controlling authorities, without which a guilty bank would be sanctioned by heavily dissuasive fines and the revocation of its banking licence. This measure must be seriously applied. It would be a protection for ordinary users

who make reasonably-sized international transfers of money. Tax reform is also very important: reduce taxes paid by the majority of the population and greatly increase, on a progressive scale, those imposed on the richest households and international companies, whether national or foreign.

• And for Greece?

SYRIZA made interesting propositions during the 2012 elections. If there is a SYRIZA government the unjust laws (in particular, those that abolished collective bargaining between labour and employers) that were passed under pressure from the Troika must be repealed. Other necessary measures would include: radical tax reform favouring social justice and redistribution of the country's wealth; the abolition of the most unfair taxes paid by the poor and increased taxation of the rich; an audit of the debt and the repudiation of the part identified as illegal and/or odious; socialization of the banks and control of the movement of capital.

• As Naomi Klein has said, "Neoliberal capitalism is fundamentally at war with life on Earth". Recently, hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets in many countries to protest against climate change. What does this mean?

This very important because, worldwide, more and more people are becoming aware that we are facing global problems: global inequalities damage the climate, push people to migrate, and cause wars. International protest movements are fundamental and essential. Nevertheless, they need to be strengthened. I am impatient to see greater, and stronger, worldwide mobilisation of the peoples.

Translated from French to English by Snake Arbusto, Vickie Briault and Mike Krolkowski.

The original Greek version is available here : <http://www.efsyn.gr/?p=245093>

Translated by Christian Haccuria, from Greek to French.

SOUTH AFRICA

On the crisis in COSATU

When Cosatu was born in 1985, the federation brought together many different trade unions with different organisational, political and administrative cultures and traditions.

From 1981, it took four long hard years to emerge from the unity talks with the establishment of the largest federation in South Africa in December 1985.

The Cosatu we formed, over its 29 years of existence, has grown and been united, by the following values:

1. Cosatu is an independent, fearless and democratic trade union federation: it confronted the Apartheid regime and survived! Cosatu is shaped and had existed premised on the following key and core values;

a. Cosatu is a revolutionary socialist federation.

b. Cosatu is an anti-imperialist federation: it fights against foreign capitalist domination.

c. Cosatu rejects all forms of cultural, male chauvinist and racist prejudices and discrimination.

d. Cosatu is a militant federation.

e. Cosatu is a transformative federation.

f. Cosatu is a champion of working class democracy.

g. Cosatu believes in working class power, and advocates worker control not only of the progressive trade union movement, but of society as well.

h. Cosatu believes in the revolutionary power and unity of the working class which is why it champions the formation of one union in one industry and one federation in one country.

2. The crisis in Cosatu comes about as a result of the class struggle between those inside and outside Cosatu, who would like to dilute and destroy the traditional values of Cosatu as set out above, and those who want Cosatu to retain all these values, i.e. an independent, militant, revolutionary, socialist oriented, anti-imperialist, worker controlled and democratic organisation.

The failed National Democratic Revolution and the global crises of Capitalism

The negotiated settlement and the post 1994 period have seen the abandonment of the Freedom Charter (FC) and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and their replacement with the Growth, Employment And Redistribution (GEAR) neoliberal macroeconomic framework.

We have seen, from 1994 onwards, the adoption of right-wing neoliberal capitalist social and economic policies in defence of South African white monopoly capital and imperialism.

Combined, all these have made it impossible to undo our colonial economy and society, which the SACP in 1962 characterised as Colonialism of a Special Type – a situation in which the coloniser and colonised live side by side, in the same geographical space.

The negotiated settlement and the neoliberal capitalist policies have entrenched the social and economic dominance of white monopoly capital and imperialism, in post 1994 South Africa.

In 2012, in the ANC Mangaung Conference, despite twenty years of evidence of the disastrous failures of GEAR, the ANC revised and renamed GEAR and adopted it, now as the neoliberal National Development Plan (NDP).

There is no doubt that the world is experiencing the most severe crisis of capitalism.

The so called Washington Consensus has completely been discredited as can be seen in the 2007/8 global financial capitalist crises. Despite this most obvious evidence, however, the South African government led by the African National Congress continues to follow the same old neo-liberal policy prescriptions of the Washington Consensus, with all the disastrous social and economic results this entails.

All economic policies since 1994 have been incapable of defeating South African Colonialism of a Special Type and the effects of Apartheid Capitalism which condemned the South African Black working class to a life of extreme misery and hardship.

Internally in the ANC, doors are closed to any possibility for a radical transition, as undemocratic practices have become the order of the day, whenever radical policies are demanded by the working class.

As for the SACP, more especially after 2009, it has effectively abandoned its vanguard role, and lost any claims to be leader of the struggle for socialism in South Africa.

It is this brutal reality which made Numsa to conclude that, post 1994, the deepening levels of poverty, increased levels of unemployment and extreme inequalities – all of them are clear symptoms of the continuing capitalist colonial nature of our economy and society – they serve as clear evidence that the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as the most direct route to Socialism, is completely off track, and in fact has been abandoned in favour of a capitalist post-Apartheid South Africa.

In December 2013, Numsa decided to hold a Special Numsa National Congress, and took its historic resolutions among which was the decision not to support the ANC in the 2014 elections.

We decided to break with the alliance and we resolved to form a United Front and explore the pos-

sibility for socialism in South Africa. We took all these historic decisions precisely because we realised that the South African working class clearly needed a political organ of their own committed to socialism both in its policies and action.

In December this year, 2014, we are launching the United Front.

To better service our members, to defend and grow our union, we adopted a Service Charter for ourselves.

A. Numsa SNC Resolutions and Cosatu

We wish to dispel the myth that in its Special National Congress Numsa took resolutions at variance with Cosatu policies and resolutions.

On the "Movement for socialism":

In the last 6 congresses of Cosatu, going back to 1997, Cosatu has clearly resolved:

- To set up a United Front: Cosatu called it "a broad popular movement for transformation around common struggles on issues facing the working class"
- To explore a Movement For Socialism: Cosatu called it "a popular movement towards socialism".

Numsa is today merely doing what Cosatu has desired to do all this time!

On the United Front:

In the 6th Congress Cosatu said: "COSATU should initiate a broad popular movement for transformation around common struggles on issues facing the working class..... It should be seen as a home for popular mass formations that currently lack a common agenda and programme". That is clearly a call for the formation of a United Front!

In the 8th Congress Cosatu said: "COSATU should initiate talks with a broad range of progressive social movements in an attempt to strengthen the hand of the working class and communities as a whole, provide leadership, and bring them into our fold....Differences in tactical approach should not prevent the Federation from its key mission of unit-

ing the working class, defending it and deepening democracy." Only a moron of a very special type would not recognise the United Front in this position!

In the 9th Congress Cosatu said: "The working class must mobilise society and all progressive forces against the current macroeconomic framework... We must bring back the fundamental thrust of the Freedom Charter and the RDP on nationalisation of key and strategic industries". It is impossible to achieve this without some United Front coming into existence!

In the 10th Congress Cosatu said: "We are committed to rebuild a broad coalition of social forces united by the common objective to build a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa." There it is: "a coalition of social forces" is a "United Front" by another name!

In the last Congress, the 11th Congress in 2012, Cosatu said: "We, the workers gathered here today, pledge to embark on a united and radical programme of action to realise workers legitimate demands, and to engage our communities and the broader democratic movement, to support us in these efforts." What more must we say?

What our detractors fear is the mighty power of the united working class united and working together with their communities. We are forging ahead to implement a long standing resolution of Cosatu – to build a United Front of social forces united behind the banner of the Freedom Charter and against neoliberal capitalism!

B. One Industry One Union – Cosatu's "Founding Principle"

We have done our homework on the matter of the founding principle of Cosatu of "one industry one union". Our work has revealed that virtually all Cosatu affiliates at some factory, industry or sectoral level do organise across industries and therefore stray into other affiliates areas.

Further, we have established the extent of constitutional amendments to Cosatu affiliates' constitutions in order for affiliates to extend their scope. More than half of all Cosatu affiliates have at one point or another extended their scope. Many have done this several times in their existence.

It is an established fact that several Cosatu affiliates have not only expanded their scope and strayed into other Cosatu affiliates' factories, industries and sectors, but we know as a matter of record and fact that some have actually extended their scope to allow them to organise along value chains, in the process straying into other Cosatu affiliates well recognised and established areas of organizing.

The principle of "one industry one union" is a noble persuasive and aspirational ideal for Cosatu, it has never been the basis for either admission into Cosatu or cause for dismissal, should a union, once affiliated, flout this principle.

Why then this extreme and negative fixation on Numsa's extension of scope and resolution to organise along value chains, when this has been going on in Cosatu for all of its 29 years? The reason is not difficult to find: the forces of darkness and capitalism who are very terrified of the organised socialist power of the working class are fishing for any possible constitutionally justifiable cause to expel Numsa from Cosatu.

Further, Numsa has grown to such an extent that it has now become an open threat to the dominance of right wing leadership of traditionally large unions, who are now in terminal decline because of their leaders' anti-workers, anti-members behaviors and politics. These unions' elite and plainly reactionary leaders are determined to eliminate Numsa from Cosatu, in order for them to continue to use Cosatu for their selfish personal and right wing political purposes.

C. Our Marxist-Leninist understanding of the crisis in Cosatu

During Numsa's 27 years of existence, we have been inspired and unwaveringly determined, in our

theoretical and practical work and engagement with Cosatu to:

- Defend and protect the integrity of constitutional decisions of Cosatu.
- Defend and advance the revolutionary socialist traditions and trajectory of Cosatu.
- Prevent the conversion of Cosatu into a lame duck federation, labour desk or toy telephone for anyone.
- Defend and protect the revolutionary leadership of Cosatu.
- Defend the unity of the federation at all times, being mindful that such working class unity is always born and grown out of shared struggles and campaigns of the working class, and not in boardrooms.
- Defend the revolutionary basis of the ANC led alliance, the Freedom Charter.
- Ultimately, defend Cosatu itself from being destroyed!

We must remind the Numsa membership and the broader South African public that the SACP General Secretary at the 13th SACP National Congress preempted Numsa's dismissal from Cosatu when he said;

"There is a small, but lingering, phenomenon in the trade union movement that of wanting to deliberately cause strain and divide the labour movement from the SACP and the ANC. We must intensify ideological work to expose and defeat this phenomenon within the ranks of COSATU and the progressive trade union movement."

Consistent with our Marxist-Leninist theoretical, philosophical, ideological, political and cultural traditions, Numsa in its December 2013 Special National Congress correctly analyzed the history and class causes of the crisis and paralysis in Cosatu.

We found the following to be the real causes of the crisis and paralysis of Cosatu:

a. The pursuit of Capitalism and the failure of the Alliance to pursue consistently a radical National Democratic Revolution (NDR) after 1994 are at the

heart of the crisis in Cosatu today. In our view, the struggle for freedom, justice and democracy in South Africa cannot be achieved without the popular democratic forces advancing a socialist oriented National Democratic Revolution.

b. It is important to understand the significance of the socialist orientation, traditions and socialist orientated revolutionary culture of Cosatu because the crisis in Cosatu today is in fact about whether or not Cosatu should continue to be a socialist trade union federation or it should simply become a yellow capitalist federation of the workers or a labour desk of the bourgeoisie.

c. It is evidently clear that those within Cosatu that have been advocating the idea of a rupture in Cosatu are correct. There is an irreconcilable rupture among the leaders of Cosatu! In our view, this rupture in Cosatu is between forces of capitalism and forces of socialism, among the leaders of Cosatu. We make this correct statement confidently because we have seen how in the CEC some now argue why we should not be campaigning against e-tolling, why we must not honour and execute the Cosatu resolution and policy of nationalisation of the commanding heights of the South African economy, why we must support the ANC even as we all can see that neoliberalism is alive and well during the Zuma leadership, and ultimately today, some leaders are quite comfortable with GEAR which is now called the NDP.

d. The rupture in Cosatu is between those who want to give capitalism a human face through some slow gradualist capitalist reforms and those who believe that we must, in a radical fashion, undo the continuation of capitalism and colonialism of a special type in South Africa and their evil effects which have placed more than half of the population in extreme poverty by demanding the radical and immediate implementation of the Freedom Charter.

e. Inevitably, the rupture in Cosatu is between those who want to see a radical and thoroughgoing implementation of the Freedom Charter, thus a rejection of the GEAR that the NDP is, and those who

are consciously or unconsciously defending South African capitalism and imperialism by defending the NDP and not openly supporting the implementation of the Freedom Charter, especially its nationalisation demands.

Those who want Comrade Zwelinzima Vavi out of Cosatu want a Cosatu which will be a "toy telephone", a "labour desk," a pro capitalist Cosatu and those who are defending Comrade Vavi want a revolutionary socialist, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist Cosatu.

Clearly, Comrade Zwelinzima Vavi is seen as a threat to the ambitions of the right-wing capitalist forces within and outside the former liberation movement, which see a Cosatu under his leadership as obstructing their capitalist ambitions.

Ultimately, from where we stand, our analytical work confirms that the centre of the crisis in Cosatu resides in the neoliberal and capitalist trajectory of our post 1994 socio-economic formation, which has sustained the racist and capitalist colonial character of South African economy and society.

These are not positions arrived at by some idle theoretical and academic work! In Numsa we have been in the trenches with the rest of the liberation movement, the ANC led alliance, the SACP, SANCO and others, for 27 long and hard years, twenty of those during the ANC neoliberal and capitalist rule of South Africa.

We have suffered millions of job losses as the ANC presided over the dismantling, through its neoliberal and capitalist policies, of the inherited Apartheid manufacturing sectors. Privatisation, deregulation, removal of price controls, trade liberalisation, inflation targeting and a cluster of similar neoliberal measures have ensured that the inherited white male dominated manufacturing system of South Africa is dismantled, and in its place, nothing, is established save for massive cheap imports, largely from China and Indonesia. In the process, millions of jobs have been destroyed.

In the meantime, a filthy rich Black and African tiny middle class, now politically represented by Cyril Ramaphosa, has become very vocal and evident, and is now leading the ANC. This parasitic black middle class now believes BEE can and does build a prosperous society! Like all parasitic classes in history, it too has substituted itself for South African "society", post 1994.

D. So far their strategy has failed

- So far their strategy has been to attack us with propaganda such as:

- ü They say Numsa leadership is corrupt
- ü They say we are a business union
- ü They say we are a union dominated by one man – crazy, ultra left Irvin Jim
- ü They say that we are busy turning a trade union into a political party, and that we are planning to take workers away from Cosatu

- This has all been designed to persuade our members to desert us
- What has caused their greatest frustration to date is the fact that all this propaganda is simply having no effect.

- ü They believed they could separate us from workers and they have dismally failed.

- ü They embarked on cheap propaganda to say that the problem in Numsa is not workers, it is the leadership. Remember the SACP open letter which was circulated at the Numsa Special National Congress

It is true that they hate Numsa leadership with passion.

E. Whither Cosatu?

Numsa will not hand over Cosatu to individuals and groups of individuals who have no interest in defending the principles, values, resolutions, policies and constitution of Cosatu. These individuals, in our considered opinion, are in office now illegally, after violating the Cosatu Constitution by refusing to hold a Special Cosatu National Congress, as

properly petitioned for by the requisite number of affiliates of Cosatu.

While all this will be happening, the basis of our continuing colonialism in South Africa – mass poverty, nationwide structural and systemic unemployment and extreme inequalities will continue unabated. The working class, meanwhile, will sink deeper into poverty and despair, in the absence of any revolutionary organisation and leadership of the working class.

The combination of extreme inequalities, widespread unemployment, mass poverty, despair and despondence among the working class may not last long: soon we may enter the era of intensified violent mass protests and generalized leaderless rebellions, as the millions of suffering workers spontaneously violently vent their anger and frustration with life.

The South African working class is crying out for a committed revolutionary socialist orientated trade union and political organ to educate, organise and mobilise them for radical transformation and socialism in South Africa.

Numsa will let no one, or any groups of individuals, separate it from the 2.2 million members of affiliates of Cosatu whom we know very well the majority recognise, appreciate and endorse the principles, values, resolutions, policies, constitution and decisions of Numsa precisely because all these are also Cosatu principles, values, resolutions, policies and decisions.

The only reason why the Sdumo NOBs have blatantly violated the Cosatu Constitution by not holding a Special Cosatu National Congress even when the affiliates of Cosatu who have petitioned for the Special Congress have met all the constitutional requirements is precisely because they all know and understand that the majority of members of Cosatu affiliates will easily side with Numsa's principles, values, resolutions, policies, constitution and decisions.

Naturally, as the demand for a Special National Congress includes dealing with the Sdumo leadership collective, Sdumo and his friends (who are now illegally running Cosatu) know very well that they would not only be defeated in any National Congress to be held while Numsa still remains in Cosatu, but that the majority of ordinary delegates to such a Congress would easily remove all of them from office.

It is this mortal fear of loss of office that has caused them to violate the Cosatu Constitution by not holding the Special Congress.

Numsa will never allow itself to be used to destroy the socialist revolutionary unity and militancy of 2.2 million members of affiliates of Cosatu in whom, working together, Numsa has made an immense contribution to develop, over the past 27 years.

Unless all the members of affiliates of Cosatu join us in demanding the holding, immediately and urgently, of the Cosatu Special National Congress, Sdumo and his friends, terrified of being humiliatingly booted out of office by the owners of the federation – the delegates to any Cosatu Congress – are bound to perpetuate the crisis and paralysis of Cosatu, in order to illegally keep themselves in office, till Cosatu actually finally collapses!

In the meantime the respect, prestige, the popularity and credibility of Cosatu among the South African working class and poor rural populations will continue to be eroded, until Cosatu itself is completely destroyed and reduced to a rotten cabbage.

F. The ANC Task Team

From February 2013, soon after the historic post Marikana massacre Cosatu 11th Congress, a faction of Cosatu affiliates leaders imbedded in the ANC/SACP leadership structures have sought to get rid of the general secretary of Cosatu and Numsa from the federation. This faction has consistently used the CEC of Cosatu where they can muster a voting majority since the 11th Congress, to

effectively put out the general secretary of Cosatu, in the process effectively paralysing Cosatu too. Today this faction is determined to get rid of Numsa from Cosatu.

We are adamant that our expulsion from Cosatu has been a well-coordinated and political attempt by the ANC/SACP faction, to weaken, isolate and destroy Numsa and its leadership because of our socialist revolutionary character. This faction seeks to undermine our Special National Congress (SNC) resolutions, which resolutions are firmly enshrined in Cosatu resolutions and policies.

We reiterate our very correct political analysis that the ANC's Task Team intervention, led by Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa, was not only a farce, but an overall flouting of Cosatu's constitution and founding principle of being a worker-controlled and democratic union federation of workers.

When the Numsa National Office Bearers presented the Numsa National Executive and Central Committee resolutions, with respect to the crises in Cosatu, to the ANC Task Team on 10th September 2014, we made the following succinct points about the ANC's mediation role;

1. There is no ANC that can facilitate in Cosatu.
 - ü It is the neoliberal agenda of the ANC, supported by the Sdumo faction, that is the cause of the problem
 - ü It is the ANC's desire for a toy telephone that is the cause of the problem
2. How can the cause of the problem suddenly become the referee, player and the mediator?
3. The problem is that Cosatu has existing resolutions which Sdumo doesn't support, and the ANC doesn't support.

The ANC Task Team effectively handed over Vavi to their faction to deal with, and isolated Numsa and thereby prepared the grounds for its expulsion from the federation. This is all masked by a report which hides the identity of who it is talking about by talking of "many affiliates" and "the majority of affiliates" and "most affiliates" and "some affiliates"

and even sometimes "only one affiliate". Always without mentioning any names

After the latest Special CEC and the experience Numsa was exposed to, the Numsa NEC now officially distance ourselves from the ANC Task Team and its involvement in Cosatu. As Numsa, we will confront the crisis Cosatu is going through using Cosatu's constitution and its membership.

Numsa will not, from now on, blindly escort itself into any slaughter house, which is what Cosatu CEC meetings have become for Numsa today. We will stick, strictly, within the confines of the constitution of Cosatu and its resolutions and policies. We will also not hesitate to approach affiliates of Cosatu who genuinely want to resolve the crisis in Cosatu on behalf of its affiliates and members.

Just like the SACP, the ANC Task Team Report blames the crises in Cosatu at the door of the Numsa "current leadership" when the report says;

"All the other affiliates agree that the Federation must engage NUMSA on its behavior and there are affiliates who said that "NUMSA should go" but in interacting with them it becomes clear that this relates more to the conduct of the current leadership of NUMSA."

G. We think there is a new strategy at play

- They hate Numsa because we take a clear, unequivocal position against their class interests.
 - This is not just a question of ideology.
 - It is a question of clear material interests.
- Now that their propaganda has failed, their new plan is to dismiss Numsa. Then they will say to Numsa members:
 - You have been dismissed from the federation because of your leaders.
 - We will welcome you back as our members if you leave those misleaders of Numsa and join MAWUSA.

· They are dismissing us from the federation. But they hope that they can persuade workers to believe a different story - that it is we, the Numsa leadership, who are taking the members away from their true political home in the ANC and SACP. And they will offer a way back to that home by abandoning those national Numsa leaders.

· To pursue this propaganda, they have raised one other thing which also appears in the ANC report. They say that Numsa and Vavi are working with the CIA – the report calls them "international foreign bodies that are anti-ANC".

- This is the same strategy they have used for Thuli Madonsela.

– This is the same strategy that they used in concocting what was called the "intelligence report" which we got to know about from Cedric Gina, who told us that he was in Sdumo's house when he got showed the "intelligence report".

H. We remind ourselves of the inaugural Cosatu political policy

There is much talk of the founding principles of Cosatu. But there is very little clarity on what those principles are. The following are the founding principles from the Political Resolution of the founding congress in 1985:

1. This federation and the working class should play a major role in the struggle for a non-racial and democratic society and this federation will not hesitate to take political action to protect and advance the interests of its members and the wider working class.
2. This Congress asserts the economic, political and organisational independence of the federation and all its affiliates and asserts the independent political interests, position, action and leadership of the working class in the wider political struggle.
3. We should do this by taking up political struggles through the membership and structures at local, regional and national level as well as through disciplined alliances with progressive community and

political organisations whose interests are compatible with the interests of the workers and whose organisational practices further the interests of the working class.

4. The federation will strive to ensure that its members participate effectively in the progressive organisations and campaigns that conduct democratic struggles against oppression and economic exploitation in the interests of the working class and the democratic society.

5. The federation will make sure that there is full discussion of the demands and aims of workers in the struggle at all levels of the federation.

6. In the interests of building unity the federation shall not affiliate to any political organisation within the democratic struggle in South Africa at the present time.

G. Continued violation of the Cosatu Constitution:

Cosatu NOBs and its faction of affiliate leaders, supported by the ANC and SACP, have committed no less than 6 violations of the Cosatu constitution:

1. They have suspended the General Secretary without bringing the report of his investigation to the CEC to decide whether or not to subject him to a disciplinary hearing.
2. They have suspended the General Secretary without going through the process set down in the constitution, a decision which has now been overturned by the High Court.
3. They have nakedly refused to call a Cosatu Special National Congress, despite receiving the number of requests required by the constitution.
4. They have tried to keep Zingiswa Losi as a president of Cosatu when she has resigned at Ford Motor Company SA and therefore, in terms of the constitution, has ceased to be eligible to be a Cosatu NOB

G. What happened at the Cosatu CEC

· AT the time of the adoption of the agenda, we put on record that we remain firm and resolute behind our correspondence that that CEC couldn't take any decisions from the ANC report. It can only receive it. We had absolutely no mandate and nor did any of the other affiliates.

· This became a big debate as those who are fighting Numsa registered a different view that this was an adjourned CEC.

· We remained very firm that whether or not it was adjourned, as Numsa we are not witch-doctors.

– We could not have known the ANC report, without being given it.

– So the meeting can't take decisions because none of us have a mandate, as required by the Cosatu constitution.

· Sactwu persuaded Numsa that we must at least receive the report first. Then later on, once it has been presented, we can revisit the Numsa position.

· We confirmed that we remained constructive and progressive. However, the position that we have presented is the position now and it will be the position even after the ANC report was given.

· Being constructive, we were willing to allow the report to be presented, knowing that we would revert back to our position that we have no mandate and therefore no decisions can be taken

· Within no time, as there was absolutely no objectivity, there were two motions. The meeting was steam-rolled into voting in an arrogant way by Zingiswa Losi who is allowed to sit in the CEC with no status. She herself resembles an organisational crisis.

· Under her biased, caucused leadership they moved a motion that the meeting will take decisions. This was put to a vote and they won with ±34 votes and we lost with ± 23.

· In the old days, we could have embarked on a walkout. But in today's dynamic legal environment of laws and procedure, if a meeting quorated and

you choose to walk out, maybe, for example, because you find yourself in a meeting of thieves, unfortunately the meeting remains quorate and its decisions are binding on you.

· The only option left for us was to put on record that in all decisions that would be taken in that unlawful fiasco of a meeting we will participate under protest. We will oppose all the decisions that the meeting purports to take, on the record. We regard any decision that may be taken as unprocedural and completely unlawful.

H. Our Demands

The Numsa NEC held on 27th October 2014 demand the immediate convening of a Cosatu Special National Congress as the only constitutional structure of Cosatu capable of taking the federation out of its paralyzing crisis.

We will place before the NOB the demand that from now on, no Cosatu CEC or any activity must be executed unless it is in furtherance of holding the Special National Congress.

We will demand that it is irrational, against all known rules of justice, for NOBs structure to preside on any event, constitutional or otherwise, with the purpose of expelling Numsa when Numsa and other unions have successfully petitioned the president of Cosatu to hold a Special Congress to resolve the same issues Numsa is now threatened with suspension or expulsion.

We will, to that end, immediately reinstate the legal challenge to demand that the current national leadership of Cosatu devote their efforts to ensuring that a Special National Congress is held, to resolve all the matters now killing Cosatu.

Cosatu meetings going forward must attend to the calls for a Special National Congress and in that regard must attend to date and logistics for the hosting of the Special Congress in or before the end of 2014.

To achieve our objectives of keeping the 2.2 million members of Cosatu affiliates united, militant, so-

cialist revolutionary respecting the time tested principles of worker control and internal democratic order in our unions, Numsa will spare no effort to advance the resolution of all Numsa constitutional structures.

"Nothing demonstrates better the increasing rigor of the colonial system: you begin by occupying the country, then you take the land and exploit the former owners at starvation rates. Then with mecha-

nization, this cheap labour is still too expensive. You finish up taking from the native their very right to work. All that is left for the Natives to do in their own land at a time of great prosperity, is to die of starvation." (Jean Paul Sartre, 2001)

Numsa Special National Executive Committee Meeting

27 October 2014

PALESTINE

As if the intifadas never happened

These statements come following Wednesday night's incident in which Abdul Rahma Shloudi, from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan, killed one and injured eight when his car went up on a light rail platform in what Israeli authorities are dubbing a terrorist act. Shaloudi's family insists it was an accident. Shaloudi himself was killed by a police officer on the scene, and eyewitnesses report that the officer continued shooting him even after he was on the ground and disabled.

During a Thursday afternoon meeting with police and secret service heads, Netanyahu ordered that "Israeli sovereignty" be exercised in all parts of Jerusalem

"United Jerusalem was and will remain Israel's eternal capital," Netanyahu told the press. "Every attempt to harm its residents will be met with the strongest possible response – we will return the quiet and security to Jerusalem. I therefore ordered the augmentation of forces, including additional companies of border police, surveillance means, means of intelligence, means of enforcement, they are things that together with additional means, which I will not detail here, can and will return the quiet to the capital".

Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman both compared the incident in Jerusalem with Wednesday's attack in the capital of Canada, thus seeking to place Israel's oppression of Palestinians in Jerusalem within the global fight against 'terrorism'. Responding politically, Netanyahu added that "the attack in Jerusalem is supported by the chairperson of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen – he both glorifies the murderers and embraces the organisation to which they

belong, the Hamas. And against this action of the PA chairperson we encounter international feebleness, they are not willing to say two words, even one word, of criticism against him. With us there is no feebleness, we will stand firm on our rights and duties to protect our capital. We will do it with power – and we will win".

Sporadic clashes continued throughout Thursday in the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Silwan, Issawiya, Wadi Joz and Jabal Mukaber, amongst others, and the press reports that seventeen Palestinians were detained.

Speaking from Washington, Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon further attacked the Palestinian Authority, claiming "The attack in Jerusalem is a clear result of those who educate the young generation to hate Jews and to throw them out of their homeland. In the Palestinian Authority there is no, and has never been, a culture of peace, but a culture of incitement and of jihad against Jews. It begins with the false statements of Abu Mazen against Israel on the UN stage, and continues with the ongoing Palestinian attempts to implement delegitimisation against us on various stages of the international system and ends with incitement in the Palestinian education system, of which these are its difficult implications". Ya'alon adds that "Therefore we say that the source of the conflict isn't territorial, but the fact that the Palestinians are not willing to recognise our right to exist as a Jewish state at any border".

Economy Minister Naftali Bennett (Jewish Home), who in recent opinion polls is cited as Israel's most popular politician, stated that "A sovereign state cannot accept such a reality, where we are truly determined to eliminate terror we will succeed. First of all we must apply our sovereignty in Jerusalem. For a long period Jews who enter the Temple Mount are attacked and the Arabs smell this. We

must make a switch in the mind, there will be full security here, we will build wherever we want, we will stop being afraid and then our enemies will calm down".

Transport Minister Israel Katz, who only this week called for entry of the Israeli army into Jerusalem to deal with stone throwing, wrote in Facebook that in response to Wednesday's incident, "the pace of building in greater Jerusalem must be increased, (we must) permit the entry of Jews to the Temple Mount in a free and orderly fashion, to increase police presence in Arab neighbourhoods, to make punishment more severe and to deal with the rioters and their controllers with an iron fist".

The police issued a statement that "Jerusalem police emphasise that it will demonstrate zero tolerance for every violent event, will find and get its hands on every person who violates order in the city and will act to prosecute them to the full extent of the law".

Together with police and secret service forces, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat toured Thursday morning the East Jerusalem settlement of French Hills and forcibly entered the nearby village of Issawiya, scene of harsh clashes with Israeli forces. "Today it is clearer than ever that police forces must be brought into the Arab neighbourhoods in which there are disturbances, to place them in strategic points, in substantial numbers", Barkat told the press. "At my request the prime minister ordered the augmentation of police so that it can implement an operational action plan designed to deal with riots, including additional manpower and special units, use of technological means and an increase in intelligence", Barkat added.

The use of increasing force against the Palestinians of occupied East Jerusalem will undoubtedly stir even more tension in a city many claim is on the boiling point.

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Alternative Information Centre

SYRIA

A review of the origins and development of the revolutionary process (part 2)

JOSEPH DAHER ·

Syria: a review of the origins and development of the revolutionary process (part 2) Joseph Daher

The Syrian uprising is explained by internal factors, by the absence of democracy and growing social inequality, as well as by regional factors, in the framework of the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

The regional dynamics of the uprising

The Syrian revolutionary process is part of a regional movement which has shaken the entire Arab region. It is therefore clearly in the context of other uprisings which are the result of the confluence and mutual reinforcement of different sites of dissatisfaction, struggle and popular mobilization. These battles are intertwined and have enabled different sectors of these societies to join forces in rebelling against authoritarian and corrupt regimes, deemed moreover responsible for the continuous deepening of the social crisis.

The turn taken by the dynamic of protest in a large number of countries of the region, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Morocco, and so on, should be related to previous mobilizations, as has been clearly explained by Mounia Bennani Chraïbi and Olivier Fillieule: the joint actions of support for causes deemed "Arab" or "Islamic" like the Palestinian issue; workers' mobilizations in the Tunisian mines of the Gafsa basin (2008) or Ben Guerdane (2010), or the wave of workers' strikes that has continued to grow in Egypt since 2004 ; the coordination against the high cost of living in Morocco (up to 2009); the development of groups which transcend ideological cleavages (like Kifaya, the April 6 group, and the

National Association for Change in Egypt, or human rights organizations in several countries) .

These mobilisations have allowed partial convergence between activists belonging to socio-political networks that we would not characterise as competitors, but as different: they have known how to combine their claims and their forces at certain times, such as the workers' movements of Egypt and Tunisia, and political activists more generally. In addition, borders have sometimes proved porous between trade union structures and political activists, the latter reaching out to act within the UGTT in Tunisia or the independent trade unions in Egypt. Such experiences promote the learning of collective protest by millions of people and past actions always serve as experience for future initiatives.

In our view, several demands explain the popular mobilizations that have convulsed the region. First of all, the demand for basic democratic rights in the face of dictatorial regimes, supported directly or indirectly (at least, initially) by the Western countries (many political, economic and security agreements witness to such a collaboration).

The depth of the social question and its impact on the outbreak of these revolutions is surely the dimension that has been most obscured by the mass media and the available literature on these events and their dynamic. These popular uprisings, which occurred after decades of structural adjustment policies and neoliberal measures, express of course a revolt against the latter, particularly as they were imposed by corrupt authoritarian regimes supported by financial institutions which are increasingly perceived as the licensed representatives of the Western powers and foreign capital, such as the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB).

The scourges that derive from these policies are many. Among them are high unemployment or under-employment, particularly among young graduates who do not find jobs on a job market that focuses on activities with low added value and skilled work is rare; the deepening of social and economic inequalities, the fact that the lower and middle classes have not enjoyed the fruits of "growth"; the privatization process that has led to the formation of new monopolies in the hands of those close to the regime.

These phenomena are in fact an integral part of a system of corruption that directly benefits the ruling circles of these countries, including the family of Mubarak in Egypt, Trabelsi (wife of President Ben Ali) in Tunisia, or Makhoul (first cousin of Bashar al-Assad) in Syria. The popular movements have also been accompanied by a recurring denunciation of the nepotism of these families. Thus, from the beginning of the process, the protesters in Syria have designated Rami Makhoul as a "thief", a veritable incarnation of the corruption and undue opulence of the country, and have attacked the branches of his telecommunications company (Syriatel), as well as other firms belonging to him.

The social forces of these uprisings will therefore bring together different groups in society stretching from the popular classes who wish to change their material conditions and want more democracy, to a part of the bourgeoisie who can perceive its interest in the promotion of a liberal state, free of the tutelage of the reigning families who have seized political power and the growing economic benefits arising from this. This phenomenon should be further analysed to better understand the dynamics of different groups of the Syrian opposition.

The internal dynamics of the uprising

At the internal level, the weeks preceding the beginning of the first demonstrations, in mid-March 2011, saw the situation develop slowly: demonstra-

tions in support of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions were prohibited, and those held were strongly suppressed by the security forces. On 14 February 2011, 14 people were arrested and several people beaten by police officers in uniform and in civilian clothes during a peaceful sit-in involving 200 people in front of the Libyan embassy, in solidarity with the uprising there.

During this same period, many human rights activists had to face a series of tactics of intimidation, including visits to their homes by agents of the intelligence services and the close monitoring of their emails, blogs and so on, as well as of their telephone conversations. Some of them were warned not to leave the country.

On 16 March members of the families and relatives of a number of political prisoners organized a rally in front of the Ministry of the Interior to obtain their release. Thirty-four of them were arrested, 32 of whom were placed under investigation for "undermining the prestige of the state". It was in the same week that the true spark of the beginning of the uprising was triggered, in the southern city of Deraa, which quickly became a symbol of the national resistance: the arrest of 15 children for having written "the people want the fall of the regime" ("Ash-shab yurid iskat year nizam") on the walls of their school, inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and the insults directed to their parents who were asking for their release, on the part of the head of the security services in the region. Subsequently, the discovery of traces of torture on the bodies of these children after their release from prison reinforced the sense of humiliation of the local populations. The story of these events was spreading rapidly across the country. The 18 March 2011 was the first day of the Syrian uprising, called the "Friday of dignity" in response to the lack of respect of the local authorities, in tandem with the Friday of the same name in Yemen. The events in Deraa probably marked a turning point of the situation in Syria, like the "Friday of rage" of 28 January in Egypt.

The Syrian uprising would then extend gradually during the month to all regions of the country – despite the repression deployed by the regime, which made massive use of force by opening fire on the demonstrators. Indeed, it was this violent and growing repression by the security services that would progressively radicalize the popular movement, which passed from the demand for reforms to demanding the fall of the regime.

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

The actors in the popular movement

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

Examples also include various activist groups from different regions of the country, like the Youth of Daraya, on the outskirts of Damascus, who were socially active for almost ten years, launching a campaign against corruption or organizing a demon-

stration after the fall of Baghdad, in April 2003, in the course of which they were arrested under the pretext of "forming an unregistered political group and spreading confessionism". The Youth of Daraya drew on historical examples of non-violent movements. They formed a mobile library and distributed books to the people of their neighbourhood. They cleaned the streets. They showed films on Gandhi in a mosque.

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

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

The second and undoubtedly the most important component of the Syrian revolutionary movement is that of economically marginalized rural workers, and urban employees and self-employed workers, who have borne the brunt of the implementation of

neoliberal policies, in particular since the coming to power of President Bashar al-Assad. The geography of the revolts in Idleb and Deraa, as well as in other rural areas, all historical strongholds of the Baath party which had not played a large role in the insurgency of the early 1980s, including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, shows the involvement of the victims of neo-liberalism in this revolution. From this component of the current protests emerged some of those who joined the armed groups of the FSA (Free Syrian Army), first developed to defend peaceful demonstrations and since then adopting more offensive policies.

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

Armed resistance and self-organization

Several elements fostered the emergence of armed groups after more than seven months of demonstrations and peaceful resistance.

In the first place, the violent repression of the regime against peaceful demonstrators and against the leaders of the popular movement, killed, arrested or forced into exile. This radicalized the movement and helped to push forward activists more inclined to resist with weapons. More and more groups of citizens took up arms to defend their demonstrations and their homes against the *chabihahs* [militiamen paid by the regime, perpetrators of countless abuses], the security services and the army.

In the second place, the increasing number of desertions from the army, in particular of ranking soldiers refusing to fire on peaceful demonstrators. The reluctance of soldiers to fire on peaceful protests provoked many mutinies and desertions. It is also necessary to mention the willingness of the

regime to militarize the revolution by leaving weapons on the fields of battle or by increasing the number of weapons on the market and/or lowering the price of weapons to justify the discourse of the regime that they were fighting against armed extremist groups.

Finally, there was the willingness of political currents and/or states, notably private donors in the Gulf monarchies, to fund specific armed groups to strengthen the support they had or establish relays on the ground.

In April 2013, the FSA addressed a statement to the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Syria. It denounced its attempts to monopolize the revolution and held it responsible for the delaying of victory and the fragmentation of the opposition, since it sought to subordinate groups on the ground in exchange for material and financial support. [1]

The release of significant groups of jihadists and Islamists by the Assad regime during the first amnesties in May-June 2011, which would normally allow the liberation of demonstrators and political prisoners, also strengthened the process of militarization of the Syrian revolution. Most of the Islamists and jihadists released at this period are at the head of the main armed groups active today.

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

The Syrian army was structured at the time of Hafez el-Assad, which explains why collective insubordination or mutiny is very difficult. The structure of the high command is based on clientelism and confessionalism. Most of the units loyal to

Assad are dominated by Alawite officers, even if they also include Sunni officers. The leader of the battalion which led the terrible attack on the Baba Amr neighbourhood of Homs, in February 2012, was thus a Sunni colonel. The role assigned to these units is to protect the regime by applying various forms of repression. Mostly, those who want to defect can only act individually or in small groups, leaving the ranks with or without their weapons.

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

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

The FSA is still not a unified institution. It is rather the collective designation of independent armed groups, localized in various regions of the country. These groups do not have adequate arms or fund-

ing. They buy weapons on the local black market – from traffickers who profit from the situation – but also from Iraqi, Lebanese and Turkish smugglers. The members of the FSA also retrieve weapons abandoned by the security forces or left in their depots.

In 2012, the Coordination of Local Committees (CLC) analyzed the situation of the FSA in the following terms: "The fate of our Revolution has been entrusted to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), composed of deserters and civilians who bear arms to defend themselves. This group is devoid of any sustainable basis and does not have a unified command. At the same time, the FSA has remarkably and courageously defended unarmed civilians and their living areas with light weapons and little ammunition. As could be expected, the war machine of the repressive regime has been able to concentrate its repression and anger on the residents of these areas where the FSA has taken a position. The war machine of the regime has carried out acts of reprisal that have doubled the number of victims, resulting in humanitarian crises and causing the appearance of disaster zones in many regions of the country". [2]

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

The Islamic Front has distanced itself from the opposition in exile of the national coalition, following the refusal of the latter to grant it a greater presence within the military leadership commanded by

brigadier general Salim Idriss. The Islamic Front declared that it would not oppose the FSA, despite the attack on some of these groups, and has called for an Islamic state in Syria. This new Islamic Front has the financial and political support of monarchical regimes of the Gulf. The massive funding of these groups helped to attract many opposition fighters, not by a religious discourse, but mainly by military equipment which was much more sophisticated and abundant, and higher wages compared to the brigades of the FSA which lack everything.

The Gulf monarchies and the private donors in these countries have funded the reactionary Islamist forces in order to transform the Syrian revolution into a sectarian war. The victory of the revolution in Syria and its spread in the region would constitute a threat to their own regimes.

The popular movement and self-organization

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

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

Free local elections in "liberated" areas have been held for the first time in 40 years in some regions, neighbourhoods and villages. This is the case for

example in the city of Deir Ezzor, in February 2013, where a voter called Ahmad Mohammad said: "we want a democratic state, not an Islamic state, we want a secular state managed by civilians and not by the mullahs". These local councils reflect the sense of responsibility and the capacity of citizens to take initiatives to manage their affairs by relying on their frameworks, experiences and energies. They exist in various forms, both in the liberated areas and those still under the domination of the regime.

Another concrete example of this dynamic of self-organization is the founding meeting of the Coalition of Revolutionary Youth in Syria, which took place in June 2013 in Aleppo. The meeting brought together a wide range of activists and coordinating committees, which have played an important role on the ground since the outbreak of the revolution in Syria and who came from different regions of the country and represented broad sectors of Syrian society. The conference has been presented as a key step to representing the revolutionary youth of all communities.

We should also note the formation of the Free Syrian Union, on 13 October 2013 following a meeting at Rihania, a town on the border between Syria and Turkey. This structure is composed of around 106 groups and collectives bringing together the military brigades, information groups and other civilian formations. Its founding statement calls in particular for a free and democratic Syria in which all religious communities and ethnic groups would be treated equally. This does not preclude that there are sometimes limits to these popular councils, such as the lack of representation of women, or of certain minorities. It is not to embellish reality but to establish the truth.

Another important element in the popular dynamic of the revolution is the explosion of independent newspapers produced by popular organizations. The number of newspapers has tripled since the revolution started – with a press essentially in the hands of the regime – to more than sixty, written by popular groups.

The example of Raqqa

A very striking example of the self-organization of the masses is the city of Raqqa, the only provincial capital liberated from the forces of the regime (since March 2013). Still subject to bombardment, Raqqa is completely independent and it is the local population that manages all the services in the community.

In Raqqa, popular organizations are most often led by young people. They have multiplied, to the point that more than 42 social movements were officially registered at the end of May. The popular committees have organized various campaigns. An example is the campaign "the Syrian revolutionary flag represents me", painting the revolutionary flag in the neighbourhoods and the streets of the city, to oppose the campaign of the Islamists who wanted to impose the Islamic black flag. At the cultural level, a piece of theatre satirizing the Assad regime was shown in the city centre and at the beginning of June the popular organizations organized an exhibition of local arts and crafts. Centres have been established to deal with young people and the psychological disturbances caused by the consequences of the war. The end-of-year exams for the Syrian baccalaureate in July and July were organized by volunteers.

This kind of experience of self-organization is reflected in many liberated regions. It is to be noted that women play a large role in these movements and in the demonstrations in general. For example on June 18, 2013 in Raqqa, a mass demonstration, conducted by women, took place in front of the headquarters of Jabhat al-Nusra, an Islamist group, in which the protesters called for the release of prisoners who had been incarcerated. The demonstrators chanted slogans against Jabhat al-Nusra, and denounced their actions. The demonstrators chanted the slogan first used in Damascus in February 2011: "The Syrian people refuse to be humiliated". The group "Haquna" (which means "our right"), in which many women are present, has also organized many rallies against the Islamist

groups in Raqqa, chanting "Raqqa is free, Jabhat al-Nusra out".

Many new demonstrations have also taken place in this city against Islamic State.

In the town of Deiz Zor in June, a campaign was launched by local activists aimed at encourage citizens to participate in the processes of monitoring and documentation of the practices of the local people's councils, including by associating them to assert their rights and to promote the culture of human rights in society. A particular emphasis has been placed on the idea of law and justice for all during this campaign.

Against the Islamists and jihadists

While in Europe and the United States the need to oppose the jihadists is only just being talked about, the Syrian revolutionary people has opposed them for more than a year. These are the same popular organizations cited above, which are the most often opposed to the armed Islamic groups. They want to take control of liberated areas by force when they have no roots in the popular movement, and they are nothing to do with the revolution.

The city of Raqqa has for example seen a continued and unwavering resistance against Islamist groups. Since the city was liberated from the troops of the regime, in March 2013, many demonstrations have been organized against the ideology and authoritarian practices of the Islamist groups. There have been rallies in solidarity with activists demanding their release from the jails of the Islamists. This has led to the release of some activists, but many others remain imprisoned until today like the famous Father Paolo and others, such as the son of the intellectual Yassin Hajj Saleh, Firas.

In September 2013, following the occupation of the city by ISIS and the attack by the latter against the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Raqqa, groups of young activists organized a demonstration to condemn the actions of ISIS, in which they brandished a large cross as a sign of solidarity with the Syrian Christian community in the city. They

have also published the statement: "We demand the respect of all religions: Christians and Muslims are one and united, we have lived and we will live as brothers. The people engaged in these kinds of actions represent only themselves and the Islamic religion is innocent of such acts."

Women have played a leading role in the resistance of the population to ISIS in the town of Raqqa, as elsewhere. For example, Suad Nofal, a school teacher, has protested almost daily for several months against the authoritarian practices of ISIS and for the release of political prisoners. Similar demonstrations of the popular masses challenging authoritarian practices and reactionary Islamists have taken place in Aleppo, May?d?n, Al-Quseir and other cities such as Kafranbel. These struggles continue today.

The CLC have also denounced the calls of the Al Qaeda leader, Ayman Zawahiri, for the establishment of an Islamic state in Syria. They condemned this "flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Syria" and reiterated "the fact that only Syrians will decide the future of their country". In this statement, the CLC affirmed once again that "the Syrian revolution began in order to achieve freedom, justice, and a civil status, pluralistic and democratic ... the establishment in Syria of a State for all its citizens". [3]

In the district of Bustan Qasr, in Aleppo, the local population has demonstrated many times to denounce the actions of the Sharia Council of Aleppo, which is composed of several Islamist groups. On August 23, 2013 for example, the demonstrators in Bustan Qasr, while condemning the massacre by chemical weapons committed by the regime against the population of the eastern Ghouta, also demanded the release of the well known activist Abu Maryam, once more imprisoned by the Shania Council of Aleppo. A popular explosion also took place following the killing by foreign jihadists belonging to ISIS of a young boy aged 14, for so-called blasphemy when he had made a joke referring to the Prophet Mohammed. A demonstration was organized by the people's committee of Bustan Qasr

against the Islamic Council and the Islamist groups, chanting: "What a shame, what a shame, the revolutionaries have become Shabbiha" [a reference to an armed pro Assad group], or they made reference to the Islamic Council citing the security services of the Assad regime, a clear allusion to its authoritarian practices.

On August 2, 2013, during one of the weekly Friday demonstrations, the CLC, which plays an important role providing information on the revolution but also in aiding and supplying services for people and refugees, stated this in their press release: "in a unified message of the revolution to the whole world, we can confirm that the kidnappings of activists and of key actors in the revolution, in addition to serving the interests of the tyranny, are detrimental to the freedom and dignity of the revolution". This message was addressed directly to those reactionary Islamist groups. In the same spirit, on July 28, 2013, the CLC wrote a press release with the title: "Tyranny is one, whether exercised in the name of religion or in the name of secularism", comparing the Islamists and the regime. The CLC published a press release on September 20, 2013 whose title was "Only the Syrians will liberate Syria", re-affirming their rejection of a replacement of one tyranny by another, and they complained about the practices of ISIS, who "do not differ from the practices of the Syrian regime in the repression and the suppression of freedom of expression".

The People's Council of the district of Salah El-Din, in the city of Aleppo, waved a sign in the middle of a demonstration on September 27, 2013, in opposition to ISIS, which said: "Take your Islam and leave us our Islam - Islam conquered hearts before territories". Coordinating committees such as the Kurdish Committee for Fraternity have accused ISIS of "occupying the cities and terrorizing the citizens", equating it to the armed pro-regime groups, such as Hezbollah, who also target civilians. On a demonstration against ISIS in the neighbourhood of Ashrafiya in Aleppo on 20 September 2013, placards were waved saying "Syria will be free, ISIS

out" and "Our Syria is coloured. No to ISIS and its black flag."

In September of the same year, eleven civilian organizations representing the organized revolutionary structure in the region of the Ghouta, an area outside Damascus, strongly defended the activist Razan Zaitouneh, a popular revolutionary figure, against threats made to her by members of armed Islamist factions.

In mid-October, the Civil Movement in Syria released a statement following the remarks of Zahran Alloush, commander of the Army of Islam, in which the groups and the members of the Syrian revolutionary process declared their rejection "of any attempt by any party to impose new forms of authoritarianism on the Syrian population and the work of the activists".

This statement was published after Alloush sought to impose his authority on the civilian council of the city of Duma, on the outskirts of Damascus. The armed and peaceful popular opposition has not ceased to oppose ISIS, now IS, up to today.

Arabs and Kurds united

In the north-east of Syria, inhabited in its majority by the Kurdish population, the recent fighting between Islamists and Kurdish militias of the PYD (linked to the PKK) has been the occasion for popular initiatives by activists and the local population. These popular initiatives were aimed at demonstrating the brotherhood of Kurds and Arabs in this region and to reaffirm that the popular revolution excluded racism and bigotry. At the time of the fighting, in the province of Raqqqa, the city of Tall Abyad saw the formation of the battalion "Chirko Ayoubi", which joined the brigade of the Kurdish front on 22 July 2013. The battalion is now composed of Arabs and Kurds together. They have issued a joint statement denouncing the abuses committed by the Islamist groups and the attempts at division of the Syrian people based on ethnicity and community. The different factions of the FSA are however divided. Some fight on the side of the

Islamists, but others have joined the Kurdish militias and denounced the atrocities committed by Islamist groups.

In the city of Aleppo, more specifically in the neighbourhood of Achrafieh (inhabited mainly by Kurds), a demonstration was organized on 1 August 2013 bringing together several hundred people in favour of solidarity between Arabs and Kurds, to condemn acts committed by Islamic extremist groups against the Kurdish population.

In the city of Tell Abyad, which has been subject to intense fighting, activists have tried to launch several initiatives to put an end to the military conflict between the two groups, to stop the forced departure of civilians, to set up a popular committee to govern and manage the city on a daily basis, and to promote initiatives and joint actions between Arabs and Kurds, in order to reach a consensus by peaceful means. The efforts are continuing today despite the continuation of fighting between Islamists and Kurdish militias.

In the town of Amouda, about thirty activists met on 5 August 2013 with Kurdish flags and flags from revolutionary Syrians behind a sign saying "I love you Homs", to show their solidarity with the city besieged by the regime's army.

Most recently, in the city of Qamichli, where Arabs (Muslim and Christian), Kurds and Assyrians live, local activists have launched numerous projects to ensure coexistence and the management of certain neighbourhoods by joint committees. In this same city, the branch of the Union of Free Kurdish Students has launched an internet campaign for freedom, peace and fraternity, tolerance and equality for the future of Syria.

At the time of the attacks on the Kurdish majority city of Kobani by the forces of the Islamic State, military resistance was organized by the PYD and its military forces, the People's Protection Units (YPG), and also of the active participation of at least three battalions of Arab combatants present in the city: "revolutionary battalion of Al Raqqqa", "Sun of the North battalion" and the "Jirablis" battalion.

On 4 October, the free Syrian Army also decided to send a thousand fighters to defend Kobani. Many demonstrations of support for the town of Kobani also took place in villages and "free" districts of Syria by the revolutionaries.

In its very large majority, the Syrian popular movement has repeatedly expressed its rejection of confessionalism, despite the attempts by the regime and Islamist groups to light this dangerous fire. The slogans of the demonstrators such as "We are all Syrians, we are united" and "No to confessionalism" have been repeated continuously until today.

It is important to understand the crucial role played by the people's committees and organizations in the pursuit of the revolutionary process, because these are the essential actors that allow the popular movement to resist. This is not to diminish the role played by the armed resistance, but the latter depends on the popular movement to continue the struggle. Without it, we would have no chance.

It is difficult to establish a relationship of forces between the different popular committees, which have a very significant implantation in this revolution, and the jihadist and Islamist reactionary groups. What is certain is that the popular movement will not abandon the goals of the revolution: democracy, social justice and rejection of confessionalism, despite the threats that the Islamist groups and the Assad regime represent.

In 2014, a persistent popular movement and struggle against the regime and ISIS

The popular movement continues to make its voice heard against all those who are opposed to the goals of the revolution.

In January 2014, a popular explosion in many liberated areas had pushed ISIS out and encouraged other armed groups to combat the latter, including certain Islamist groups which were initially reluctant but which, under popular pressure, had to fight ISIS. For a large majority of the people of the liberated territories ISIS had become the other face of the Assad regime because of his authoritarian-

ism, well summarised by the chanting of the demonstrators that "Assad and ISIS are one".

In March 2014, numerous events and activities were held to commemorate the third anniversary of the Syrian revolution and recall its objectives, with photo exhibitions and theatrical performances in liberated zones like Aleppo and the region of Idlib.

During April and May, actions were also organized against the jihadist and Islamist groups. In the town of Minbej, near Aleppo, held by ISIS, a general strike was called in May by the inhabitants of the city to protest against the occupation. A group of activists have also launched a campaign to call for the release of four revolutionaries including Razan Zeitouneh, the symbol of the popular uprising and the struggle against the regime, kidnapped in December 2013, very probably by the Islamic Front who had already threatened activists in the past. Demonstrations have been held for example in the city of Duma, close to Damascus, and in the district of Salah el-Din in Aleppo under the slogan: "Whoever kidnapped the revolutionaries is a traitor".

During the sham democratic election in June 2014, which saw the re-election of the dictator Bashar al-Assad, groups of activists distributed flyers and brochures in the greatest secrecy, before and during the elections, in cities and areas under the domination of the regime, such as Damascus, Aleppo and Hama, condemning the crimes of the latter and reiterating their determination to continue their revolution until victory. At the same time there were demonstrations in many liberated areas to denounce these "elections of blood". We also saw some revolutionaries in the liberated areas transform garbage cans into ballot boxes on which was written "You can vote here", "We have thrown you out, Bashar" and "Bashar, it is here that you live". In the town of Qamichli, a demonstration was organized by movements of young Kurds to condemn the election as a farce orchestrated by Assad and calling for a boycott.

During the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, in the "liberated territories" of Syria,

particularly in different neighbourhoods of Aleppo, in the city of Qaboun near Damascus, Deraa, and so on, there were demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian people from the start of the operation.

In the district of Salah el Din, the protesters sent this message to the Palestinian people: "from the population of Salah el Din in Aleppo to the population of Gaza: we are one, as is our fight against our enemy". A torchlight vigil also took place in Aleppo for Gaza, while children were demonstrating en masse in the city of Qaboun in solidarity with Palestine. There have also been demonstrations in support of Gaza in the Palestinian camp of Yarmouk. On the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel, protesters supporting the Syrian revolution denounced the military attack of the army of occupation of Israel on Gaza, with signs calling for a halt to the massacre in Syria and Gaza.

At the beginning of August 2014, activists in the popular committees and popular councils of some neighbourhoods of Aleppo launched a campaign to revitalize the movement of peaceful protest against the regime while also opposing the Islamic State and the dangers posed by the latter while it was at the gates of Aleppo. The campaign wants to particularly revive street demonstrations while using social media. The campaign is called: "peaceful activism is the pulse of the revolution".

The campaign brings together the revolutionary councils of the neighbourhoods of Salah al-Din, Bustan al-Qasr, Kalasa and the old city of Aleppo, the Coordinating Committee of the district of Mashhad, and civil defence emergency teams. The municipal council of free Aleppo, the Syrian Association of Women and a number of independent activists have also joined this mobilization.

During the first day of the campaign, the revolutionary council of Salah al-Din organized a vigil. Participants held banners in response to an article published in the American magazine "Live Wire", characterising Aleppo as "the most dangerous city in the world". The demonstrators wanted to send a

message that their city is alive and deserves their affection despite the dangers of living there. In the east of Aleppo, the protesters took part in a march from the neighbourhood of Salah al-Din, passing by Mashhad and ending in the neighbourhood of Ansari. The students participating in the demonstration waved signs calling for a return to the values defended at the beginning of the revolution of 2011, and for the unification of the Free Syrian Army.

The most notable facts are two strikes in the free areas of Aleppo. First, that of the street sweepers on 20 September against the "provisional government", body of the national opposition coalition, and then that of the of "civil defence" agents, equivalent of firefighters, against the same "government" on 21 September. There was also the creation on 3 October of an independent campaign of denunciation and the continuation of corruption within the structures of the opposition...

During September there were also many demonstrations and mobilizations against the intervention of the coalition led by the United States, on 26 September for example under the slogan "The civilians do not need the new international assassins!", thus expressing their feeling of the uselessness of bombardments and especially their opposition. A streamer held up by a demonstrator of Alep said it recently: "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. (Albert Einstein), and underneath: Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014".

On 16 October the demonstrators of the "liberated" city of Kafranbel demonstrated under the slogan of returning to the spirit of the revolution.

In the regions under the control of the regime, the opposition has not stopped rising even among the "loyal supporters".

In July and August, the areas under control of the regime were submerged by an avalanche of leaflets printed with the slogan "We want to live: your children lie with the palace and our children in coffins". In the same way mid-August, a campaign

was launched by activists from the Alawite community, "Shout" your opposition to Assad. The group tries to show the dangers and the sacrifices made by the Alawite community to defend the Assad regime. They for example launched campaigns on the social networks or on several occasions secretly distributed leaflets in the town of Tartous stating "the street wants to live" and "the chair for you [Assad], coffins for our children", in reference to the significant number of Alawite soldiers in the regime's army of the mode who have died during the last three years. The chair is a symbolic reference to the presidency.

On 2 October, an important demonstration in the "loyal" districts of the city of Homs took place against the governmental leaders, following an explosion which killed tens of children. The demonstrators shouted the slogan "the people wants the fall of Barazi", in reference to the governor of the city, Talal Barazi, a regime supporter.

On the same day there was a demonstration in the "rebellious" district of Homs in solidarity with the families of the victims. This occurred one month after the arrest of "loyal" activists at the origin of a protest campaign called "Where are they?", against the abandonment by the regime of a military base in the north of Raqqqa province and the massacre of hundreds of soldiers by the Islamic State.

In the middle of October the town of Tartus, regarded as a stronghold of the regime saw its first demonstration calling for the fall of the regime and all its symbols.

At the same moment, the opening of a major shopping centre, including seven restaurants and a game room for children, costing more than 50 million dollars in the town of Tartus exasperated partisans of Bachar el-Assad, who consider them indecent while the country is devastated by the war. These criticisms express an increasingly palpable bitterness in the pro-regime media, in particular after considerable losses among the soldiers, and the drama caused by the death of about fifty children in recent attacks on Homs. The promotion of other

tourist projects simply adds to it. Loyal supporters accuse the regime of abandoning "while approximately 60% of the population of Tartus cannot afford to shop there" over there", says one indignant message on a pro-regime Facebook page.

At the same time we should note the formation, in several regions with a Kurdish majority, in the north-east of Syria, of an autonomous government dominated by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is the Syrian equivalent of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK), in November 2013. The forces of Assad had withdrawn in July 2012, from nine cities with a Kurdish majority. The PYD controls most of the Kurdish regions outside the city of Qamishli, still under occupation of the regime, and a few mixed cities in the provinces of Hasaka and in Aleppo.

Autonomous transitional administrations have been created in the three areas of Afrine, north-west of Aleppo, Kobani, between the Turkish border to the north and the Euphrates which borders on the west, and the Djezireh, the largest and most populous zone, which is located in the extreme north-east of the country.

In the expectation of elections planned during 2014, each entity currently has a transitional legislative assembly led by a president and a provisional regional government, made up of twenty-two members, appointed ministers, who manage, with a ministerial council, the usual business of political, social, legal and economic life. These three regional governments are each headed by a Kurdish prime minister and two deputy prime ministers often originating from other religious or ethnic communities, Kurds, Arab, Christian or others.

Very interesting experiments in self-administration, particularly on the level of women's rights and of the minorities, but with also many contradictions, in particular the authoritarianism of the PYD forces, which did not hesitate to repress activists or to close establishments and institutions which are critical of it. In the same way since the beginning of October, obligatory conscription was decreed and

implemented by the PYD in the areas under its control, provoking the flight of an increased number of young people belonging to all the communities, while the others who refused to serve in the YPG forces were imprisoned. This campaign was also the object of criticisms and protests, four women even demonstrated in the streets of Amuda on 14 October 2014.

One should not forget indeed only the PYD, just like its mother organization the PKK, lacks democratic references whether in its inner or external functioning in relation its rivals or simple groups. We should remember the protest movements at the end of June 2013 in some towns of Rojava, like Amuda and Derabissyat, against repression and the arrest of Kurdish revolutionary activists by PYD forces.

That does not prevent us from giving total support to the Kurdish national liberation movement in its fight for self-determination in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran against authoritarian governments that oppress them or prevent them from exercising their self-determination. This is why also that it is necessary to demand the removal of the PKK from all the lists of terrorist organizations in Europe and elsewhere.

We can indeed criticize the leadership of the PKK or the PYD for some of their policies, but as I said before, a basic principle for revolutionaries is that we must initially support all forms of struggle for liberation and emancipation unconditionally before having the right to criticize the way in which they are led.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Syrian popular movement faces several counter-revolutionary threats, first of all the Assad regime assisted by its Russian, Iranian and Hezbollah allies, which has recorded significant military victories like the recovery of the city of Homs in May 2014. The propaganda of the regime about the "war on terrorism", which is also taken up by the dictator Sissi in Egypt and the reactionary

monarchies of the Gulf, finds more echo within the Western countries in their repressive measures that are supposedly to cope with the jihadist threat in Europe.

The other face of the counter-revolution is the Islamist and jihadist groups who are opposed to the goals of the Syrian revolution (democracy, social justice and rejection of communalism) and attack revolutionaries in the so-called liberated regions. These groups have benefited in the first place from the amnesty granted by the regime at the beginning of the revolution while democrats and other revolutionaries continued to languish in prison and to be murdered by the regime. Also the Assad regime does not systematically fight them, as in Raqqa, the city occupied by the IS, spared from bombing from its occupation until the US bombing in August 2014 in Iraq against IS military advances.

In the second place these jihadist groups have benefited from financial support, especially at the beginning of the revolution but less the case today, from private donors in the Gulf monarchies who wanted to transform the popular revolution into a religious war. The jihadist groups like IS and the Jabhat al Nusra have moreover become largely financially autonomous thanks to the traffic generated by the occupation of oil wells and the development of a war economy.

It is also important, in spite of the difficulties and threats to the Syrian revolution, to consider it as an integral part of the revolutionary process in the region and its dynamic, and any attempt to separate them must be challenged. The revolutionaries in Syria are fighting like the other activists in the countries of the region for freedom and dignity and also against the authoritarian regimes and the Islamic groups and jihadists who are opposed to their objectives.

Similarly the so-called geopolitical oppositions or from above of those blocs of countries do not explain the dynamic of the Syrian revolution. This analysis leads some political commentators to positions that render incomprehensible the dynamics of

the revolutionary process, and passes over in silence the fact that the major powers, allegedly opposed, collaborate together on different themes, such as for example on Iraq lately but also in the "fight against terrorism".

The rapprochement over the last year between Iran and the United States is a perfect example and has demonstrated, if it were still necessary, the futility of the position of those sectors of the left who consider Russia and Iran as part of an anti-imperialist bloc. The different world imperialist powers and regional bourgeois regimes, in spite of their rivalry, have a common interest in the defeat of the popular revolutions of the region, and the most obvious example is that of Syria.

The Geneva 2 conference in March 2014 on Syria, supported by all the global and regional powers without exception, had the same objectives as the previous "peace" conferences: to reach an agreement between the Assad regime and an opportunistic faction – linked to the Western States and the

Gulf monarchies – of the opposition coming together in the Syrian Coalition.

We must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies of the popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution, only the popular classes in struggle throughout the world. In Syria as elsewhere, no solution can be found as long as the democratic and social issues are not dealt with together.

Finally, as the revolutionary Syrians put it: "The enemies are multiple.... the revolution is one ... and it continues". The Syrian popular movement has undoubtedly not said its last word.

USA

The New York City People's Climate March: Looking Back at September 21st

DIANNE FEELEY ·

Some have complained—both before the march and afterwards—that it was a symbolic action without official demands and heavy corporate funding, while others objected to the fact that we even marched away from the site of the one-day UN conference on climate change. I myself was initially disturbed by the fact that the march route turned at 42nd Street and traveled away from the United Nations, but I found that turning our backs was empowering.

The march brought together something on the order of 400,000 people and more than 1,500 participating organizations, all opposing the ineffective policies of governments, beginning with the United States. Above all, the marchers called for stopping the policies that subsidize fossil fuel production. The slogans and chants indicated that demonstrators were demanding alternatives to a society based on profitability. The fact that there was no general slogan, and no policing of slogans, revealed a range of statements from the very personal to the very political—sometimes within the very same message! People were not asking for half-measures, but stating what we need.

In fact, the contingents and their chants, banners, costumes, puppets, and props displayed a wealth of knowledge about alternatives, from ending war production to developing public transportation, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture. These ideas, as well as even more visionary ones, were expressed with creativity and a good deal of humor. This breadth, instead of making the action more "respectable" as some left-wing commentators

feared, pushed the event in a more radical direction.

Attempting to wait out the event, police finally arrested 102 as night fell, including someone in a polar bear suit. While many who attended the sit-in felt overwhelmingly positive about the action, others were frustrated by the failure to reach the steps of the exchange as energy slipped away since there was no contingency plan.

Actions and the Future

The breadth of the march also opened up space for conferences and other actions. This benefited the more radical end of the spectrum, which organized additional events:

System Change Not Climate Change [1] along with Global Climate Convergence [2] held a conference with over 100 workshops the day before, attracting 2500 participants. The range of topics was impressive and the final plenary included talks by grassroots activists Olga Bautista, from the Southeast Side Coalition Against Petcoke; Desmond D'Sa, 2014 Goldman Prize recipient from South Africa; and Naomi Klein, whose new book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* had just been released.

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy also held a conference before the march, with participation from national and international unions.

Flood Wall Street, an action involving 3,000 people, took place the day following the march. Organized by the Climate Justice Action, its slogan was "Stop Capitalism. End the Climate Crisis." Although the plan was to sit in on the steps of the

Stock Exchange, police put up barricades and marchers ended up sitting on lower Broadway.

While radical journalist Chris Hedges had counterposed Flood Wall Street to the mass march, it's clear in retrospect that the size and breath of the march enabled the various other events to be as strong and successful as they were. The debate over demonstration tactics is hardly new: this was also an issue during the anti-Vietnam protests. There, too, direct actions were part of the mobilization days, but separated from the large action given that most people are unable to commit themselves to the possibility of arrest.

From the perspective of many revolutionary-minded organizations, building demonstrations is important in showing the breadth of the movement for social change. For everyone who marches, many more feel at one with the demonstration, and often begin to act as a result of seeing its power and confidence. The goal is to win the vast majority to understanding the seriousness of the problem, a sense of what it takes to overcome it and a willingness to act.

Given the scope of how fossil fuels control production and transportation processes, create a toxic environment, and reinforce inequality, the vast majority have a lot to think through. That so many constituencies joined the march reveals that understanding has moved to a higher plane. In this regard I'd like to note three important elements:

The environmental justice movement—led by African American, Native American, and Latino people who have fought against toxic waste dumps, mining, incinerators, and coal-fired plants that are

overwhelmingly in their communities—played a key role in the march and related activities.

Labor's participation was noticeable. At least 75 unions endorsed and many encouraged members to turn out. The effect of Hurricane Sandy on metro New York City has awakened many city unions to the reality of climate change. Since fossil fuel industries boast of how many jobs they are creating, union members have been forced to think concretely about how their livelihoods will be affected by moving to alternative energy. Of course it is easier for transit workers and bus drivers to see the need to build mass transit, but all workers are forced consider how their work can be reorganized in order to insure a future.

What kind of society demands jobs that maim and destroy people's lives? Why should a worker fear the danger of unsafe working conditions? Why should communities be dependent on the mercy of corporations? Yet fear of job loss is the tool through which the fossil fuel industry has been able to keep people from demanding a swift transition to new ways of organizing industrial and agricultural production.

The participation of queer activists also brings new energy and confidence to the movement.

In building for the People's Climate March, organizers stressed "To Change Everything, We Need Everyone." While I'm only speaking about the New York City event, the march did not occur only there. Indeed, 2646 solidarity events took place in 162 countries—a big step forward!

October 22, 2014

Against the Current

MEXICO

Political disappearances spark crisis in Mexico

EDGARD SANCHEZ ·

On 26 September, municipal police attacked a group of students distributing political leaflets during a public event organized by local government in the city of Iguala, Guerrero. [1] The students were ejected from the public event and pursued and shot at by police, who also attacked a bus carrying other students who had travelled to Iguala to compete at a soccer tournament. Four students were killed and a number of others were seriously injured. Another 43 students were detained by police and transferred to a police station, from which they were taken away in police vehicles. They have not been seen or heard from since.

The disappearance of these 43 students has taken place in a state where the majority of disappearances of activists and guerrilla fighters took place in the 1970s, so the student response has been swift and massive.

Thanks to the "war on drugs" initiated by former National Action Party (PAN) president Felipe Calderón and continued by Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) president Enrique Peña Nieto, the number of disappearances has grown to 10,000 people in recent years and is now a full-blown human-rights crisis.

One of the absurd and heart-wrenching things about this state terrorism is the fact that most of the disappeared have been random members of the civilian population, described as "collateral damage" of the war against "organized crime". This is what makes them different from the more than 500 cases taken up in the 1970s and 1980s by the "Eureka!" committee of mothers of the disappeared led by Rosario Ibarra. At the time, we spoke of the "po-

litical disappeared" since these were people the government accused – at times falsely – of belonging to armed political organizations.

This latest case of missing students in Guerrero has taken us right back to the kind of disappearances carried out against political and social-movement activists in the past. The government can no longer claim that it is a matter of "collateral damage" of the war on drugs. This act of aggression was explicitly directed against students from the Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa teacher-training college. [2]

The government initially claimed that the students were victims of "organized crime". In light of evidence provided by surviving students, it was forced to admit that the students had been detained by municipal police and handed over to a leading drug trafficker who ordered that they be killed and buried in secret mass graves in the countryside. Army, police and forensic teams were assembled to locate the mass graves. The teams found more than ten mass graves and then compared DNA from the human remains with that of the missing students' families. In a show of distrust toward Mexican authorities, the families demanded that Argentinian experts in forensic medicine be involved in the case.

Blaming "organized crime" is a way to create confusion and obscure the government's responsibility for these crimes. It's clear that the 43 missing students were initially detained by the police and then transported in police vehicles to destinations unknown. It's no coincidence that the slogan made famous by Rosario Ibarra and the "Eureka!" Committee in the 1970s and 1980s is once again ringing out in the demonstrations, especially in the contingents of Ayotzinapa students and family members. "They were taken away alive, and we want them back alive!"

The students were not "picked up" by organized crime, nor are they victims of kidnapping by individual criminals. They are victims of "forced disappearance", the term used in international human rights law when the perpetrators of the crime are state organizations of any sort. The UN considers forced disappearance to be a war crime.

The other important point about the current situation is that both the Iguala municipal government and the Guerrero state government are run by the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). [3] The events of recent weeks show how low the party has sunk. PRI president Peña Nieto won the 2012 elections through yet another election fraud. Soon after, in December of the same year, he secured PRI, PAN and PRD support for his Pact for Mexico, which recognized Peña Nieto as president and promised support for his government agenda.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, PRD presidential candidate in both 2006 and 2012, broke with the party and created a new one, called the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA). It embraces the same nationalist strategic perspective advocated by the PRD at its founding convention in 1989. During his first 18 months in power, Peña Nieto succeeded in getting his harshest neoliberal reforms through a Congress controlled by the Pact for Mexico parties.

Peña Nieto's reforms have radically altered the content of the 1917 Constitution – in the area of social and economic rights and in relation to the country's national sovereignty. Now, not only does the PRD bear responsibility for supporting this overhaul of the constitution drafted in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, it is now involved in human-rights violations akin to those committed during the earlier decades of PRI rule (when, indeed, most PRD leaders were still in the PRI). The head of the Iguala municipal government requested leave and is currently a fugitive from the law. Guerrero state governor Ángel Aguirre Rivero has rejected calls for his resignation and was backed by his party during the first 15 days of the crisis. He has also received support from the PRI group in Congress, who argue

that he should remain in office and track down the missing students.

These parties argue that "organized crime" bears responsibility for these crimes, and that it is pointless to call on Ángel Aguirre to step down, and that the conflict shouldn't be "politicized". This can only be because they realize that the situation in the country is explosive, with so many wrongs having been committed against workers and the people generally speaking. They know that the dynamic of the student protests and solidarity movement can quickly evolve toward challenging government, from the local level to the federal one. The protests of recent days are a clear signal.

There were renewed clashes with police when Ayotzinapa students and teachers gathered to protest in Chilpancingo, prompting protestors to set fire to the state-government complex and city hall and rain stones down on the local Congress building. The following day, the protest movement announced plans to occupy more than 40 municipal-government buildings across the state of Guerrero.

A first national and international day of action in solidarity with the Ayotzinapa students was organized on October 8th. The event was a resounding success, given the large number of cities where protests took place and the breadth of the social-movement and political forces involved – stretching from the Catholic church to militant trade-union organizations such as Mexican Union of Electrical Workers (SME) and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), which has once again taken to the streets of San Cristóbal in the southern state of Chiapas.

Immediately following the day of action, a 48-hour work stoppage was organized in the main universities of the central part of the country, and most significantly at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The work stoppage coincided with the general strike underway for several weeks at the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) – another educational institution established at the

time of General Lázaro Cárdenas to give the children of workers and peasants access to higher education, and which the neoliberals now want to overhaul.

The committee in solidarity with Ayotzinapa students has called for another national and international day of action on 22 October to demand that the 43 missing students be returned alive and that the guilty parties be punished to the full extent of the law. The second day of action is expected to be even bigger than the first.

The Workers and People's Political Organization (OPT) has pointed out that the current protest movement shows how wrong the government is to say that neoliberal reforms are the result of broad national consensus. [4] The OPT says that genuine

opposition to these reforms is not to be found in the Congress, but rather in the country's streets, highways and rural areas, where a huge number of resistance movements are active. What is lacking is a political and social reference point to unite sectoral struggles within a political movement aimed at dislodging the neoliberal oligarchy and its Pact-for-Mexico party mouthpieces from power. The SME seeks to build such a political and social force with initiatives like the OPT and the launching of a new Trade-Union Centre (NCT, whose first national congress took place on 17 and 18 October). The goal is to build such an alternative as quickly as possible within the resistance movements and new social movements that are breaking away from the parties of the current order.

FRANCE

The "pact of responsibility": from austerity to the liquidation of the Social Security system

JEAN-CLAUDE LAUMONIER ·

In a press conference a few days later, Hollande went into more details about the content of this pact: Every year, €30 billion of exemption from social security contributions [1] for the employers, underwritten by a cut of €50 billion in public spending over three years. An unprecedented austerity plan.

As for the famous "in return" the employers quickly made it known that it was out of the question for them to undertake any binding commitment, especially in terms of job creation.

Following the electoral collapse of the Socialist Party in the municipal elections in March 2014, Hollande changed his Prime Minister. He did not, however, change his policies. Instead he appointed Manuel Valls, one of the most right-wing and liberal leaders of the Socialist Party (PS) as Prime Minister, to implement "more quickly" and "more strongly" the pact of responsibility, which has become the backbone of the economic and social policy of the Socialist government.

Despite the protests - without any consequences - of a minority of Socialist MPs, the new prime minister won a vote of confidence in Parliament on the pact of responsibility. This pact will, from 2014, come into force in the form of two laws that will "rectify" the budgets of the state and of the Social Security system, laws that were adopted in early July.

A social-democratic turning point?

The pact of responsibility has often been presented as a "social-democratic turning point" [2] in the five-year term of François Holland. They forget that

the liberal dogma of "lowering the cost of labour" in order to ensure an economic "stimulus" has been the guiding line of the PS/Green government ever since the presidential election. From autumn 2012, the government announced a "pact for competitiveness" in the form of tax credits: a handout of €20 billion paid, without any conditions, to businesses. Those €20 billion were offset by an increase in the tax burden, falling primarily on the working classes (in particular VAT) and by reductions in public spending.

The pact of responsibility in 2014 is therefore a continuation of the CICE (Competitiveness and Employment Tax Credit), which it will gradually replace. However, the new plan differs from its predecessor on two points:

- The scale of the attack against public spending (public and social expenses).
- The "pact" operates a decisive shift towards the liquidation of the social protection introduced in 1945.

An unprecedented austerity plan

The pact of responsibility is primarily an austerity plan, on an unprecedented scale. It is underwritten by €50 billion of cuts in public and social spending over three years, distributed as follows: €19 billion will be taken out of the state budget, €10 billion from local authorities and €21 billion from spending on social security (€11 billion coming from pensions and social benefits and €10 billion from the health service).

Public services, already under strain because of earlier liberal counter-reforms, will be subjected to a veritable financial strangulation and replaced with

a minimum service called "general interest" (according to the wishes of the European Union) with bits and pieces of public service without any real means, precarious associative set-ups and the participation of private companies wherever profits are possible.

The closures, consolidations and privatization of public institutions will continue, along with job cuts for civil servants. The path has been traced in a report by the Court of Auditors, which recommends the annual suppression of 10,000 government jobs over three years, accompanied by an increase in the number of hours worked. The first effects of this "pact", whose stated goal is "employment" will therefore be the elimination of thousands of public sector jobs [3]. Civil service wages, which have not been upgraded since 2010, will remain frozen until 2017. Finally, pensions and various benefits will be frozen until October 2015, except for those on the lowest incomes, with a resulting decline in purchasing power.

€30 billion a year of "lowering labour costs"

This "effort", of which the working class will bear the brunt, will make it possible to reduce labour costs for employers by €30 billion a year.

For the year 2014, to the €20 billion already granted in the form of tax credits will be added:

- The elimination of all social contributions paid on wages at the minimum wage level and their reduction on wages up to 1.6 times the minimum wage (€4.5 billion);
- A reduction of family allowances on wages up to 3.5 times the minimum wage - which concerns 90 per cent of wages (€4.5 billion)
- A reduction of family allowances for the self-employed and tradespeople (€1 billion)

By 2017, the (temporary) mechanism of the tax credit will be replaced by the (definitive) annual elimination of €30 billion in social security contributions, in addition to the €32 billion already granted 20 years ago to the bosses.

Holland and Valls have added as a bonus a reduction in company tax:

- Abolition of the "social solidarity contribution on companies" (€6 billion);
- Abolition of the surtax on companies and reduction in company tax (which will be reduced from 33 per cent to 28 per cent) (€5 billion);
- Abolition of various small taxes paid by businesses.

A final component of the pact of responsibility will make it possible to free companies from the administrative "constraints" that "burden" them, in particular from the Labour Code which guarantees the recognition of employees' rights and sets limits to employers' arbitrary powers. In short: more flexibility and precariousness.

In an attempt to sell its reform, the government had completed the pact by a measure which is supposed to ensure its social character, pompously entitled "solidarity pact", but which is just smoke and mirrors. The lowest wages were supposed to benefit from a reduction in employers' contributions defined as "payroll" [4], supposedly to restore "purchasing power". This was nothing but a confidence trick; it consisted of a transfer of part of the indirect wage to the direct wage with no impact on profits. Once the Constitutional Council had annulled it, this fig leaf for austerity disappeared.

The social wage as the defining issue of the class struggle?

The struggle by the employers for the abolition of social contributions is in no sense an ideological whim: these contributions represent over 40 per cent of their payroll. Their reduction and their eventual eradication are therefore a key issue for the reduction of labour costs and the defence of the rate of profit.

In 2010 in France, €633 billion, or nearly one third of gross domestic product (GDP), was spent on social protection, of which 64 per cent (€400 billion) consisted of social contributions [5] or one and half

times the entire state budget, (which amounted to €275 billion that year). In comparison the taxes paid to the state by businesses appear ridiculous: in that year, company tax brought in €34 billion and the solidarity tax on wealth €4.5 billion!

The allergy of employers to the system of social security has another fundamental root. Social security not only alters the distribution of wealth in favour of employees, it prefigures (partially) a non-capitalist way of sharing wealth between producers: no longer to each according to the quantity of individual labour that they provide, but "to each according to their needs" [6].

Towards the fiscalization of social security

Michel Rocard, Socialist Prime Minister from May 1988 to May 1991, initiated the offensive against social contributions. He began the massive fiscalization [7] of the funding of social protection by creating the CSG [8], a new tax for funding social security and the RMI [9], a survival allowance, financed by the state and by local governments in place of unemployment benefits paid from employers' contributions.

Since then all governments of right and left have continued along this road.

In the name of job creation or application of the 35-hour week, employers were exempted from €32 billion of contributions, which were offset primarily by the state.

The result is enlightening: in 1980, 96.9 per cent of the social security system was financed by social contributions. In 2012 this share was only 58.4 per cent. Over the same period, the share paid from taxes has risen from 2 per cent to 13 per cent, to which must be added the 6.3 per cent paid by the state as compensation for employers' exemptions from contributions. But especially the CSG - a tax that is "pre-assigned" [10], established in 1990 - now contributes 20.4 per cent of the funding of social security (35.4 per cent for the sickness branch).

In 2012, Hollande's predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy wanted to move to a new stage by dealing with the financing of the family branch of social security. He decided to replace €6 billion of employers' contributions to this branch by an increase in VAT, a tax on consumption, the most unjust of all. Hollande, who had denounced the measure at the time, repealed it in the first weeks of his term of office... But today he is going much further than Sarkozy, by abolishing over three years the equivalent of the entire €30 billion of employers' contributions to the family branch. Just like Sarkozy, in the name of "lower labour costs" it is not only the level of social contributions that he is challenging, but their very principle. According to him, there is no legitimate reason for employers to finance family policy today.

Tomorrow this reasoning can be extended to the sickness branch. Thus a note of the "Council of Economic Analysis," a body placed under the responsibility of the Prime Minister, advocates the complete abolition of public health insurance and the establishment of a "regulated" competitive system between decentralized regional public funds or between private insurance companies. If we add in pensions, which have been the victim of multiple counter-reforms since 1993, it is all the branches of social security that are threatened.

The pact of responsibility accelerates the replacement of the system of social security as an institution independent from the state, and still mainly financed by contributions from employers (the social wage), by a minimum coverage financed by taxes, and incorporated into the state budget. This should then be completed, depending on individuals' situations, by personal and/or collective insurance, in the form of the "three pillars" approach advocated by the European Union [11].

The "fiscalization" of the funding of social security is therefore in no way a "technical" measure. It is the means by which the reduction of the socialized part of wages and the disengagement of employers from financing social protection are being achieved.

Fighting against it should be self-evident, even elementary, for a class-struggle trade unionism. This is unfortunately far from being the case.

A workers' movement that is paralyzed and on the defensive

The vote of confidence in the government Valls over the pact of responsibility took place without even a national day of strikes and demonstrations, and it was only on June 26, just before the holidays, that part of the trade-union movement called for a day of action "against austerity" without even putting forward clearly the demand for the scrapping of the pact of responsibility.

The scenario that had been seen in 2013 over pensions was thus repeated.

However, over the past 30 years the offensives against the system of social security have been the cause of all the great social movements that the country has seen, demonstrating the acute sensitivity that workers had to this question. In 1995, 2003 and 2010 millions of them went on strike and took to the streets for several weeks to defend their social protection (pensions, sickness benefit).

In order to understand the lack of response to the pact of responsibility, we must take into account the deep disillusionment that exists today among the majority of workers. The defeat of the movement on pensions in 2010 left its mark. But above all it is bitterness and despair that dominate, faced with the austerity policies of a pseudo-left government that is continuing and accentuating the attacks of its predecessors. For the lack of any perspective, anger is expressed primarily in negative form by the massive level of abstention and the vote for the far-right in elections.

Passivity and a wait-and-see attitude are reinforced by the strategy of the union leaderships, which are engaged, without any mobilization, in a "social dialogue" with the government and the employers, and their renunciation of any sort of large-scale action against austerity.

The part of the union leaderships that is most poisoned with liberalism, whose main component is the leadership of the CFDT, fully supports the dogma of lower labour costs and supports the "pact". It is favourable to the abolition of social security contributions and to fiscalization through the CSG. At most, it seeks to negotiate some symbolic "counterparties" in exchange for its support for the employers' projects.

Another part of the union leaderships, where we find the CGT, FO and the FSU [12] criticize the policy of austerity and the "pact" but are an integral part of the masquerade of "social dialogue" established by the Socialist government. The government organizes lengthy "cold" negotiations with the "social partners", whose main function is to paralyze social mobilization and whose only issue is the negotiation of some crumbs in exchange for the acceptance of reforms.

Only the most combative wing, though very much a minority, represented by the Solidarity Union Federation (Solidaires) has remained critical of this comedy.

In addition, almost all the leaderships of the workers' movement have dropped the reference to social contributions as a part of wages that should fund the social security system as an institution that is independent of the state and big business.

The CFDT has lined up in support of the employers' point of view, denouncing social contributions as a "charge" that "weighs down on labour". The others - CGT, FO, FSU - defend the maintenance of social security as an autonomous institution and its financing by social contributions. But they believe that reform is needed and that other resources should be found by "taxing profits." They put the emphasis on these alternative sources of funding, not on the maintenance and extension of social contributions. They therefore place themselves within the logic of negotiations to make the plans of the government and the employers "fairer", rather than on mobilizing to defeat them. This line of argument is even largely taken up by the most radical

wing of the trade-union movement, represented by Solidaires [13], as well as by the main components of the Left Front and also by some people in ATTAC and the Fondation Copernic think-tank.

Towards a change in the social climate?

The present social paralysis in the face of the pact of responsibility may however be thrown into question in the coming months under the double impact of the deepening economic crisis in Europe as a whole and the failure of a discredited government.

After announcing two years ago that "the rising curve of unemployment would be reversed," Hollande must now recognize that the goal is not in sight. The Prime Minister himself has announced a difficult autumn, while deflation threatens and the sacrifices demanded by the pact will become reality. Without any alternative policy, the government is in a dead-end, heavily criticized within its own majority.

In such a climate, the state of mind of workers can change rapidly, opening up the possibility of social remobilization. There are signs that seem to indicate this.

Under pressure from their base, the CGT and FO confederations have had to cancel, at the last moment, their participation in the annual social conference, the high mass of the government's "social dialogue".

In recent months social conflicts have increased, including the recent two week-long railway strike, the long and difficult conflicts in the postal service, and significant struggles in the public and private hospital sectors, which are directly concerned by the "pact of responsibility."

A large-scale offensive against health insurance and the public hospital system

Of the €50 billion "pact of responsibility" cuts, €10 billion concern the health sector. It is all very well for Marisol Touraine, Minister of Social Security and Health, to state that "we will make €10 billion

of savings without that leading to a 'low cost' health system": who can believe that such a "purge" will be without consequences?

It is actually the acceleration of the policy of privatizing the health system and the destruction of the system of public hospitals that is on the agenda.

The increase in health expenditure reimbursed by social security will be limited to 2.1 per cent in 2015, 2 per cent in 2016 and 1.9 per cent in 2017 in order to reach the target of €10 billion of cuts. The immediate consequence will be an increase in the part of health care whose cost must be borne by patients and by their supplementary health insurance. The amount of such supplementary insurance continues to grow, putting a little more strain on the purchasing power of workers and pensioners. Access to care for those who have the lowest incomes and cannot afford good insurance will be further reduced.

A significant part of the restrictions on health (€3 billion euros over three years) will fall on public hospitals. These restrictions will be added to nearly €1 billion euros of cuts already made in 2013-2014. Again, the soothing words of the minister, who claims to be reducing hospital expenditure through the development of ambulatory surgery and improvements in hospital purchasing, do not fool anyone. Hospital managers, through the voice of their employers' federation, the Hospital Federation of France, have not hesitated to say so clearly. In their opinion, it will be necessary to take on the workforce, which represents 70 to 80 per cent of hospital spending, make cuts in staffing, go on the attack over the number of hours worked and working conditions. They have also, without qualms, volunteered for this task.

The minister herself is so little convinced by her own words that she is preparing a bill called "Public Health" that extends and deepens one entitled "Hospital, Patients, Health and Territories (HPST)" adopted by Nicolas Sarkozy in order to impose hospital restructuring. This law, which should be adopted in early 2015, provides for mandatory con-

solidation of all health institutions in the same region, encourages the transfer to the private sector (liberal, voluntary and commercial) of part of the functions of the public service, ensures the strengthening of the "strong arm" of austerity in health that is represented by the Regional Health Agencies.

These measures come after ten years of attacks which have had dramatic consequences. They have resulted in the development of the private sector to the detriment of the public, but have also forced public hospitals to operate according to the criteria of productivity and profitability of private enterprises (pricing reforms and "governance") .. . Hospital managements apply and generalize the management methods of private business establishments. Thus the CGT of Toulouse CHU (University Hospital Centre) [14] denounces the introduction of "lean management", directly inspired by the "lean production" of Toyota. An infernal work rate, time and motion methods, but also "self-policing" of workers, resulting in the harassment of those who do not keep up with the pace by management or by their colleagues themselves.

In all workplaces the unions are denouncing the increase in suffering at work. This is related not only to the working conditions, but also to the dissatisfaction of doing a job that is subjected to demands which pervert it. Burnout and suicide attempts are the most visible signs.

This situation, which has been endured over a decade, has today reached a critical point. There has been in recent months a renaissance of struggles. All categories of institutions have been affected: major hospitals like the CHUs, large psychiatric institutions that have been especially targeted through reductions in appropriations, local hospitals subject to restructuring, retirement homes, private clinics [15]. But these movements have remained isolated, none of the three main trade union confederations (CGT, CFDT, FO) envisaging even the slightest coordinated action.

Only the mobilization of a particular category of workers, such as the midwives, has been able to take a national dimension.

"Convergence of hospitals fighting against 'hosterity'"

It is in this context that the CGT and SUD unions of a public psychiatric facility (the EPSM of Caen in Normandy) took the initiative of a "general assembly of hospitals".

After having twice defeated the austerity plan that the management of the hospital wanted to impose on them, they circulated an appeal for a meeting on April 4 in Caen: "Everywhere - said the appeal - hospitals suffer the same problems, the same financial difficulties, and managements impose the same remedies: suppression of [days of] RTT [reduction of working time] job losses, bed closures. (...) Today, it is no longer enough just to fight back hospital by hospital d (...) it is time to provide a national response to a national problem".

This appeal had a large echo, since hundreds of activists - representing mainly SUD unions (which are part of Solidaires) and CGT unions - met in Caen. After having assessed the situation, they decided to create an instrument for coordinating struggles. A new and larger meeting was held in Nanterre in the Parisian region on May 22.

An appeal was adopted there reiterating the demands: "The general assembly demands the cancellation of the debt, the repeal of the HPST law, the abolition of pricing activity, increased wages, permanent contracts for temporary workers, hiring of more staff..." It traced the perspective of preparing a national mobilization to defeat the austerity policies in the health sector, in the spirit of the "White Tides" in Spain.

A first initiative was decided for June 18 in Caen against "hosterity" [16] and the criminalization that is accompanying the rise of mobilizations in hospitals. Managements of public hospitals, with the support of their employers' federation and the government, now often behave like hardnosed bosses to get their austerity policies through. They do not

hesitate to call in the police, to take union officials to court, to obtain convictions against staff involved in combative actions.

This first demonstration was attended by over 600 people, mainly from the region, but there were also delegations from other regions and from Paris.

In the afternoon, 69 health institutions (including 7 CHUs) represented by about 250 activists, for the most part members of the CGT and SUD, but also the UFAS [17], the Nurses' Coordination and activists from the CFDT met in a general assembly. The National Coordination of Local Hospitals and Maternity Homes [18] was also present. Messages of support were sent by institutions that could not come.

It was decided to move to a higher level of mobilization and to start preparing now a national demonstration in Paris on September 23. A calendar of initiatives was drawn up, an organizing team designated and a name given to this regroupment: the "convergence of hospitals fighting against hosterity".

The "convergence", a new and promising instrument

The appearance of such an instrument is a new and promising factor in the French social and trade-union movement.

For the first time, even before a struggle has begun, activists from rank-and-file trade-union structures and representatives belonging to different unions, are coming together in a spirit of unity, with a com-

mon goal, to make struggles converge and to win satisfaction for our demands.

Although the SUD Health and Social Services Federation supports the initiative, the leadership of the CGT federation is very hostile and tries to discourage by all means its unions from participating.

Despite this, many CGT unions, exasperated by the passivity of their federation, have decided to defy it, and not merely to express their dissatisfaction adoring congresses.

As for the other union federations, they are also doing everything to preserve their monopoly of inaction and "social dialogue", without any struggles with the government.

The potential importance of the "convergence" has been further demonstrated by the recent struggle of railway workers: a very combative strike, organized on the terrain by general assemblies, primarily coordinated by teams of CGT and SUD activists, ran up against the absence of a democratic instrument for coordinating and controlling the movement.

The outcome of this strike could have been quite different if those teams of activists had previously begun to meet and act together.

It is still too early to know whether a major struggle will take place in the autumn in the hospital sector and whether the "convergence" will have managed to build itself sufficiently to make possible a democratic coordination of this struggle. But what is certain is that everything must be done to move in this direction. [19].

BOLIVIA

Bolivia Elects Morales for Another 5 Years: Is Revolutionary Change Still on the Agenda?

CLAIRE VEALE ·

The Promises of a Grassroot Socialist Leader

Morales' widespread popularity stems from his poor and indigenous background, and his symbolic role in the anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal popular uprisings of the 2000s. He first became known for leading the coca farmer's fight against the War on Drugs driven by the U.S.A. to criminalise the coca leaf, a sacred plant in Bolivia, legally used daily by hundreds of thousands of Bolivians. He then took an active part in the social revolutions that brought people to the streets in mass numbers to protest the privatisation of water in 2000 and to call for the nationalisation of gas in 2003. The social movements were successful in bringing an end to the neo-liberal regimes that had been privatising and exploiting Bolivia's natural resources since the 1980s, and in 2005 Evo Morales' Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS) party was elected by the support of these movements, on the promises of nationalisation.

Nine years on, Morales' government has, without a doubt, improved the lives of many Bolivians through the so-called *Proceso de Cambio* (process of change). There have been great advances in poverty reduction schemes, with cash transfers to mothers, children, and the elderly, and education reforms that have radically lowered illiteracy rates [1] and medical services, which are now widely available to all and have improved with the cooperation of Cuban medical aid. Infrastructure and industrialisation have also been developed, and an ef-

fort towards nationalising Bolivia's key industries has been central to Morales' campaign.

The new constitution of 2009 is another important achievement for the MAS, implementing new mechanisms of direct democracy and pushing for decentralisation, dispersing authority to regional, departmental, and indigenous territories. The constitution also recognises Bolivia as a plurinational state, as well as acknowledging the rights of Mother Nature, a landmark for the advancement of indigenous rights and environmental legislation. In a country where no less than 30 years ago, indigenous populations were not allowed to enter certain spaces due to racial discrimination, it is not difficult to understand why Morales enjoys extensive support from Bolivia's predominantly indigenous and low-income population.

All in the Discourse

However, it is nearly impossible to truly break from Latin America's long history of colonial rule and today's global neoliberalism, which has meant that the government's policies have fallen short of the promised revolutionary change Evo was elected on. Indeed, many critics from the left have argued that Morales' government has focused on superficial policy adjustments driven by populist discourse, without tackling the capitalist structures of exploitation. And to some extent, that seems to be true.

The nationalisation of the hydrocarbon industries was, arguably, a simple re-negotiation of contracts with foreign-owned petrol companies [2] aiming to increase state royalties, rather than seizing assets for a full nationalisation. The choice of language in the government's discourse is problematic when

the Bolivian people, who have historically been fierce fighters for the ownership of their resources, are being dissuaded to demand nationalisation any further, as Morales falsely claims the industry is now in the hands of the state.

It is not the only issue where the president's discourse has not been quite in accordance with the reality on the ground. Indeed, Morales is known internationally for his powerful defence of Pachamama, Mother Earth, and claims to represent indigenous struggles for their rights and land worldwide. There is no doubt that Morales' defense of the environment and his much needed criticisms on growth-driven capitalism are remarkable advances for societies worldwide. The Aymara tradition of Suma Qamaña or buen vivir—the need to live in harmony with nature without focusing on material gains—which has been widely promoted by Morales, reflects an inspiring alternative approach to development. Nevertheless, the discourse is far from the reality of his policies, and one only has to look at the government's reliance on extractive industries to understand the contradictions.

Socialist redistribution of wealth vs. Pachamama

Evo Morales, much like his South American allies in Venezuela and Ecuador, heavily relies on the extraction of gas, oil, and minerals to fund his socialist policies of wealth redistribution, a strategy that can be contradictory to environmental policies and the promotion of indigenous rights. The government has been infamously repressive of the indigenous marches for the protection of the TIPNIS reserve which is under threat by the plans to build a highway linking Bolivian and Brazilian trade routes.

Recently, indigenous people in Bolivia have been protesting a mining law that would result in widespread contamination of drinking water and agriculture, resulting in the criminalisation of protests concerning this issue and the closing down of the headquarters of a leading critical indigenous movement, CONAMAQ [3]. Indigenous critics, including Fernando Vargas, one of this year's presidential

candidates, claim that Evo is no different from his predecessors in the destruction of the planet in pursuit of economic growth. This debate sheds a light on the ambiguous incompatibility of socialist and environmental goals.

Criminalizing Criticism

The government's severe repression of the TIPNIS and the CONAMAQ movements illustrates a wider concern about the MAS' difficult relationship with social movements and critics. Indigenous movements, which have been fighting for their rights for decades, have been accused of working under the influence of imperialist and capitalist groups with the aim to destabilise the government and possibly stage a coup. However, these accusations not only diminish the tremendous work indigenous communities have achieved in their struggles for rights, by portraying them as simple victims of imperialist powers [4], but also create this unhelpful dualism for social movements: "you are either with us or against us." Morales' government, under the intellectual leadership of Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera, has periodically criminalised any form of criticism, dismantling social movements and accusing critics of working for the opposition. This reality is disappointing, considering it was radically critical social movements that enabled Morales to become president in the first place.

A New Term Brings New Hope

Despite all his government's fallbacks, Evo Morales still represents the hope for radical change and his policies hold huge potential for Bolivians. His government's vision of socialist wealth redistribution and Bolivia's efforts to join the continent's anti-imperialist tendencies by encouraging regional cooperation is a truly positive step in the right direction.

However, as we have seen in Venezuela, the MAS must plan ahead in order to remain strong after Morales' time comes to an end, to push forward with the Proceso de Cambio. One way to strengthen the government's position in society would be to change tactics confronting social movements and

criticism, recognising that indigenous and worker's movements should be treated separately from real right-wing opposition efforts to dismantle the government's policies. The current to conflictual strategies will only weaken the MAS in the long turn, losing credibility and support from the left. Enabling safe space for dialogue and cooperation between the government and social movements is

essential to stabilise the infant process of de-colonialism and socialism the MAS is trying to establish. Let's hope the MAS will take the opportunity of this new term to secure their Proceso de Cambio by broadening the debate with social movements and deepening their social project.

14 October 2014

Global South Development Magazine

VENZUELA

The limits of changes – Venezuela: terminal crisis of the rentier petro-state?

EDGARDO LANDER ·

Over the 15 years of the Bolivarian government in Venezuela, significant changes have taken place in the political culture, the social and organisational fabric, and the material living conditions of previously excluded low-income groups. Through multiple social policies (known as "missions") aimed at different sectors of the population, levels of poverty and extreme poverty have been reduced significantly.

According to ECLAC, Venezuela has become – together with Uruguay – one of the two countries with the lowest levels of inequality in Latin America. People are better fed. Effective literacy programmes have been carried out. With Cuban support, the Barrio Adentro mission has brought primary medical care to rural and urban low-income groups throughout the country.

The state pensions system has been massively expanded to include millions of older people. The increase in university enrolment has been equally extraordinary. For the last few years, a housing programme for people with low incomes has been taken forward. Unemployment has been kept at a low level and informal-sector employment has been reduced from 51% in mid-1999 to 41% in mid-2014.

The amount spent on social investment between 1999 and 2013 is estimated to total some US\$650 billion. According to the UNDP, Venezuela's Human Development Index rose from 0.662 in the year 2000 to 0.748 in 2012, taking the country's human development ranking from medium to high.

This has been a time of dynamic grassroots organising and participation, with the setting up of Water Committees and Community Councils, Health Committees, Urban Land Committees, Communal Councils, Communes... Most of this organisational dynamism was the result of government policies expressly aimed at promoting these processes.

Equally important has been the weight of Venezuela's experience – particularly its constitutional reform process – in the progressive shift or turn to the left that has taken place in Latin America over these years. Its influence has also been important in the setting up of various regional integration mechanisms – UNASUR, CELAC, Petrocaribe, ALBA – that have strengthened the region's autonomy and lessened its historical dependence on the United States.

Nevertheless, the social changes that have taken place were not the result of equally profound changes in the country's economic structure. On the contrary, the last fifteen years have seen a consolidation of the rentier state model, with an increased dependency on revenue from oil exports. Oil's share of total export value rose from 68.7% in 1998 to 96% in the last few years. The value of non-oil exports and private sector exports has fallen in absolute terms during this time. Industry's contribution to GDP shrank from 17% in 2000 to 13% in 2013. [1]

October 2014

TNI

NOBEL PRIZE

Satyarthi's Nobel is a cheer - and a warning for India

PRAFUL BIDWAI ·

The award of the Nobel Peace prize to Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai has been widely welcomed in India. This is doubtless positive for the cause of children's rights. But it's also a comment on how the world looks at the social reality of an India that struts about as an "emerging power" but tolerates large-scale abuse and merciless exploitation of children. Satyarthi got the prize partly for the same reason why *Slumdog Millionaire* was a hit in the West.

Satyarthi's Bachpan Bachao Andolan has done commendable work in rescuing 80,000 child labourers from bondage since 1980. True, this is a drop in the ocean in relation to the number of Indian children at work, estimated by UNICEF at a horrifying 12 per cent of our entire child population. The number is minuscule even in relation to the 2011 census estimate of 5-14-group working children (4.35 million), itself dubious because it represents a steep fall, against all observation and intuition, from the 2001 figure (12.67 million). But 80,000 isn't a trivial number even by Indian standards, considering what's at stake, or in relation to, say, our success in reducing human trafficking.

Satyarthi has attracted criticism, not all of it unfairly, for inflating/double-counting the number of rescued children, exaggerating the harshness of their working conditions, passing off regular school-children as child carpet-weavers, relying on sympathetic officials and judges dealing with child-labour regulations to claim easy victories, and for being led by Western NGOs in the "Rugmark" initiative for carpet exports, which seemingly ran out of steam long ago. He has also been accused of intolerance towards critics and subordinates.

However valid, these charges pale beside two fundamental criticisms. First, the BBA's work only tinkers at the margins of the whole complex of social pathologies and economic conditions that sustain child labour. It doesn't try to integrate that necessary but limited agenda into, or even acknowledge the need for, a radical reform or transformation of the social system which alone can produce a lasting solution.

Second, perhaps a majority of rescued children aren't truly rehabilitated and soon regress back into bondage because of various compulsions. Poverty isn't the regression's sole cause. Lack of access to schools, uncongenial classroom conditions, caste prejudice, gender discrimination and insecurity, and absence of vocational training, also play a major role. The non-poverty factors are better understood now that the flaws in the Right to Education Act are coming to light.

But an overarching condition for the persistence of child labour, and the decades-long failure of official/NGO efforts to abolish it, lies in the mindset of the Indian elite. For the elite, child labour is like ether in medieval metaphysics: it's present everywhere, including in their own homes; but it's never noticed. The elite has largely inured itself to child labour not just because most working children are poor, but because it fundamentally rejects the concept of the universal rights of the child, and the obligation of the State and society to provide education, care, safety and space for play to all children regardless of class/caste/gender.

India thus fails an elementary litmus-test of a civilised state. It continues to deprive millions of its children of literacy, which sociologist Daniel Lerner termed in 1958 as "the basic personal skill that underlies the whole modernising sequence." Indian society thus condemns them to a perpetual exis-

tence that's incompatible with developing their basic human potential. If Satyarthi's Nobel helps some in the elite to comprehend this crime's terrifying magnitude, it will have served a purpose.

Friday, October 17 2014

Daily News and Analysis

NOBEL PRIZE - PAKISTAN

The marvelous Malala – a real moment of joy for women

BUSHRA KHALIQ ·

A candid photo of education advocate Malala Yousafzai prior to her meeting with Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson. Ms. Yousafzai is at the United Nations today for a special event to mark 500 Days of Action for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). - UN Photo/Mark Garten

Malala Yousafzai-who survived murderous attack by Taliban in October 2012- was globally recognized as fighter for the girls' right to education. Since then Malala has become the flag bearer of girls and women rights. Her sacrifice highlighted the cause of girls at global level and inspires those who were scared of terrorists and fundamentalists. She challenged the orthodoxy with unique courage, which many of us lack.

The Nobel Prize is beautiful endorsement to the marvelous courage of Malala. It is reminder to many of us that fighting for justice is a Nobel cause. Whosoever is doing this deserves respect and acknowledgment. This young girl is now a peerless symbol of resistance and defiance that few of us can even hope to aspire. She is someone who dared to stand up as a child, alone and defenseless, to the fundamentalists. She believed that one book, one pen and one girl can change the world. The fierce force of fanatics could not shatter her classical resolve.

In a region torn with terrorism, where women are oppressed since centuries, Malala dared to stand up

declaring she was no longer willing to accept the oppression on girls by the patriarchal and fanatic forces. In a decadent society where girls' education has long been criminally relegated, Malala refuse to accept the anti-women prevailing cultural, social and political norms through her resolute stance against forces of the darkness. In a patriarchal society where debilitating gender apartheid in all spheres of life is inhumanely tolerated, Malala's clear voice is a reminder of prevailing patriarchy that continues to brutalize women in this country.

What should shame us is that dominant forces has pushed this society to the point where a girl demanding education her right, had to flee from this country for her life while millions of us could only mock her to feed our insatiable appetite for conspiracy and extreme proclivity for collective denial. It is sad that many Pakistanis still consider it as western conspiracy and mainstream media tends to present Malala as part of so-called anti-Pakistan campaign. Equally sad is persistent societal denial to Dr. Abdus Salam- the first Pakistani scientist acknowledged by the world.

The sharing of Nobel Peace Prize by Kailash and Malala is also a good message for the people of India and Pakistan. Let's win together! Thanks Malala. You are true face of Pakistan. This is the best way to defeat extremism and Talibabanization. Keep it up.

October 13, 2014

Human Rights Asia

KURDISTAN

The results of the Kobane war; so far...

AMED DICLE ·

The Turkish state officials also made contingencies in accordance with this plans and was expecting for 400,000 people from Kobane to come to Urfa by the 20th. This way, Turkey would be 'the country opening its arms to Kobane when it falls'.

When this plan collapsed, in the redrawn plan some were talking of celebrating Eid in the mosques of Kobane. Some must have indulged in this plan so much that they were unable to held back from running with headlines like 'the expected scenario never materialised'. Then Erdogan could no longer hold himself and gave away his feelings when he declared 'Kobane is about to fall'. However, Kobane never fell; it resisted, and is still resisting. This resistance is now the main agenda of not only the Kurds and the Middle East, but the whole world.

The military situation

The 15th of September Kobane attack by ISIS was an expected development after ISIS occupied Mosul and overran military bases belonging to the Syrian army in Raqqah. The YPG made preparations for this within its means. When the attacks began, the YPG evacuated the surrounding villages around Kobane. Some of the people were brought to Kobane and the rest went across the border into Suruc next to their relatives. The evacuation of tens of thousands of people was a successful operation. The YPG was aware of the size of the attack that was being planned and took this precaution in order prevent a massacre.

The geographic conditions and ISIS's superior weapons advantage meant that the YPG had to narrow the lines defence. By doing this, the YPG was able to better position itself. The last stage was ur-

ban warfare and so the main preparations were made for this. ISIS believed this to be a weakness and thought the progress it made on deserted lands was a success for itself. This is why Erdogan, some US officials and analysts made the claim that 'Kobane was about to fall'.

However, the real battle with ISIS started on the edges of the town. ISIS fired mortars from a distance in the hope of clearing a path for itself. This is how it was able to enter the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the town. They lost hundreds of fighters as a result of ambushes by the YPG/YPJ fighters. And for the past 4 days they have been unable to make any progress whatsoever. Many of their attacks have been repelled. Now, ISIS is attempting to use car bombs against YPG positions. These cars have been noticed and destroyed from a distance. In the havoc caused by these explosions, ISIS fighters are able to take a few steps forward. However, in urban warfare, those who know the city are at an advantage; and in the current urban war, the YPG has turned Kobane into the Bermuda Triangle for ISIS.

Another factor that has changed the course of the battle has been the intensifying coalition airstrikes. In the last few days, the strikes have been very effective. Strikes have ISIS's heavy weapons, but because their supply lines have not been effectively targeted, as of yet, they are able to bring in reinforcements. According to some YPG commanders, if the coalition had conducted the airstrikes at this intensity from the beginning, ISIS could not have reached Kobane. This means, that the coalition is conducting a controlled and gradual campaign.

The coordinates for the coalition airstrikes are being supplied from Kobane. However, it must be said that not every coordinate given is being targeted. This is being read as part of the coalition's de-

sire to be 'the saviour'. ISIS, on the other hand, is trying to spread itself across the city in order to decrease the effectivity of the airstrikes. If the sides on the ground mix in with each other than airstrikes will be more difficult to carry out.

YPG is surprising everyone by saying that it is not going to let ISIS live in Kobane. They say "Kobane is not Mosul". We are talking about thousands of people willing to sacrifice their lives in order to live on their land. This is why ISIS taking Kobane, is as impossible as the Sun not rising tomorrow.

The international aspect

The Kobane resistance has opened the door to important gains for the Kurds in the press, the international community and in diplomacy. Those that had never even heard of Kurdistan before, now know of Kobane. This resistance has introduced the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement to the world. It has also opened important diplomatic doors for Kurdish representatives. Many important meetings were held with important forces in the world. These gains will consolidate the position of the Kurds in the region.

Intra-Kurdish relations

The Kobane resistance has consolidated Kurdish unity much the same way as the Halabja and Sinjar massacres did. It has led to a massive spiritual and political synergy. On this platform, first a KCK delegation went to meet with the parties of South Kurdistan, then the Southern parties gathered among each other and then the parties of Rojava joined them. All Kurdish political figures were forced to adopt a line of national unity; because it was finally understood that those that did not adopt this line would be damned by the Kurdish people.

Relations with Turkey

While the ISIS attacks were ongoing, Turkey invited Salih Muslim to Turkey. However, this invite

never went any further than being a delaying tactic. The Turkish state made promises like "we will support you in every way, if need be we will also strike ISIS, just relax" probably in order to weaken the desire of the resistance in Kobane. The Kurds were aware of this, although they did not close the door on the Turks they did however take their own precautions. Currently, the Turkish state is not in good condition in the international arena. Even more striking was the fact that Turkey's animosity towards the Kurds and how it dictated state policies was now out in the open. Turkey's stance forced the Kurds to reanalyse the situation. This reanalysis is not only a political action, but one that occurred in the hearts and minds of all the Kurds. "How are Turkish-Kurdish relations going to be? Why all this animosity?" are only some of the questions being frequently asked.

Maybe Turkey needs to be thinking about these questions before the Kurds do. No doubt one place where the answer to these questions will be clarified is the island of Imrali, where meetings are continuing with the Kurdish people's leader Abdullah Ocalan. Turkey's policy towards and handling of the Kobane situation will determine the future of the meetings and dialogue in Imrali Island.

In conclusion, we are in the middle of a war. In wars, the balances can tilt from time to time. However, in a short time, ISIS will be gradually cleared from the neighbourhoods of Kobane, and the villages surrounding Kobane. As a result of this process, we can say that ISIS will also be cleared from the villages of Tel Abyad to the east, Sirrin to the south and Jarablus and Azzaz to the west. This charge will not only determine the future of the region, but will shape the destiny of all Kurds and Kurdistan.

Those who support this struggle for humanity will be victorious; those who positioned themselves on the wrong side of history supposedly being 'impartial' will drown with the dark forces.

History will write this, and we will witness this history.

Kurdish question

PAKISTAN

The terror of anti-terrorism

FARZANA BARI ·

The conviction rate of terrorists in these courts is extremely low. They are often set free on the pretext of a lack of evidence whereas the state has been actively using ATCs to politically victimise human rights activists, who are seen as the real threat to the state and the status quo.

Most recently Baba Jan, a well-known activist and former Vice President of the Awami Workers Party, and 11 other activists from Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) were given life sentences by an ATC on September 25, 2014. Their crime was raising their voices for the rights of displaced people in GB. Baba Jan was leading the movement for victims of the Attabad Lake disaster caused by floods in 2010. The victims of this natural disaster were simply demanding the compensation that the government promised them. However, the government as usual faltered on its commitment and tried to suppress their voices by using violence and arresting activists. Two protesters were killed by the police. Compensation for flood victims is still being awaited. Baba Jan is greatly loved and trusted by people. He has the courage and conviction to challenge the establishment and the government.

Similarly in Faisalabad, loom workers Fazal Illahi, Akbar Kambo, Babar Shafique Randhwa, Rana Riaz and nine others were given life sentences because they were fighting for a minimum wage. Twenty activists of the Anjuman-e-Mazareen fighting for land rights in Okara were also convicted on criminal charges by an ATC. Trade union leader Ghulam Dastgir Mehboob who was leading an anti-privatisation campaign was also imprisoned and his case has been pending in the ATC since 2012. Trade union leaders of the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) Malik Maqbool, Hafiz Lutufullah, Emadul Hasan and 63 other PTCL

workers faced charges of terrorism in the ATC in 2009 after protesting. Although the case was dismissed by the ATC, the PTCL trade union leadership was again arrested in 2010 under the ATA on similar charges as they continued to protest against the dismissal of workers. These cases make it obvious that this judicial mechanism was put in place by the state to provide legal cover for its illegal acts. The ATCs have unleashed terror against labourers, trade union leaders and social activists who challenge and expose the illegal acts of the state.

The state and private businesses constantly attack the rights of workers. Neo-liberal policies of privatisation, casualisation and informalisation of labour have played havoc with the lives of workers. Unemployment, unfair dismissals, victimisation of trade union leaders and low wages are bringing people on the streets to demand their rights. However, instead of responding to their legitimate demands, the federal and provincial governments are stifling their voices through the use of violence. The connecting thread between all of the above who are suffering from state repression is that they all belong to progressive, democratic, secular schools of thought and are not for sale.

The Pakistani state has gradually been captured by a military oligarchy collaborating with the neo-colonial bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy, and the feudal and capitalist classes. These classes thrive on the oppression and exploitation of the masses. Therefore any real threat to the status quo is perceived as a threat to their survival by the ruling classes and the state is very vigilant in this regard. It nips in the bud any political figure that will not compromise on principles or strike a deal with the establishment. That is why progressive leftist political forces in Pakistan have always faced the tyranny and repression of the state. Their leaders have been

jailed, tortured or killed to weaken their movement in Pakistan. In the face of state repression, progressive leftist forces cannot succeed in popularising an agenda amongst the masses.

The overdeveloped state apparatus of the military establishment has emerged as the country's key powerbroker. Therefore, they are extremely careful in choosing and developing their present and future political partners. They invest only in those political forces willing to play as junior partners, content with assuming formal authority without substantial power. The vicious attack of the state on the revolutionary leaders of people's movement by using the parallel judicial system of ATCs is condemnable. Through such acts of terror the state will further deepen its legitimacy crisis. The civil and military

bureaucracy of GB must understand that the repression of people's rights may lead to a situation like that in Balochistan, which will not be in the interests of the country. The government of GB must take immediate action and release Baba Jan and other social activists who are implicated in fraudulent cases otherwise they must be ready to face the people's wrath, which will overthrow this system of exploitation and repression.

18 October 2014

ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION - URGENT APPEALS PROGRAMME

To sign the appeal:

Urgent Appeal Update: AHRC-UAU-026-2014.

Geopolitical chaos and its implications: introductory notes for collective thinking

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Climate chaos is a new structural situation caused by atmospheric warming of human (in fact capitalist) origin. The current geopolitical chaos also seems to be a new structural situation caused by capitalist globalization and the choices imposed by the traditional imperialist bourgeoisies. Because chaos exists, and its causes are deep.

From 2003 (at least) [1], we tried to perceive the consequences in all fields of capitalist globalization, but today, it is necessary to try more systematically to take stock of the causes of geopolitical chaos and the dynamics of the ongoing crisis, as well as updating our necessary responses to a world situation which is new in many aspects. These notes aim to tackle these questions so as to encourage and nourish collective thinking. They do not claim to be exhaustive – other elements are dealt with in other texts written by other comrades. They are often based on already shared analyses, but try to push further the discussion on their implications: we cannot be satisfied with repeating what we said before. For this purpose, with the risk of over-simplifying complex realities, they "purify" the ongoing, often unfinished, developments, to emphasize what appears to be new.

Long term and short term imperialism and changes of context

The initial debates of reference on imperialism go back to the beginning of the 20th century, to the time of the completion (in the West) of the formation of nation states and colonial empires – and the inter-imperialist war aiming to modify the division of the world. All the definitions of imperialism sys-

tematized at the time reflect this geopolitical context. They can serve as useful "benchmarks" (including as a basis for measurement of changes), but certainly not as a "standard". [2]

The revolutions following the First and Second World Wars upset the geopolitical framework, with a new more complex configuration combining the opposition of revolution and counter-revolution, "blocs" of West and East (not simply identical with the previous opposition), decolonization and zones of more or less exclusive influence, inter-bureaucratic (USSR/China) and inter-imperialist competition within this framework

The implosion of the USSR, then China's entry into the world capitalist order modified the situation once again. We will return to this. The point that I want to underline here is that the "organic development" of capital does not explain everything, far from it. Exogenous factors played a much more crucial role in the reorganization of the world. It is necessary to take account of this to understand the choices made by the imperialist bourgeoisies after the implosion of the USSR in 1991 (capitalist globalization).

In the short run (from the 1990s until today), there was also a rather radical change. Initially, the (traditional) imperialist bourgeoisies and states were veritable conquerors, with penetration of the markets of the East, intervention in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and so on. Then there was military stagnation, the financial crisis, the emergence of new powers (China), the Arab revolutions and so on, with all of this leading to a loss of geopolitical initiative and control. Washington reacts today more on an emergency basis than in planning the imposition of its order. We need to assess the link

between the post-1989 (long term) turn and the turn which took shape in the mid-2000s (short term), so as to distinguish what is conjunctural and what is structural in the present situation.

When the imperialist bourgeoisies become emancipated from politics

Let us say that after the implosion of the USSR, the imperialist bourgeoisies believed that they were free to realize their dream; namely a worldwide market with uniform rules allowing them to deploy their capital at will. The consequences of capitalist globalization could consequently only be very deep – and accompanied by developments that, in their euphoria, the aforementioned imperialist bourgeoisies had not wanted to envisage.

1. The classical schema of North-South or Centre-Periphery relationships (the North exporting goods and the South raw materials) was upset with production chains internationalizing and the countries of the South becoming the major exporters of industrial goods (in particular in Asia: China, the "workshop of the world"). Even if the economic domination of the "centre" continues by other means (high technology, status of the US dollar, financialization, the military capacity of the United States and so on), these modifications obviously have considerable implications for the workers' movement, but also for the imperialist bourgeoisies: it contributes to reducing the significance of their countries of origin and facilitates their emancipation from politics.

2. Constituting a "standardized" worldwide market indeed implies becoming emancipated from politics. The "appropriate modes" of bourgeois domination produced by the specific history of countries and areas (historic compromise of the European type, populisms of the Latin-American type, official state intervention of the Asian type, redistributive populism of multiple types and so on) are gradually illegalized, because all of them establish specific relations with the worldwide market, and are therefore obstacles to the free deployment of imperialist capital. However, abandoning these "suitable"

modes of domination necessarily leads to crises of legitimacy, even of ungovernability more especially as aggressive neoliberal policies tear the social fabric in a growing number of countries. What is striking is that the imperialist bourgeoisies do not seem to care about this, insofar as their access to raw materials, production centres, the means and nodes of communication and so on, remains assured. At the time of the empires, it was necessary to ensure the stability of the colonial possessions – also (although to a lesser extent) the zones of influence at the time of the cold war. Let us say that today, this depends on the place and the moment. There is a change in the relationship with the territory. We can say that if the states continue to support "their" transnationals, the latter no longer feel dependent on their country of origin: the relationship is more "asymmetrical" than ever.

3. The relationship to the territory changes; and thus to the state. Governments are for example no longer the co-pilots of largescale industrial projects (see the development of nuclear power over one decade in France) or of social infrastructures (education, health and so on). They must contribute to founding the rules universalizing the mobility of capital, open all sectors to the appetites of capital (health, education, pensions and so on), destroy social rights and keep the population compliant. A head of state is a simple major-domo today. Of course, certain countries remain more equal than others and the United States allows things which they do not authorize elsewhere. The US state maintains global regal functions that others no longer have – or no longer have the means to have.

4. Capitalist globalization thus leads to crises for various reasons, of which one occupies a particular place: a class cannot durably dominate a society without social mediations, compromises, legitimacy (of historical, social, democratic, revolutionary or other origin). The imperialist bourgeoisies are liquidating centuries of "savoir faire" in this field in the name of the freedom of movement of capital; but the dream of the financier is unrealizable. It

leads ultimately to a permanent state of crisis. This is already the case in entire regions.

The specificity of globalized capitalism is thus that it seems to accommodate crisis as a permanent state: it becomes consubstantial with the normal functioning of the new total system of domination. If this is the case, it is necessary to deeply modify our vision of "the crisis", as one particular moment between long periods of "normality" – and we have not finished measuring them or undergoing the consequences of them.

New Fascisms

One of the first consequences of the phenomenal destabilizing power of capitalist globalization is the spectacular rise of new fascisms with a (potential) mass base. Some take relatively classical forms, like Golden Dawn in Greece, situating themselves in new xenophobic and identity-based reflexes. But the phenomenon now dominant is the assertion of fascist currents with religious references (and no longer the triptych "people/state, race, nation"). They appear in all the "great" religions (Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and so on). They now pose a considerable threat in countries like India or Sri Lanka. The Muslim world thus does not have the monopoly in this field; but it is certainly there that it has taken on a particular international dimension, with "trans-border" movements like Islamic State or the Taliban (see the situation in Pakistan) and networks which are connected more or less formally from Morocco to Indonesia, even (potentially only?) in the south of Philippines.

One can discuss the definition of the concept of fascism. These movements are not organically related to "big capital" as in Nazi Germany, but they exert terror of a fascist type, including in daily life. Where they exist, they occupy the "political niche" of fascism – and they pose new political problems (for our generations) of anti-fascist resistance on a large scale.

The term political Islam covers a broad range of currents which all are not included in the same cat-

egory, far from it. But not such a long time ago, a significant part of the international radical left considered that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (such as Talibanism) had a progressive and anti-imperialist character. However, even when it confronts the United States, it represents a frightening counter-revolutionary force. With the aid of experience, the currents which maintain these positions are rarer today, but "campism" remains present in this field, like a Pavlovian reflex: satisfied for example to condemn imperialist intervention in Iraq and Syria (which it is certainly necessary to do), but without saying what Islamic State represents or calling to resist it.

This kind of position prohibited us from clearly posing the tasks of solidarity *as a whole*. To point out the historical responsibility of imperialism, to the intervention of 2003, the unavowed objectives of the current intervention, to denounce one's own imperialism are not enough. It is necessary to think through the concrete tasks of solidarity *from the point of view of the needs of the victim peoples and the movements in struggle*. Let us take a controversial example: from this point of view, one can be *against* the imperialist intervention and *for* the supply of weapons of high power by our governments to the Kurdish forces – this is to answer an insistent and repeated call by Kurdish organizations: why refuse it? I do not seek to take refuge behind an argument of authority, but I find the text of Leon Trotsky written in 1938 [3] really interesting and useful to our debates of yesterday (the Malvinas war, for example) and today.

New (proto) imperialisms

The traditional imperialist bourgeoisies thought after 1991 that they would penetrate the markets of the former so-called "socialist" countries to the point of subordinating them naturally – wondering even if NATO still had a function with respect to Russia. This assumption was not absurd as shown by the situation of China in the turn of the 2000s and the conditions of membership of this country in the WTO (very favourable to international capi-

tal). But things turned out differently – and this does not seem to have been initially or seriously considered by the established powers.

In China, a new bourgeoisie was constituted *inside* the country and the regime, mainly by the "bourgeoisification" of the bureaucracy, the latter auto-transforming into a *possessing class* by mechanisms which we know well [4]. It was thus reconstituted on a basis of independence (the legacy of the Maoist revolution) and not as a bourgeoisie organically subordinated to imperialism from the start. Is China a new imperialism? As with the concept of fascism, it is necessary to specify what one understands by imperialism *in the present world context*. For my part, I use the formula of imperialism in constitution (without any guarantee of success) [5] It is enough to say for the moment that China has become a *capitalist power* to understand that the geopolitics of the contemporary world are quite different from fifty years ago. We will return to this point in the report on the situation in Eastern Asia.

The BRICS have tried to play in concert in the arena of the worldwide market, without much success. The countries which compose this fragile "bloc" do not all play in the same court. China hopes to play in the court of the largest. Russia, also a permanent member of the Security Council and official holder of nuclear weapons, would like this also, but with much less means. Brazil, India, South Africa can probably be qualified as sub-imperialisms – a concept which goes back to the 1970s – and regional gendarmes, but with a notable difference: they profit from a much greater freedom to export capital than in the past. See the "great game" opened in Africa with competition between the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, India, Brazil, South Africa, China and so on.

Two conclusions here:

1. Competition between capitalist powers has also revived with the assertion of China especially, but also Russia in Eastern Europe. This definitely amounts to conflicts between *capitalist* powers, thus qualitatively different from the previous peri-

od. In the past, without ever aligning ourselves with Beijing's diplomacy, we defended the People's Republic (and the dynamic of the revolution) against the US-Japanese imperialist alliance – we were in this sense in its camp. We will see (Asia report) to what extent regional geopolitics have changed, which implies for us a different "anti-campist" position.

2. More generally, concerning the freedom of movement of capital, the bourgeoisies (even subordinate) and transnationals of the "South" can use the rules conceived after 1991 by the traditional imperialist bourgeoisies *for themselves*, making competition on the worldwide market more complex than in the past .

Capitalist expansion and ecological crisis

The rehabilitation of the Sino-Soviet "bloc" in the worldwide market has allowed an enormous capitalist expansion on which the optimism of the imperialist bourgeoisies is based. It is also the basis a dramatic acceleration of the ecological crisis. I do not want to expand on this question, but to stress:

1. It is impossible in this context to pose the question of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions only in the North – it must also be raised in the South.
2. The payment of the ecological debt in the South should not favour world capitalist development capitalist and benefit either Western-Japanese transnationals established in the South, or the transnationals of the South (such as Brazilian agro-industry), which would do nothing but feed ever more social and environmental crises.
3. There is always the need for "North-South" solidarity, for example in defence of the victims of climate chaos. However, more than ever, it is a common "anti-systemic" struggle which is on the agenda in "North-South" relations from the point of view of the popular classes: i.e. a united struggle for an anti-capitalist alternative, another conception of development in "North" and "South" (I put quotation marks everywhere, because the heterogeneity

of "North" and "South" is today such that these concepts can be misleading).

4. If the starting point is the socio-environmental struggle "to change the system, not the climate", it has as basis social movements more than specific coalitions on climate. It seems to me that it would thus be necessary to discuss again the articulation between the two. If we do not "ecologize" the social struggle (following the example of what can be done in peasant or urban struggles), the numerical expansion of "climate" mobilizations will remain on the surface of the things.

5. The effects of climate chaos are already felt and the organization of the victims, their defence and their self-defence are also part of the basis of the ecological struggle. The effects of the Haiyan super-typhoon in Philippines exceed in width what we had already been warned about. The predicted future became part of the present. That has destabilizing consequences which go well beyond the directly affected areas and cause a chain of tensions (see the refugees of Bangladesh and the conflicts with India on the question of the migrants).

A world of permanent wars

My assumption is that we are not going towards a Third World War on the model of the First and Second, because there is not a conflict for *territorial* division of the world in the sense that there was in the past. But the factors of war are very deep and varied: new conflicts between powers, competition on the worldwide market, access to resources, decomposition of societies, the rise of new fascisms escaping the control of their progenitors, chain effects of climate chaos and humanitarian crises of great breadth.

That means that we have now entered on one level a world of permanent wars (in the plural). Each war must be analysed in its specificities. However we need "points of stability" to keep a compass in a very complex geopolitical situation: class independence against imperialism, militarism, fascisms and the rise of "anti-solidarity" identity-based

movements (racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic, xenophobic, caste-based, fundamentalist and so on).

In this context, the "campist" legacy is particularly dangerous. It results in lining up in the camp of a regime (Assad and so on) against a good part of the people or a capitalist power (in East Asia, the USA in the name of the Chinese threat or China in the name of the US threat) (Russia or the West in the case of the Ukraine). Each time we abandon some of the victims (which are on the wrong side), we feed aggressive nationalism and sanctify the borders inherited from the era of the "blocs" precisely when we must erase them.

We remain tributaries of this legacy more than we think. When, in France, we speak about Europe, that means in fact the European Union or at best a widened Western Europe – and it is within this framework that we work out alternatives. But Europe is also Russia and alternatives must be thought through that include the two sides of the Russo-West-European border (even the Mediterranean). This question is particularly important in Eurasia, because it is the only continent that has been at this point fashioned by the revolution/counter-revolution and face-to-face confrontation of the "blocs".

Limits of the super power

The United States remains the only super power in the world – and yet, they lose all the wars they are engaged in, from Afghanistan to Somalia. This point is astonishing! The fault is probably with neoliberal globalization which prevents them from consolidating (in alliance with local elites) temporary military gains.

This is perhaps also a consequence of the privatization of the armies, firms of mercenaries playing a growing part, as well as armed "non-official" bands in the service of private interests (big companies or families and so on). Decidedly, the state is not what it used to be.

It is also the case that this power, super though it is, does not have the means of to intervene randomly under structural conditions of instability. It needs secondary imperialisms able to shoulder the burden. But the constitution of a European imperialism has fallen through; France and Great Britain now have only a very limited ability; Japan must still break civic resistance to its complete remilitarization.

Wars are thus there to last, under multiple faces. We should thus again interest ourselves in the way in which they are carried out, in particular by popular resistances, to better understand the conditions

of a struggle, the reality of a situation, the concrete requirements of solidarity and so on.

Who says wars should say anti-war movement. The wars being very different from each other, the constitution of anti-war movements in synergy is not easy. The position in (Western) Europe on this question gives rise to pessimism, inasmuch as "campism" has corroded and rendered impotent the principal campaigns engaged in this area. But there are anti-war movements, in Asia in particular – and in Eurasia, transcending the borders inherited from the era of the blocs will be focused in particular on this question, it seems to me

AFRICA & EBOLA

Who are the architects of death and how can we combat them?

JEAN BATOU ·

We should first note that this illness seems to have been controlled in Nigeria and in Senegal, and that it seems to have been slowed down in Guinea. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a similar epidemic began at the end of August also seems to have been brought under control, a country that has experience with this disease since 1976. How can we explain then the particular seriousness of the pandemic in Liberia, which has the majority of new cases since mid-August, followed in second place by Sierra Leone? The fact that Guinea has done better suggests that the epidemic began in the forested areas of the south, largely cut off from the northern economy based on bauxite mining, the world's largest reserve. In fact the south looks toward Liberia and Sierra Leone, which offer it the closest seaports.

To understand the gravity of the situation in Liberia, in Sierra Leone and in the south of Guinea, it's necessary to look carefully at the particularities of this sub-region. I note here four characteristics that constitute an explosive cocktail.

1. At the end of the 1980s, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the south of Guinea were at the center of armed conflicts for the control of natural resources.
2. After the reestablishment of relative peace in the early 2000s, there was a surge of foreign investments, accompanied by land-grabbing and the expropriation of the small farmers who had been weakened by war.

3. The increasingly rapid destruction of the forests endangered many animal species and pushed their microbial parasites to search for new hosts at the margins of their traditional ecosystem.

4. The collapse of the state institutions that had been established when these countries became independent led to the transfer of their tasks to outside and local non-governmental organizations, private companies, and even to Western powers.

It is the combination and interaction of these four characteristics that has made these countries an ideal terrain for the diffusion of the Ebola virus.

Wars for the Control of Natural Resources

The civil wars that bloodied Liberia and Sierra Leone starting at the end of the 1980s had largely been carried on by groups—whether those in power or those in rebellion—struggling over the control of natural resources, in particular diamonds (which because of these circumstances came to be called blood diamonds) as well as lumber, with the complicity of large multinational corporations. Those wars were the cause of the death of some 200,000 people, not to mention the thousands of wounded, mutilated, raped women, orphaned children, and those displaced and turned into refugees. The vast forests where Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea touch have been particularly ravaged by the battles in which the Guinean army confronted the Liberian forces, which were allied to the rebels of Sierra Leone. [1] In addition, this remote area where the capitals of the three countries are found has continued to be the scene of repeated violence [2], almost to this day, either in the district of Kolahun (Lofa County) in Liberia, or in that of Guéckédou,

Guinea. It is in the latter that the Ebola epidemic broke out in December 2013.

Liberia and Sierra Leone recovered from their civil wars and attained a relative stability, supported by the diplomats and the special forces of Great Britain and the United States, whose action has been continued by United Nations peace-keeping missions there, so that by 2005 in Liberia and 2005-07 in Sierra Leone there had been put in place a semblance of representative democracy and business-as-usual resumed. The international index of "economic freedom" (of the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal) showed a continual improvement in commercial freedom, in the monetary and tax systems and in investments in the two countries, and only the rights of workers and public services have worsened.

No doubt about it: the international competition for the control and exploitation of natural resources has returned with a vengeance, dispensing with the mediation of costly armed bands, as part of the new scramble for Africa. During the last five years, from 2009 to 2013, according to the World Bank, the GDP of Liberia has grown on average by 11.1 percent per year, and Sierra Leone by 10 percent. Overall, Guinea remains behind, with a growth rate of 2.5 percent, though it is true that it has not suffered a destructive conflict in the whole country.

Expropriation of Rural Communities

In Liberia and Sierra Leone rural communities have been the first victims of the war and of the savage exploitation of natural resources by the belligerent parties; half of the inhabitants have been internally displaced, while at the same time there has been an influx of refugees from neighboring states, as hundreds of thousands of small farmers have been permanently uprooted. It is in this context of mining and land-grabbing that have developed on a large scale over the last several years, with the delighted encouragement of the authorities, obsessed with the neoliberal ideology if not actually corrupted—that in 2012, the tax abatements

conceded to the six largest corporations represented 59 percent of the Sierra Leone budget [3].

In Liberia, the grabbing up of arable land by international investors has exploded, notably by rubber and palm oil plantations and biofuels; and finally iron ore extraction has led to new concessions. This country now has the world record for foreign investment ratio to GDP. At the same time, 85 percent of its inhabitants live below the poverty line, and 80% of them are unemployed. Sierra Leone presents the same picture. In November 2011, the Swiss Addax Bioenergy Company of the billionaire Jean-Claude Gandur launched a great production unit aiming to develop 20,000 hectares of sugar cane, an ethanol refinery for export, and an electric power plant. Altogether, multinational corporations today control some 500,000 hectares of land in a single country [4]. These investments deprive agriculture for food production of the land and water that it needs, which is why, echoing numerous popular protests, last June some 180 citizens signed the Freetown Declaration against land-grabbing.

Destruction of Forest Ecosystems

Forested areas of the three countries are subject to growing exploitation due to population pressure, aggravated by the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing armed conflict. Meanwhile, the timber industry is sold to international dealers that open up roads and employ armies of lumberjacks. Small scale mining and the intensive exploitation of flora and fauna accompany these developments, so that the people whose livelihoods depend on all these activities must rely increasingly on bush-meat, hunted on a large scale, which is sold in regional markets for food.

Throughout this sub-region, commercial lumbering has caused an irreversible destruction of the forest: while wooded areas represent only 4 percent of the surface of Sierra Leone, their importance in Liberia and the south of Guinea is much greater, representing a larger part of their territory.

This is what led to the accelerated destruction of wildlife, which despite the animals' higher morbidity, has not prevented them from also being hunted and consumed by people. This is probably also the reason why the fruit bats, healthy carriers of the Ebola virus, move on, traveling ever greater distances in search of food. It is therefore possible that it is these fruit bats, which originally came from their home in Central Africa, that brought the strain of the Ebola virus causing the outbreak in West Africa. Moreover, they often colonize the fruit trees that grow on the edges of the forests near inhabited areas. (Washington Post, July 8, 2014).

Privatization and the Out-Sourcing of Public Tasks

In 1991, Sierra Leone was subjected to a brutal structural adjustment program, reducing public spending by 40%, a development that contributed to the outbreak of civil war. Therefore, the state has increased its contracts with foreign private companies to provide public services, to be paid by a share of the profits from diamonds: the country acquired private troops, private customs agencies, a private central bank, and private fisheries ... encouraging a growing complicity between African war lords and large international companies. Liberia has followed the same path, which led to the virtual disappearance of its already minimal medical infrastructure. Today, there are 1.4 doctors and 27.4 nurses per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 2.2 and 16.6 for Sierra Leone (the OECD average is 320 and 890) (Vox, Oct. 2, 2014).

With peace restored in the 2000s, similar processes have continued into the present. Now, it is "democratically elected" and internationally recognized officials who are selling off the natural resources of these countries to foreign investors. The latter are not required to accept national participation in these ventures, not even the smallest share; they are allowed to repatriate their profits; they are protected against any possible change in the law that would be unfavorable; they are exempt from taxes; and they have access to the workforce of the country at bargain prices. It must be said that the

President of Liberia studied economics in the United States, and has worked for the World Bank, Citibank, and HSBC! There is still a "national" state, though it is primarily used for punishing people who dare to protest against those in power and their decisions. For instance, in dealing with Ebola, the authorities of the countries concerned have focused on military roadblocks, imposing quarantines to hundreds of thousands of people and stalking families who do not report their sick, to avoid their loved ones being taken away and isolated without getting any care,

We find the same situation in the south of Guinea, where the poor Guéckédou District institutions have not been able to deal with the exponential growth of the population over the last 20 years, an explosion from less than 80,000 to approximately 350,000 people today. The infrastructure is so non-existent that when Doctors Without Borders (MSF) dispatched its first team in March 2014, they had to scramble to make a map of the city [5]. In one day, from satellite images, 200 volunteers from around the world were asked to arrange some 100,000 homes in the metropolitan area on a plane that involved little more than two roads and the indication of some large areas inhabited. A feat that is nothing other than the mirror image of the total collapse of public services.

AFRICOM is not the Salvation Army

The role played by MSF on this terrain is emblematic of the abnegation of responsibility by the United Nations organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). With an annual budget of \$400 million, eighty percent of which comes from private donors, this corps of 35,000 volunteers has without a doubt been the principal actor in the struggle against the epidemic in West Africa since the spring of 2014. Overwhelmed by the breadth of the problem MSF has not hesitated to use its good will to call for massive civilian and military aid [6]. With the exception of Cuba, which has announced that it will send 400 doctors and nurses and already has half of them on the ground, it is es-

essentially the countries most engaged in the new partition of Africa that have responded to this appeal [7] China has converted a hospital in Freetown that it had previously constructed into a health care center and has sent the necessary medical personnel. The old colonial powers have made small gestures: France announced the establishment of a treatment center and a laboratory in Guinea, while the United Kingdom promised field hospitals in four urban zones of Sierra Leone.

Obama struck a blow in deciding to send 3,000 troops to the countries most affected and by helping with the distribution of aid, together with the government of Senegal, with the local NGOs, but all by promising to establish 17 medical centers of 100 beds each. The headquarters of the operation is based in Monrovia, Liberia, under the orders of a U.S. AFRICOM general. After its intervention in Nigeria against Boko Haram, the U.S. Army has another occasion to polish its image on the continent, after having failed, despite its attempt to work with 49 African States, to establish AFRICOM's command center on the continent. A little more than a month earlier, the U.S. president had brought together 51 delegations from African countries for an unprecedented economic summit in Washington. "Strip away all the modern PR and prettified palaver and it's an ugly scramble for oil, minerals, and markets for U.S. goods" noted the editor of *Foreign Policy in Focus* [8].

If the devil had wanted to create an advertisement to sell capitalism to humanity, he would have presented the Swiss and their mountains...of chocolate, though while buying it, humanity would have received Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ebola as well.

Indeed, the current epidemic is a condensation of the deadly consequences of a world order which feeds on the huge growth of inequalities: the exploitation without limits of men and of natural resources; the destruction of the environment; a double digit growth (for how long?) in profit to foreign investors and a handful of local potentates; states in the service of multinationals, which know nothing other than repression to deal with the discontent caused by their resort to privatization, supplemented by charitable NGOs, and in the case of a sharp crisis, by foreign armies aiming to make the situation permanent. Conspiracy theorists imagine that Ebola is the brainchild of a perverse scientist paid for by the imperialists' military research funds, but fail to see that the real architects of death are the little circles of people who profit from the existing world order, and that they can only be dethroned by the action of a mass movement of people in struggle.

In order to get out of this barbaric situation, we have to denounce the mystifications of those who unceasingly praise the "take-off" of Africa, portraying the multinationals as development agencies, that pass off the MSF as the WHO, and suggest that AFRICOM is the Salvation Army. At the same time, our solidarity should go to all of those African social movements that combat the pillage of their natural resources, the expropriation of their peasants, the super-exploitation of their workers, the ruin of their public services, and the repression of their democratic rights.

Translation by Dan La Botz.

10 October 2014

New Politics

ITALY

Ri-Maflow wants to exist!

The economic crisis has led to deep social transformations and job losses all over the world, destroying the plans and expectations of millions of men and women. The answers given so far have been completely negligible from a social point of view and favourable only to the profits of the financial capital, with no positive repercussions on the real economy.

Many have opposed these policies so far: from the Occupy mobilizations in the US, to the struggles of workers in Southeast Asia, peasants in Africa and Latin America, students in Quebec, from the movements in defence of migrant rights, to those against the debt, to women's movements, to the movements of people who are denied every right. The experience of Ri-Maflow in Italy stands in full solidarity with this international movement that, in spite of its efforts, has not managed to challenge the capitalist management of the crisis.

Ri-Maflow is a workers' cooperative in Trezzano sul Naviglio (Milan). Until 2012 it has been the seat of the company Maflow, which made profits, fulfilled orders and ran factories all over the world. When the company shut down, the workers did not give up and decided to occupy the plant, beginning a completely new experience, based on self-management and democracy. They looked at the experiences of the Argentinian *fabricas recuperadas* and the *Sem terra* movements in Brasil. "Occupy, resist and produce" has become their motto, too.

Much has been done in just one year and a half: the disused workshops have started operating again, a "Town of another economy" has been realized, an alternative marketplace has been created, together with cultural and performing art classes and a place for "outside the market" distribution in collaboration with the association SoS Rosarno, created in

Calabria (a southern region of Italy) to free migrants from the exploitation in orange plantations.

In the very same place that the owners of Maflow decided to shut down, the workers, together with young precarious workers, have created moments and spaces for a new sociality.

But this experience today wants to take a step forward and must do so, accomplishing the goal of operating the factory, in order to obtain a full wage for all the workers during 2015. For this purpose, Ri-Maflow is promoting a solidarity campaign with the minimum, but fundamental goal of buying a plant for the production and distribution of compressed air, which is necessary to activate all the machinery.

Achieving this goal would be an important step not only for Ri-Maflow workers, but for all those who want to work on a project of self-management, of opposition to austerity, and of defence of labour rights. For this reason, we believe that it is important to support this campaign. As academics, artists, social and political activists, media and communication workers, simple citizens, we want to say out loud that RI-MAFLOW WANTS TO EXIST.

First signatures

- Joao Pedro Stedile, Movimento Sem Terra, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
- Ken Loach, film-maker, London, Britain
- Frei Betto, liberation theologian, São Paulo, Brazil
- Themba Chauke, Landless People Movement - Via Campesina, South Africa
- Andrés Ruggeri, Open faculty programme, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Plácido Peñarrieta, CHILAVERT Artes Gráficas y Red Gráfica Cooperativa, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Gladis and María del Valle, Hotel BAUEN, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Silvia Díaz, Cooperativa LA CACEROLA y

FACTA, Buenos Aires, Argentina

- Juan Martín Pereyra, Cooperativa Restaurant LOS CHANCHITOS, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Daniel Zakuski, Universidad de los Trabajadores, IMPA, Buenos Aires Argentina
- Patricia Acha, coop. LA YUMBA, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Pedro Sánchez and Fernando Rodriguez, Coop.TEXTILES PIGUE' Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Enrique Iriarte, Coop. 19 DE DICIEMBRE, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Osvaldo da Costa Neto, Fábrica FLASKO', San Paolo, Brazil
- FRALIB, ex Unilever, occupied factory, Marseilles, France
- Mondeggi Bene Comune, farms without owners, Florence, Italy
- OZ-Officine Zero, fabbrica recuperata, Rome, Italy
- Socrate, migrants homes Associazione Solidaria-Netzanet, Bari, Italy
- S.O.S Rosarno, produttori and braccianti Piana di Gioia Tauro, Italy
- VIO.ME <<http://VIO.ME>> , occupied factory, Salonika, Greece
- Asamblea generale 'Encuentro Sudamericano La Economía de los Trabajadores' c/o Textiles Pigué, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Gilbert Achcar, SOAS, University of London, Britain
- Giso Amendola, University of Salerno, Italy
- Bruno Arpaia, writer, Milan, Italy
- Cinzia Arruzza, The New School, New York, USA
- Dario Azzellini, Workerscontrol.net and University of Linz, Austria
- Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South, Bangkok, Thailand
- Johanna Brenner, University of Portland, USA
- Pino Cacucci, writer, Bologna, Italy
- Salvatore Cannavò, journalist, Rome, Italy
- Vivek Chibber, New York University, New York, USA
- Simon Chritcley, New School for Social Research, New York, USA
- Antonio Conti, Rete ONU-operatori nazionali

USAtO, Rome, Italy

- Elvira Corona, journalist, author of 'Lavorare senza padroni', Cagliari, Italy
- Edenise Da Silva Antas, University of Serra dos Orgaos, Brasil
- Erri De Luca, writer, Rome, Italy
- Nicoletta Dosio, Movimento No Tav, ValsUSA, Italy
- Valerio Evangelisti, writer, Bologna, Italy
- Sara Farris, Goldsmiths, University of London, Britain
- Angelo Ferracuti, writer, Fermo, Italy
- Nancy Fraser, New School for Social Research, New York, USA
- Andrea Fumagalli, University of Pavia, Italy
- Mabel Grimberg, Directora Instituto Ciencias Antropologicas, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Nancy Holmstrom, Rutgers University, Newark N.J., USA
- Statis Kouvelakis, Kings College, London, Britain
- Michael Lowy, author, University of Paris V and CNRS, Paris, France
- Aldo Marchetti, sociologist and author of 'Fabbriche aperte', Milano, Italy
- Ana Marssani, University of the Republic, Uruguay
- Sandro Mezzadra, University of Bologna, Italy
- Antonio Montefusco, University Heinrich-Heine, Düsseldorf, Germania
- Toni Negri, già University of Padua, Italy
- Florencia Partenio, Carrera de Relaciones del Trabajo, Univ. Naz. A.Jauretche, Argentina
- Charles Post, professor CUNY, New York, USA
- Alberto Prunetti, writer, Piombino, Italy
- Gabriele Polo, journalist, Rome, Italy
- Re:Common, sottrarre risorse naturali a finanza and mercato, Rome, Italy
- Anabel Rieiro, Università della Repubblica, Uruguay
- Pierre Rousset, Europe solidaire sans frontières, Paris, France
- Sally Rousset, Babaylan-Femmes philippines en France, Paris, France
- Catherine Samary, economist and global justice

activist, Paris, France – Heike Schaumberg, University of Manchester, Britain – Marina Sitrin, City University, New York, USA – Richard Smith, essayist, New York, USA – Cecilia Strada, presidente di Emergency, Milano, Italy – Peter D. Thomas, Senior Lecturer in Political Philosophy, Brunel University London, Britain – Massimiliano Tomba, University of Padua, Italy – Alberto Toscano, Goldsmiths, University of London, Britain	– Eric Toussaint, presidente CADTM, Liège, Belgium – Massimo Vaggi, lawyer and writer, Bologna, Italy – Eleni Varikas, University Paris VIII and CNRS, Paris, France – Guido Viale, journalist and essayist, Milano, Italy – Gabriel Videla, geographer, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina – Wu Ming, writers' collective, Bologna, Italy – Alex Zanotelli, missionary comboniano, Naples, Italy
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USA

Don't Back Down

BRIAN BEAN ·

Not long ago, such propositions would have seemed absurd.

Certainly Chicago teachers bested Emanuel in the CTU strike and partially defeated the mayor's neoliberal education agenda. Nevertheless, Rahm (supporters and detractors alike give him the first-name-only treatment, Madonna-style) remains one of the most politically wired politicians the country.

Rahm has become America's Mayor. And he has magazine covers and fawning articles in *Time* and the *Economist* to prove it, along with a CNN documentary series in which producers worked with Rahm's handlers to turn the foul-mouthed, vindictive political operative into a tenderhearted guy who just loves the city's kids — so much so that he reluctantly has to be tough to solve the city's problems.

Then there's Rahm's resumé: an up-and-coming powerbroker in the 1990s Chicago Democratic machine who became a key policymaker and political enforcer in President Clinton's administration; a rainmaker at an investment bank for thirty months, which bagged him \$18.5 million; a six-year stint in Congress; chief of staff for two years in Barack Obama's White House.

Those connections enabled Rahm to win the mayor's race in a walk in 2011. He continues to pile up campaign cash — some \$8.2 million to date — from wealthy donors delighted with his pro-corporate record.

Emanuel was publicly shamed by the Chicago teachers during their 2012 strike, when teachers, parents, and students derailed his plan to defeat the CTU and blame teachers for the many problems of Chicago's public school system. Yet Rahm took his revenge in 2013 by ramming through other parts of his education program; he ended up clos-

ing forty-nine neighborhood schools and expanding nonunion charter schools. The money, the networks, his reputation for destroying political opponents — all seem to make Rahm unbeatable for a second term.

Over the following year, however, Rahm's apparent successes actually sapped his popularity as the CTU and its allies made him pay a high political price for the school closures. According to a recent Chicago Tribune poll, some 62 percent of voters side with the union on education issues, compared to 23 percent for the mayor.

Rahm has also taken a political hit for the gun violence that's plaguing poor neighborhoods. Since the recession, City Hall has done little to address the evisceration of black wealth due to falling house prices and rising unemployment — trends exacerbated by the century-old impact of racism, segregation, and poverty in Chicago. Emanuel's austerity policies, such as closing mental health clinics and slicing library budgets, have accumulated grievances throughout the city.

The mayor has promoted gentrification instead of equitable economic development, even as workers are stuck with subprime mortgages, higher property taxes, and rising rents. Amid his school closings, Emanuel announced that he'd use \$55 million of public money to help build a new basketball arena for a private university. His days are spent, as journalists Mick Dumke and Ben Joravsky found, meeting with "rich guys, campaign donors, powerful contractors, union busters, charter-school supporters, City Hall insiders, aldermanic brownnosers, and other favor seekers."

By early summer, opinion polls showed Emanuel's unraveling support in working-class Chicago. A late summer Chicago Tribune poll found that Lewis —

who is now gathering signatures to be on the ballot yet says she's only considering a run for office — would receive 43 percent in a mayoral contest to Emanuel's 39 percent. Among African Americans, Emanuel's support fell to 8 percent in May, according to a Chicago Sun-Times poll.

At the same time, the Latino wing of the Chicago Democratic machine — cultivated by Emanuel's predecessor, Richard M. Daley, and a bastion of support for the current mayor — is in disarray following a major corruption scandal involving Juan Rangel, longtime head of the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO), a leading local operator of charter schools. Notably, Rangel was Rahm's Latino outreach organizer for his first mayoral campaign.

Yet as Emanuel became vulnerable, the person considered best able to oust him, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, the city's most prominent African-American elected official and a key player in the local Democratic Party, announced she'd stay out of the race. Lewis had publicly urged Preckwinkle to run (despite the county board president's attack on union pensions). But with Preckwinkle out, Lewis herself became the focus of media attention.

To Lewis' longtime supporters in the CTU and beyond, the prospect of her candidacy seemed to promise a decisive break with politics as usual. "Unfortunately there's really only one party in this country," she told members of US Labor Against the War in January 2013. "It's the party of money, and there are two branches. So we have to work with our allies to develop new coalitions." She's made similar comments in the mainstream media.

Now, however, as Lewis' candidacy for mayor appears viable, she has dropped that rhetoric and taken stances that have disappointed and even shocked some prospective supporters.

The biggest surprise came when Lewis wrote a full-page op-ed piece denouncing Emanuel for proposing that graduates of Chicago Public Schools should receive preferential status for jobs as Chicago fire-

fighters or police officers — a move that would give more blacks and Latinos a shot at those positions, historically dominated by whites.

Lewis claimed that this mild affirmative action proposal smacked of religious discrimination — and even racial bias against whites — because many white cops and firefighters send their kids to private Catholic schools.

Emanuel's backers had a field day with Lewis' piece. "This reads like nothing more than a political love letter to white ethnic voters in Chicago, and a short-sighted attempt to expand her limited base of support," Owen Kilmer of Democrats for Education Reform stated in an email to the *Sun-Times*. "This debate is not about policy for her, it's about court-ing votes."

Kilmer's teacher-bashing organization has its own reasons for attacking Lewis. But it's hard to disagree with him on this specific point. Lewis knows that the Chicago Fire Department has long been marked by racism, with the numbers of black firefighters kept to a minimum through discriminatory testing practices. In 2011, a judge ordered the city to hire 111 African Americans as firefighters — people who were denied the job based on racial discrimination back in 1995.

Emanuel's proposals may only address this issue indirectly, but they are a concession to a longstanding black community demand. The mayor has positioned himself to the left of Lewis on the issue.

This policy stance seems part of a broader slide to the right. In the past, Lewis has often spoken eloquently about how violence in Chicago is the product of decades of racism, segregation, and disinvestment in black communities. Her message now: hire more cops, because police overtime means "a lot of tired, demoralized cops on the street." In the same interview in which she made those comments, Lewis spoke approvingly of an agreement between Illinois Governor Pat Quinn and Emanuel to bring in forty state troopers to help Chicago police officers in "a handful of high-crime city neighborhoods."

To some political observers, Lewis' calls for additional cops smacks of old-school mutual back-scratching. The Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) supported the CTU strike, so now Lewis supports them. Yet this message — especially after the uprising in Ferguson that followed the killing of Michael Brown and opened up a national discussion about racism and police brutality — was startling. After all, the Chicago FOP is raising money for Darren Wilson, the cop who killed Brown.

The issue of racist police violence is central in Chicago's African-American neighborhoods, where people still remember the torture of black men administered by former police commander Jon Burge. In August, Chicago Police Commander Glenn Evans — a controversial black cop promoted and praised by police superintendent Garry McCarthy — was charged with battery for an incident in which he allegedly shoved the barrel of his gun into a suspect's mouth. Evans is just one of more than six hundred Chicago cops who have ten or more complaints filed against them.

If Lewis is going to build on the momentum that she and the CTU have created due to their advocacy for black and brown youths, she'll have to take the issue of police violence and racism head-on. Instead, Lewis has sidestepped the question.

Meanwhile, Emanuel is staking out policy positions that are intended to cover his left flank, such as his pledge to push legislation to raise the city's minimum wage to \$13 per hour by 2018, even if the state legislature fails to act on the issue.

The emerging picture could be one in which the arch-neoliberal Rahm Emanuel poses as a champion of economic and social justice while Lewis, the firebrand union leader who galvanized the city in the biggest strike in decades, comes across as, at best, a moderate policy wonk.

Some in Lewis' camp may argue that she has to adopt such positions in order to preempt attacks from her right. But if she keeps moving in that direction, Lewis will effectively kill the possibility of an independent break from the Democratic Party.

Because Chicago municipal elections are formally nonpartisan, it's possible to dodge the question of party affiliation. Many candidates who challenge incumbents for city council call themselves independents. Yet if they win, they settle into the Democratic Party machine, even if they join the council's small and ineffectual Progressive Reform Caucus.

The Democrats have a long history of co-opting and containing challenges from the Left. Lewis faces those pressures, too. American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who has tried to sideline Lewis as a potential challenger for union leadership, said that the AFT's political arm would put up \$1 million to support a Lewis mayoral bid.

That kind of money is certainly not available for anyone who plans on bolting from the Democrats. For the AFT leader, such a move could remove Lewis as a possible rival and boost Weingarten's clout as a member of the Democratic National Committee. Moreover, Lewis, despite her public criticisms, supports Quinn — a Democrat who carried out an assault on the pensions of public workers, including teachers — in his re-election campaign against hedge fund boss Bruce Rauner.

CTU delegates themselves, after a sharp debate, voted to endorse Quinn at their September 3 meeting — even though the governor's running mate is Paul Vallas, who ran Chicago schools during the first wave of corporate school reform in the 1990s. Lewis' and the CTU's endorsement of Quinn is a sign of the pressure to stay within the Democratic Party fold, no matter how anti-union Democrats behave in office.

Lewis' turn to the right rests on the widely held assumption that the votes for a winning campaign are to be found by tacking to the center, even in a liberal big city like Chicago. In fact, the CTU strike and Lewis' emergence as the most popular African-American political figure in the city proves the opposite.

According to the conventional wisdom, the CTU would have isolated itself by highlighting the apartheid nature of Chicago schools while protesting bankers and the one percent. Certainly that was the view of Emanuel and his handlers, who didn't think the CTU members could overcome draconian legislation restricting their right to strike, let alone win overwhelming support through mass protests.

Instead, Lewis' bluntness and boldness gave a voice to working people in Chicago that had been absent for decades. Striking teachers were treated as heroines and heroes. A movement for education justice, despite its many ups and downs, has taken shape and helped to revive activism on other issues.

If a Lewis campaign is to build on that movement, it will have to stake out clear social democratic positions — from raising the minimum wage, to a tax on financial transactions, to higher taxes on the wealthy. The fight against racism will have to be front and center. She will have to highlight underfunding in schools, residential discrimination, and the lack of genuine economic development — not gentrification — in black and brown neighborhoods. Such a campaign would also have to confront the reality of police brutality, from Ferguson to Chicago. Immigrant rights should be a major focus, too, in a city in which a growing Latino population faces a dramatic rise in deportations, as well as racism and poverty.

Democratic Party advisers will counsel Lewis to avoid these questions. But they are part and parcel of the struggle for basic democratic and civil rights.

Independence from the Democratic Party is also essential in forming a campaign that can build a lasting social movement and working-class resistance. Democrats have moved steadily rightward to im-

plement anti-worker policies, even if they are capable of putting forward candidates like New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio to tap into discontent and enact a few modest reforms to secure the party's urban voting base.

Lewis faces a choice of running a campaign that's true to the principles she's championed in the past, or running a conventional race in which she adopts mainstream policies to chase centrist votes while turning off a potentially wider working-class political base. Voter turnout in the 2011 mayoral race was a meager 40 percent. If Lewis becomes a conventional Democratic politician, working-class voters will likely stay home again.

Just as the CTU strike succeeded because of the mobilization of the union rank and file, a Lewis campaign will need to be driven by grassroots organizations and working-class militants, not Democratic professional campaign strategists whose only political principle is "electability."

Running a principled campaign outside the Democratic Party that might lose would do far more to build a grassroots movement than a mainstream campaign that won. It would be a step towards independent political action that would have national implications — a rallying point for working people fed up with the Democrats as well as a focus for a new generation of activists created by Occupy, the Ferguson rebellion, and other protests. Such a campaign — in conjunction with independent city council races — could create a sustainable independent political formation.

What's most important is that the strikes and protests of recent years, especially the 2012 CTU strike, find expression at the polls

Source: Jacobin.

ISRAELI STATE

Zionist Left support for the bloody assaults on Gaza signifies its erasure from Israel's political map

TIKVA HONIG-PARNASS ·

The silence of the Zionist Left majority in response to the massacres in Gaza—including the discourse of evasion and emotional detachment by the very few who did react—indicates a complete absence of basic humanitarian values and concepts of justice. The meaning of state security, stretched to include repression of Palestinian resistance by any bloody means, unites the Zionist Left with the Right in a joint war against the Palestinian people. The Left which has been recognized as the offspring of the mythological Zionist labor movement has been wiped off the political map.

One would perhaps expect opposition to such an operation from, for example, Meretz MP Haim Oron, the past general secretary of Mapam and a member of Kibbutz Lahav, affiliated to the Hashomer Hatzair stream of the Kibbutz movement. However, on Friday, 24 July, 2014, when 150 children had already been killed in Gaza, Oron declared that his party, Meretz, would not participate in the big demonstration against the operation planned for Saturday night. The daily Maariv noted:

Thousands of Jews and Arabs are expected to participate in the demonstration. They would waive the Palestinian Authority flag (sic) and raise placards condemning the military operation [in Gaza], calling for the removal of the siege of the Strip, and ending the occupation of the West Bank.

The demonstration was organized by a coalition of what's called "Left factions" including Palestinian-Arab (Balad and Raam Taal), Palestinian-Jewish

(Hadash, the front headed by the Communist Party), and Daam, the Workers Party. Jewish protest movements like Bat Shalom and Anarchists Against the Wall, as well as NGO's like The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICHAD) and the Alternative Information Center (AIC), declared their participation in the demonstration. All in all these are very small groups which could not mobilize many participants for the few demonstrations there were against the war on Gaza. Oron explained the Meretz position, which opposed the risking of Israeli lives by landing troops inside Gaza, but not the operation itself:

Our position is essentially different from the common denominator of those groups which organized the demonstration: Meretz supports the operation in Gaza. These groups don't accept the basic right of the State of Israel to self defense, whereas we support it. A massive majority of the Party's board voted for the justification of the operation while voting for a resolution to oppose the landing act. [1]

One would assume that facing the mass murder and displacement which had already taken place by this time (24 July), those self-proclaimed fighters for universal human values would take to the streets and join whoever opposed the massacre in Gaza.

But they didn't. Moreover, Oron and his party members knew well from past onslaughts on Gaza what horrific massacre and devastation were about to occur. However they did not join this demonstration or others organized by independent groups (or the Communist Party) which were violently confronted by right wing gangs with the help of the police.

The Zionist Left/Liberal intellectuals and academics did not adopt an explicit condemnation of the Israeli "combat" in Gaza, or even make public any alarm at the genocide committed there. I refer here to those intellectuals and academics who since the establishment of the State (and prior to it) have supplied the moral and "scientific" legitimacy for Israel's colonialist policies which continue the ethnic cleansing begun in 1948. [2]

Many of those Left/Liberal intellectuals and academics participated in articulating the guiding ideology of the State of Israel under the rule of the Zionist Labor movement in the first decades of the state. Others among them have accepted their predecessors' teaching and elaborated on its premises.

They support the principal idea of Israel's established political culture: "security of the state" is sanctified as a sacred value to which human rights, class interests and ethnic identity are subservient.

Thus this fascist ideology first wrapped in socialist universal values, and later within a "human rights" discourse, has actually led Zionist Left intellectuals to justify the most horrible crimes against humanity, committed in the name of the state's security.

The Ongoing War on Gaza

The continued assaults against the Gaza Strip, since the Hamas victory in the 2006 general elections, constitute a new stage in the persistent efforts to crush the Palestinian national movement and its attempts at resistance, aided all along by the US.

With the complicity of Abu Mazen's Palestinian Authority (PA), the ongoing repression in the West Bank leaves Hamas and those confined to Gaza as the stronghold of the Palestinian struggle. The refusal of Gaza residents to surrender to Israel's opposition to the democratic election victory of Hamas, and to Israel's ongoing domination of Gaza, had to be prevented from growing and igniting the dormant flames of uprising in the West Bank. Hence, the first Israeli step following the Hamas victory was to disconnect the West Bank from the Strip and impose a siege on Gaza which

has been continually tightened such that by 2014 it was nearing human disaster.

The systematic and ongoing fragmentation of the Palestinian people has been the cornerstone of Israel's colonial strategy after 1948, in 1967, and with the isolation of Gaza. Crushing the Palestinian People as a unified political body has become a vital objective. Israel and the US share these interests, which are then also part and parcel of US imperialist strategy in the region as evidenced in the crumbling of Iraq, Libya, and even Syria.

Israel has changed the form and extent of oppression towards the residents of Gaza. Says Max Ajl:

As the challenge from Hamas mounted, Israeli policy shifted from containment to counterinsurgency, operating through both direct coercion and indirect infrastructural violence. Its techniques ranged from infrequent full-scale attacks, to far more frequent targeted assassinations, to the nearly daily destruction of Palestinian agricultural and fishery capacity, and on to hamstringing the banking system [...] In response to the blockade Palestinians launched rocket attacks. Those attacks have continually provoked upset from Israelis eager for a return to the desolate silence of defeat that they identify as "normality." [3]

Indeed the bloody attacks against Gaza have been launched precisely against the residents' courageous resistance to Israel's oppression which thwarts the aspired status quo. [4]

In addition to the dire impact of the blockade and frequent incursions and drone strikes, there have been two main military operations in Gaza prior to Operation Protective Edge in July 2014: "Cast Lead" From 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009 and "Pillar of Defense," an eight-day massacre which began on 14 November 2012 with the murder of Ahmed Jabari, leader of the Gaza Hamas military wing. As said, their aim was to return the "quiet," not to achieve totally military victory by crushing the Gaza regime.

By reviewing the position of Left intellectuals during these operations, we can see the irrelevance of a "Zionist Left" as a political force which opposes the right wing war policy. I'll begin with the 2009 war and move to the current Protective Edge Operation (which ended on 26 July with a very shaky agreement already violated by Israel as I am writing these lines).

These periodic onslaughts are euphemized in military doctrine as "mowing the lawn." As explained by Ajl:

"Mowing" refers to the impossibility of pulling out the grass in surrounding territories—chiefly Lebanon and the Gaza Strip—by the root. The inevitable growth of armed resistance forces the Israeli counter-insurgency apparatus to cut down any movement which arises to fight for Palestinian self-determination. [5]

The Zionist Left calls for "peace negotiations" after each mass blood-letting in Gaza which they support; not only are they "false prophets of peace," [6] but also vigorous supporters of the cruel assaults on Gaza which – in the absence of the prospect of eliminating them completely – are intended to deter any agreement with Hamas beyond a temporary ceasefire.

Two well-known representatives of the Left's so called desire for peace, in accord with their assumed universal humanist values, are author David Grossman and political scientist Zeev Sternhell. [7]

2008-2009 Cast Lead Massacre in Gaza

Ehud Barak, Labor Minister of Defense in Ehud Olmert's Kadima government, led the carnage in Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009. At this time as well, the determined resistance of Hamas, supported by the population, had to be repressed.

The barbaric attack on Gaza was planned well in advance. Chomsky's analysis points to (among other things) the fact that "Israel violated the ceasefire in July 2008, which was observed by Hamas." (Is-

rael concedes that Hamas did not fire a single rocket.) Also:

Israel continued its criminal activities in Gaza and the West Bank, including the continued heavy siege imposed on Gaza since January 2006, which brought it to the brink of almost complete strangulation. Later Israel refused to accept a ceasefire proposed by Hamas shortly before the invasion. [8]

As confirmed by Haaretz senior political commentator:

The enormous power was sent to Gaza not only or even mainly in order to hit the military infrastructure of Hamas. The main mission that the political level assigned to the army was to dismantle the civil infrastructure (emphasis added) of the regime. [9]

Rockets fired onto southern Israeli towns were accepted by Meretz as a justifiable pretext for the attack. Says the poet Yitzhak Laor: "Meretz justified the 'first stage' of the war but not the afterward." In the face of these apologetics, Laor asks, "How many children should die for 'not afterward' and for understanding that it is forbidden for a Left movement to take part in Israel's military games?" Laor concludes, "Let's admit it: all Zionist parties were intoxicated at the time of the 'war.' Now it seems as if they were hit by blindness. Just a hangover." [10]

And indeed, author David Grossman was apparently satisfied with the number of children murdered during the first three days of the massacre in Gaza. At that point, he believed it was the right time for a "generous" call for 48 hours of unilateral ceasefire in order to re-establish the truce that Israel itself had violated.

David Grossman praises the army's restraint

On 30 December, 2008, David Grossman's "Fight Fire with a Cease-Fire," was published in the New York Times Opinion section.

Despite the widely known facts outlined above, David Grossman repeated the official Israeli narrative: Hamas was the aggressor, violating the cease-

fire which lasted since early 2008. Grossman thus justified the first three days of the brutal attack on Gaza, depicting it as an act of act of retaliation rather than as aggression initiated by Israel.

In his article, there is no blame whatsoever concerning the Israeli army's brutality inflicted on citizens. On the contrary, Grossman depicts it as "restraint" and further praises Israel for acting "with impressive level-headedness."

This "restraint," argues Grossman, has consistently characterized Israel's policy toward Hamas. Israel had not used all its potential power despite Hamas' actions that "made life excruciating for the Israelis who live on Gaza's perimeter." Also, Hamas leaders "have rebuffed every Israeli and Egyptian endeavor to achieve a compromise and prevent a conflagration."

According to Grossman, the justification for the "heavy blow" inflicted on Gaza is thus just retaliation for the rockets Hamas fired at the South of Israel while Israel restrained itself. Grossman asked only one thing of Israel: To declare a unilateral ceasefire for 48 hours as an attempt to reinstate the status quo. Not the end of the suffocating siege on Gaza, nor the opening of the Erez passage that unites Gaza with the West Bank. Both demands, needless to say, would have been categorically rejected by Israel. A return to the status quo was all that Grossman, Israel's "peace champion," proposed to the world.

The "generous" proposal for a 48-hour ceasefire is attainable, said Grossman, precisely because Israel's power is almost limitless compared to that of Hamas.

From this powerful position, the patronizing Grossman suggests the resumption of the shaky treaty with an alarming warning:

Now after the heavy blow that Israel has dealt to the Gaza Strip, we would do best to ourselves to turn to the leaders of Hamas and tell them: Now you know how severe the retaliation can be.

The one utterance of concern David Grossman expresses is that "our duty to protect the lives of Gaza's innocent inhabitants must remain our commitment today." These false words were written after he, like many others, had adopted Israel's defensive reasoning that Hamas' activities and those of citizens are inseparable, due to Hamas' utilization of citizens as human shields. This misleading claim provided the excuse for the mass killing of "noncombatant" citizens.

This notorious allegation would be explicitly repeated by Political Scientist Zeev Sternhell.

Professor Zeev Sternhell defends the army for following orders

Like David Grossman and many Zionist Left intellectuals, Sternhell refrained from explicitly accepting the UN Goldstone Report, which disclosed Israel's war crimes committed during the Cast Lead Gaza massacre. [11]

The great majority of Israelis criticized the report for being politically biased against Israel. Zeev Sternhell joined this criticism and white-washed the crimes of the army. He argued that there was no reason to investigate the army's responsibility for the mass killings because it had received its orders from the political leadership. However, Sternhell also did not condemn those who gave the orders. Likewise, he refrained from criticizing the goals of destroying the civilian infrastructure and devastating Gaza, including the mass killing of the civilian population. Instead, he indirectly credited the political leadership for empowering the army and giving them a means to wage war while preventing injuries and deaths to Israeli soldiers:

The case is clear like the sun at noon time. [Namely,] that since Hamas operates from within a crowded population in one of the most densely populated regions in the world, any attempt to reach them [Hamas] without hurting civilians—is impossible. Thus, in order to launch a war with zero losses to our forces, the political and military leadership decided to employ massive fire, without the capability of differentiating between a fighter

who was preparing a rocket for firing and a child playing in the yard.

Indeed, all the decision-makers knew in advance that a heavy disaster was imminent in Gaza, says Sternhell:

The army committed precisely the directives it received from their moral leaders, commanders and the government. They [the army] did not seek intentionally to kill civilians. They only bombed, eliminated and leveled everything which seemed necessary for observation, maneuver and advance, since every building could be a combat position for Hamas. [12]

Sternhell's emphases on the practical implications of the means employed in Operation Cast Lead lacks any moral basis. He largely focuses on the damage to Israel's image and not on the immorality of the Gaza massacre.

A new combat doctrine which violates international law

Sternhell was right in mentioning that after the second Lebanon War of 2006, the political and military authorities decided to launch future wars with zero losses to Israeli combat forces. Hence, they determined that the army should employ massive fire without differentiating between fighters and citizens which allows for mass killings.

However, Sternhell ignores the fact that this decision violates international law. Nor did he express opposition to it or warn the Israeli public of the dreadful consequences of following it in future operations in Gaza. The decision to "spare the lives of Israeli soldiers" is justified by the intentional misinterpretation of international laws on armed conflict by The International Law Department (ILD) for the IDF. The ILD developed a new combat doctrine which among other things gave a free hand to mass killings of civilians and to destruction of civic infrastructure and not only "classic" military sites. This now includes facilities and structures like schools, centers for the disabled, governmental offices, rehabilitation centers, etc. [13]

July 2014: Operation Protective Edge

The mass murder of Gaza's residents and the devastation of its infrastructure scaled new heights in Operation Protective Edge. The operation was inspired and justified by the growing demonization of Hamas to the extent that most Israelis, including the Left, shared in the government's incitement against it.

The incitement focused on the 1988 Hamas Charter which called for Israel's destruction. However, this charter is "essentially meaningless" says Noam Chomsky, "because all along Hamas has accepted the international consensus of a two-state settlement which has been blocked by the U.S. and Israel." In an interview [14], Chomsky paraphrases the Hamas position by saying, "Yes, let's have a two-state settlement on the international border and a very long truce, maybe 50 years. And then we'll see what happens." "Well," adds Chomsky, "that proposal is far more forthcoming than any proposal in Israel." Moreover, this knowledge was widely publicized: "By now, it's quite overt. Takes effort to fail to see it. You can read it in The Washington Post."

Indeed, over the past six years, in various forums Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh stated that he would allow for negotiations in which Israel was entitled to maintain the pre-1967 borders. Also, the daily Haaretz quoted the Wall Street Journal on Khaled Meshal's interview where he declared: "We will accept a Palestinian state within 1967 lines in the framework of any international initiative." [15]

The principles on the basis of which Hamas was elected in 2006 don't include any call for the destruction of Israel. [16]

By the same token the platform on which Hamas joined the unity agreement formed with Fatah in April 2014, just two months before the July carnage in Gaza, lacks the Charter's infamous position.

As mentioned, Israel was furious at the attempt to reunify Gaza and the West Bank. When it eventually failed to prevent the unification, it hurried to use

the kidnapping of the three Israelis in Hebron as a pretext to attack Gaza. A month before, two Palestinian boys were shot dead in the West Bank city of Ramallah. However, that elicited little attention from Israel's media and public opinion.

Hamas had observed the terms of the previous ceasefire for 19 months. The ceasefire terms were that Hamas would not fire rockets and Israel would move to end the blockade and stop attacking so-called militants in Gaza. It was Israel who violated the ceasefire terms using, as usual, a negligible event to open a bloody war.

Anyone who genuinely aspired to peace could not overlook the evolution of Hamas' position. And still the Zionist Left repeated the Israeli narrative on Hamas' intention to destroy Israel, exactly as they did in 2009. They have thus become active partners in raising the fears of the public and preparing them to support the bloody attacks on Gaza. Being aware of Hamas' actual position and yet still accepting the official narrative clearly demonstrates that the Zionist Left shares the motivation for the periodic onslaughts on Gaza: to do away with any bud of Palestinian resistance led at present by Hamas, to "mow the lawn," and to regain the "status quo."

The terrifying result of Israel's "legalized" barbarism was the erasure of entire neighborhoods, the mass murder of 2030 residents, including children and civilians, as well as the destruction of hospitals, health clinics, UN schools and shelters. The sole power plant, as well as the water and sewage systems, was demolished, driving Gaza to the brink of a human disaster.

But the majority of the Zionist Left intellectuals remained deaf to the outcries of the victims and disregarded the demands of Hamas leadership to lift the siege on the Strip. Indeed, "No one is as deaf as the one who does not want to hear, as blind as the one who does not want to see." [17]

David Grossman does not see, does not hear, does not speak

In the midst of the ongoing calamity in Gaza, David Grossman used the platform of the New York Times to express abstractions, evasions and empty words which amount to clearing Israel of culpability for the devastation of Gaza. In the tradition of the Zionist Left, he further substantiated illusions which discouraged Israelis from challenging their government's policy. [18]

Aimed at minimizing Israel's responsibility for the prolonged oppression and ethnic cleansing policies against the Palestinians, Grossman introduces the image of a "hermetically sealed bubble" in which "hallucinatory wrestling" takes place between Israelis and Palestinians. The sealed bubble image permits Grossman to disregard the nature of the "wrestling," namely the colonial oppression by Israel and the resistance of the colonized who fight for their liberation. Thus the blame can be allocated equally to both sides:

Inside the bubble, who can fault Israelis for expecting their government to do everything it can to save children on the Nahal Oz kibbutz, or any of the other communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip, from a Hamas unit that might emerge from a hole in the ground? And what is the response to Gazans who say that the tunnels and rockets are their only remaining weapons against a powerful Israel? In this cruel and desperate bubble, both sides are right. They both obey the law of the bubble — the law of violence and war, revenge and hatred.

Grossman does not take the opportunity to awaken the international community and Israeli society from their sleepy indifference to the horrors in Gaza; strong empathy with the victims might have raised anger and critiques against Israeli authorities. Hence on 26 July when hundreds of thousands of people had already been uprooted from their bombed homes and massacre had continued uninterrupted, he dared to refrain explicitly from elaborating on the continued slaughter:

But the big question, as war rages on, is not about horrors occurring every day inside the bubble, but rather it is this: How on earth can it be that we have

been suffocating together inside this bubble for over a century? This question, for me, is the crux (emphasis added) of the latest bloody cycle.

Grossman avoids asking questions that would contradict his commitment to official policy. Instead, he turns to his own leaders—Netanyahu and his predecessors—to clarify the issue which preoccupies him more than the horrors in Gaza. He feigns ignorance of the deliberate policy of retaining the status quo throughout entire historic Palestine and addresses Benjamin Netanyahu with but cynical questions:

Why is it that Israeli governments have been incapable, for decades, of thinking outside the bubble? How could you have wasted the years since the last conflict without initiating dialogue, without even making the slightest gesture toward dialogue with Hamas, without attempting to change our explosive reality?

The very "innocent" questions deflect the reader from the true answer which Grossman knows well. Israel has not "wasted" time; on the contrary, the building of settlements continued unabashedly and Israel's reign over all of historic Palestine strengthened.

Grossman wrote the introduction to the "Geneva Understanding" which supports a Palestinian 'state' composed of isolated Bantustan-like enclaves. Despite this Understanding not having been mentioned, its spirit of Palestinian surrender has remained in Grossman's discourse on solutions to the "cycle of violence."

In the tradition of the Zionist Left, Grossman does not include the aspirations of the Palestinian national movement for liberation in his assumptions regarding the prospects for "peace." In the tradition of the Zionist Left, he continues to sell the illusions about the "realistic" vision for achieving a peace agreement: he determines that the great majority of Palestinians support Abu Mazen's illegitimate rule and the "peace agreements" signed by his predecessors. As a faithful son to a master nation, he overlooks any political forces that persistently resist the

occupation and might in the future struggle even more fiercely for their liberation. Nor does he listen to their strong voices—some even published repeatedly in the daily Haaretz (mainly by Amira Hass) which accuse Abu Maazen and the PA of cooperating with Israeli intelligence and thus helping in the nightly arrests of political activists. It is not only the collaborative PA which is considered a fit partner to the submissive peace plan supported by Grossman, but other US allies in the region, the Arab autocratic regimes, are also partners to the sham peace plan initiated by the US and its allies:

Why, for these past few years, has Israel avoided judicious negotiations with the moderate and more conversable sectors of the Palestinian people? Why have you ignored, for 12 years, the Arab League initiative that could have enlisted moderate Arab states with the power to impose, perhaps, a compromise on Hamas?

Grossman's misleading optimism for this "peace plan" repeats with regard to Jewish society. Despite the ever-increasing militarism, racism and pretense of security concerns, Grossman continues to sell the illusion of a "change of consciousness" that took place in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge:

[...]Something about this war is managing, I think, to direct many Israelis' attention toward the mechanism that lies at the foundation of the vain and deadly repetitive "situation." Many Israelis who have refused to acknowledge the state of affairs are now looking into the futile cycle of violence, revenge and counter-revenge, and they are seeing our reflection: a clear, unadorned image of Israel as a brilliantly creative, inventive, audacious state that for over a century has been circling the grindstone of a conflict that could have been resolved years ago.

However in order to keep this supposed change of consciousness within the boundaries of the official Israeli narrative, Grossman reminds the potentially "converted" of the durable threat to Israeli security:

Now the Left recognizes the deep-rooted hate to Israel which is not due only to the occupation. [The Left] is increasingly aware of the potent hatred against Israel and of the Islamic fundamentalist volcano that threatens the country. It also recognizes the fragility of any agreement that might be reached here. More people on the left understand now that the right wing's fears are not mere paranoia, that they address a real and crucial threat.

Indeed a right wing warmonger hides behind the façade of a prophet for peace—all for the security of the Zionist settler state.

Zeev Sternhell's lack of empathy and moral judgment

Sternhell's article was published ten days after Israel launched Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip (8 July) and one day after the ground invasion on 17 July. [19] The heavy airstrikes had already resulted in enormous devastation of the Strip. The massacre already numbered 240 killed and 1770 wounded—almost a third of them children, many from the same families. Even official Israeli news admitted that the great majority of the murdered residents were civilians. The heartbreaking picture of the four kids who were struck by the Israeli Air Force while playing at the seashore spread throughout the entire world. Waffa hospital was bombed as had been other public institutions. Two days earlier, the army had called 100,000 residents of Gaza telling them to leave their homes (front page of Haaretz, 16 July). Hundreds of thousands in the Strip had lost access to water due to the Israeli air attacks on infrastructure facilities, and medics deplored the shortage of medicines and anesthetics.

As said, these terrifying atrocities were already well underway when Sternhell's article was published. They and previous mass killings, as well as the "decision" to target civilian residents, point to even greater calamities yet to come.

Sternhell begins his article with a kind of cognitive-psychological view on Israel's part in the "conflict" which prevailed in the pre-state period and contin-

ued thereafter: "Since the beginning of Zionism, Israeli society has found it difficult to see the other nation (emphases added) that lives in this land."

It turns out however that Sternhell himself is blind. He refrains from mentioning the very colonization of the land or calling "the other nation" by its name – Palestine. This assumed "difficulty in seeing" allows him to avoid identifying Zionism as a colonial project and Palestinian resistance as a struggle for national liberation.

However, he states that prior to independence this blindness was "a source of strength." Sternhell is definitely right in evaluating the importance to the Zionist colonization project of being blind to the Palestinian nation; it helped in mobilizing participation in building the infrastructure for the settler colonial state and cleansing it of about 800,000 of its indigenous population in the '48 Nakba. The "'48 youth generation" which committed the mass expulsion had been well prepared to heartlessly commit the Nakba: to expel the majority of the Palestinian people and wipe out almost 500 villages and towns, including evacuating the then most advanced and progressive cities of Jaffa, Acre and Haifa among others. Years of indoctrination to enshrine the exclusive Jewish-state-to-come as an absolute notion created the dehumanization of Palestinians and themselves as well.

However Sternhell contends that "The blessing of being blind to the 'other' lasted only till 1949." But after 1949, and especially after 1967, the inability—or unwillingness—to understand the other (emphasis added) has been the cause of disastrous moral and political paralysis.

Why 1949? To remind the reader: during this year the Armistice Agreements were signed between Israel and its neighboring states. They established demarcation lines which "temporarily" recognized the territorial expansion of Israel far beyond the area that had been allocated to it in the UN partition decision.

The "disastrous moral and political paralysis" which characterized Israeli policies after 1949, in-

cluding the last assault on Gaza, is but "punitive measures" against the "violence" on the part of the Palestinians. Sternhell, however, does not condemn these measures on a moral basis. His main opposition to them is based on pragmatic argument:

It is unlikely that the punitive measures taken by Israel, from the retaliations of the 1950s to the tactics in the first Lebanon war and to the present, have ever brought any real benefit but the official Israel refusal to understand that.

Critiquing Israel's deliberately bloody policies solely for their futility demonstrates utter morally bankruptcy and inevitably leads to a meaningless message to the Israel political establishment and the wide strata of Israeli society: "We have been doing the same thing for years. [...]Doesn't common sense demand that we try a different method?"

Eleven days later when the bloodbath in Gaza reached hair-raising levels, and a substantial part of public opinion abroad began showing solidarity with the Palestinians, Zeev Sternhell came out with a more specific message regarding the solution to the conflict. [20] Like David Grossman, he appreciates the restraint of the Israeli army for not employing all its combat capability. And like Grossman, who addresses his message of peace precisely from this position of overwhelming military superiority, Sternhell calls "'all Palestinians' to create a framework for a comprehensive solution establishing a Palestinian independent state." The capitulatory nature of this "independence" is soon disclosed: preventing a full unification with the West Bank and eliminating its resistance. The strip would be founded as "a demilitarized province of the [Palestinian] state which would be limited in terms of arming but opened to the world and from Israeli colonialism." [21] As we said about David Grossman – the very partnership with Abu Mazen aims to confer legality to Israel's already-realized control of the entirety of Palestine.

The reaction of Zionist Left intellectuals to the periodic bloody wars on Gaza and especially to the recent Operation Protective Edge signifies the end of

their past role as even false prophets of peace—the distinction I bestow upon them in the title of my book of the same name (Haymarket Books, 2011). Now they explicitly support Israel's policy of suppressing Palestinian resistance led by Hamas and highly supported by Gaza residents. Since they have accepted the definition of Hamas as a terror organization which threatens the existence of Israel, they can easily justify the pretext of assaults against Hamas in Gaza, ignoring the fact that they amount to war on the Palestinian people.

In the West Bank, the war continues daily with the collaboration of Abu Mazen's Palestinian Authority. Zionist Left intellectuals have not come out against the recent nightly kidnappings of hundreds of Palestinian political activists and Left thinkers and academics like Palestinian professor and writer Ahmad Qatamesh who was recently detained from his home in Ramallah. The fact that he spent a total of almost nine years in Israeli prison was published in Haaretz, yet not a word of solidarity, not even on collegial academic terms, was uttered by Left intellectuals. Reading their retort to the waves of massacres in Gaza since 2006 exposes a final stage in the long betrayal by Zionist Left intellectuals.

The intolerable ease by which they accept and repeat the terms in which the political establishment frames the "conflict" with Hamas is startling. It has been accurately described by Noam Chomsky as "a mixture of half-truths, outright lies, deliberate deception, and mind-boggling daub." Left intellectual discourse adopts the official narratives about the war on Gaza and the oppressive measures implemented in the West Bank as well as the ideology of "state security" which underlies these narratives.

Netanyahu's' recent declarations which identify Hamas with the Daash organization encourages Israel to join the US imperialist "holy war" against "Islamic terrorism" in Palestine as well. Those known as the "Zionist Left" continue to supply fake moral justification to the diminishing number of Jews who still seek it.

The Left, which has been recognized as guarding the misleading legend of the mythological Zionist labor movement, no longer exists as a distinct political and cultural entity. The Left intellectuals have finally openly adopted the quasi-fascist dimensions of this movement which played a leading role in creating the hegemonic ideology of the Zionist brand of colonialism.

According to Sternhell's analysis in the '90s, from the beginning, the Zionist labor movement sharply diverged from European liberal democracy and its enshrinement of individual liberties. Their ideology of constructive socialism was a local version of National Socialism that retained the main tenets of organic nationalism within a socialist framework. [22]

However, this version of National Socialism and the world view and principles embedded within it have served as the main tenets of the official ideolo-

gy and identity of the state of Israel for decades. It later developed Israeli political culture by emphasizing the supremacy of the state and its "security" over the principles of individual human and civil rights, as well as class interests. Up to the very present, it serves as the ideological basis which unifies the Left and Right political wings within Israel behind the principal political policies adopted by all Israeli governments—both regarding the Palestinians and the Arab world, and the social economy within Israel.

What distinguishes this new stage of commitment to the colonial state of Israel by Left intellectuals is their departure from what remains of their weak commitment to universalistic values. They are now fully integral to the chauvinist, racist state of Israel which is the tool for the embodiment and expansion of Zionist colonial project.

[23]

USA

Ferguson's Killer Cop Is Not Arrested

MALIK MIAH ·

"While the racial analysis is striking, the database it's based on has been long considered flawed and largely incomplete. The killings are self-reported by law enforcement and not all police departments participate, so the database undercounts the actual number of deaths... (T)he numbers are not audited after they are submitted to the FBI and the statistics on 'justifiable' homicides have conflicted with independent measures of fatalities at the hands of police." (USA Today, August 15)

Darren Wilson, the killer of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, continues to receive full pay and freedom. At the Ferguson police department many cops are wearing "I am Darren Wilson" bracelets to mock the chants of Black men and women who chant "I am Michael Brown" at city council meetings and on the street.

Cops and prosecutors assume that Wilson used "reasonable force" and only faces scrutiny because of the public outrage and protests. The struggle is between the historical pattern of African Americans shot by white cops, and the collective fightback to win justice. It is far from settled who will win this tug of war.

A twelve-person grand jury was convened on August 20. Grand Jury deliberations are secret, but generally follow the direction of the prosecuting attorney. St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch has deep ties to the police, and has favored law enforcement in criminal cases. In his view cops always use "reasonable force" in doing their job.

Although the grand jury began meeting in August, it now reports it may not be able to decide until

January whether Wilson should be indicted. On September 16, Wilson testified before the grand jury for more than four hours, and according to sources with knowledge of the investigation Wilson was "cooperative." He was not obligated to testify.

It takes at least nine of the twelve grand jurors to issue an indictment. A tweet in late September by someone who knows a person on the Jury said there is no evidence yet to indict. This leak is a violation of the law and could lead to a new panel of jurors. The chief prosecutor said all evidence will be made public if there is no indictment.

Claim of Self-Defense

The grand jury must be convinced that Wilson wasn't acting in self-defense (his claim) to make an indictment. Yet it does not have to call eyewitnesses or have an open hearing. Generally the cop declaring self-defense is the only "witness" testifying to the jury. The dead victim is voiceless.

The grand jury system is not democratic or fair. What's happening here is a classic case of turning the victim into the criminal, and the white killer cop into the "victim." Where is the required police report after the shooting? In violation of Missouri Sunshine statutes, no information from the police (the Incident Report, for instance) has been made public.

Wilson has been kept out of the public eye as his mostly white and conservative supporters denounce the protesters as "thugs" and Michael Brown as responsible for his own death. At protests in Ferguson since August 9, it's been the cops who are violent and disrespectful to mostly peaceful protesters demanding justice for Brown.

Police propaganda and corporate media are spreading the idea that if no indictment is issued, there

may be "riots" by the community. The right wing and racist press (Fox News and conservative blogs) are running defense efforts and public support for Wilson. (An example is the conservervativebyte.com, September 25 piece that praised cops wearing the "I am Darren Wilson" bracelets.) More money has been raised for the Wilson Defense fund than for the Brown family.

Attorney General Eric Holder and the Department of Justice promised to launch a civil rights investigation. So far little has been done. The same DOJ's investigation of Treyvon Martin's killing in Florida has led to no federal indictment of George Zimmerman.

The arrogance of the Ferguson police was on display on September 25 when Police Chief Tom Jackson issued a video apology to the parents of Michael Brown—six weeks after the killin—that backfired. Jackson told the press he had been too busy working on the case and other aspects of his job to do so earlier. (Evidently the "apology" gambit came from a newly hired public relations firm.) Brown's parents responded to the apology by demanding that the Justice Department take over the case and arrest Wilson.

What Next

African Americans are disproportionately arrested, convicted, and incarcerated because of the institutional racism of the justice system. Every Black male knows that being Black in itself can lead to your death if a cop decides you are guilty of un-

known crimes. You might raise your hands (as Brown did) but it doesn't matter.

"The NAACP released a report Thursday, titled *Born Suspect: Stop-and-Frisk Abuses & the Continued Fight to End Racial Profiling in America* [1], that looks at the 20 states without laws explicitly prohibiting racial profiling and the 30 states with some form of racial profiling laws on the books.

"'Not much has changed' in the past decade, said Niaz Kasravi, the report's lead author and the NAACP's director of criminal justice. 'I can't tell you how many parents have sat with me in their living rooms and talked about their sons or daughters who are no longer with us and flipped through photo albums. It's heart wrenching.'

"The NAACP and Urban League are committed to seeking justice on behalf of those families, [Urban League President Marc] Morial, said." (USA Today, September 15)

What happens next in Ferguson depends on the national and international spotlight. Reverend Al Sharpton of the National Action Network and an adviser to the Brown parents summarize best what must be done, "Whether they wear blue jeans or blue uniforms, criminals must be held accountable."

Collective pushback through civil disobedience and mass public actions is essential to hold the killer cop accountable.

October 7, 2014

MIDDLE EAST

Da'esh - Golem is turning against its creator

MICHEL WARSCHAWSKI ·

The State of Israel has also played this game, encouraging in the 1980s the growth of the Hamas Islamists against the nationalists of the PLO. We know what happened then as well. Today it is with Da'esh (IS, ISIS or ISIL) that the USA and their allies are having the same experience: this by-product of al-Qaida has taken on an importance which has surprised the Pentagon strategists and CIA experts, and is threatening to destroy the architecture of the Middle-East, put in place almost a century ago, by Messrs Sykes and Picot, at the time when the Ottoman Empire had become the "sick man of Europe".

It is important to underline that it is Saudi Arabia, great ally of the United States in the Middle East, that created al-Qaida – and thus, indirectly, Da'esh – in its war against increasing Iranian influence in the Middle-East. Its radically fundamentalist Wahhabist Islam was the ideological school of this movement. The Golem has now turned against its creators.

Recently on the far left in Europe, I have heard expressions of support for Da'esh. There again, the enemy of my enemy (USA) supposedly would be my ally. A serious mistake: there is nothing progressive in Da'esh, even when they are fighting against the United States and their allies. It is a barbarian invasion that not only sows death and the destruction, but commits itself publicly and openly to imposing an Islamic regime, in its most rigorous interpretation, with all that that implies in terms of public freedoms, women's rights and non-observance of the rights of minorities.

Political combat is not a football game, where one must support a team because one does not like the other one. There are cases where we are facing two plagues, of which neither is better than the other.

The United States stop carrying out their dirty wars in the Middle East, the international community stops being an accessory to Israel's colonial policy, and Da'esh will lose the popular support it has in certain layers of the Muslim world. It is as simple as that .

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USA

Chicago mayor campaign – Karen Lewis and the Long Arm of Lesser Evilism

SCOTT JAY ·

Accepting the lesser of two evils, usually in the form of supporting the Democratic Party, has led many social movements to their own graveyard. Accepting the logic of supporting candidates who preach against our interests has led many movements to soften their voices, limit their demands, and even disappear rather than embarrass their candidate. However, many on the Left who have been quite clear about this have not always been so clear that lesser evilism does not stop at the voting booth. The issue is not only whether we can build a resistance to the blatantly neoliberal Democrats like Obama but also whether we can stop our own allies from accepting the lesser evil and keep themselves from being pulled in along with them.

The problem is not one of ideological purity. On the contrary, we can be as pure as we want about never voting Democrat, but if we uncritically promote allies who are dragging others down this road, we are hardly building an alternative to lesser evilism. It is one thing to compromise our demands downward in order to build a larger coalition to fight for them, it is another thing entirely to advocate for things that we oppose. Austerity is often carried out by our "friends," which weakens our ability to resist these measures because nobody wants to embarrass their friends. After all, the thinking goes, if we fight concessions carried out by our allies—who are generally less evil than the opposition—we will only help bring the reactionaries back into power.

This thinking is suicidal for the labor movement but it is all too common. The Democratic Party has

long been the primary tool of liberalism to facilitate lesser evilism. However, the long arm of lesser evilism reaches far beyond the immediate scope of those who endorse Democrats and often touches their allies and their allies' allies as well.

Fighting the Democrats or Supporting Them?

The impending mayoral campaign of Karen Lewis is a minefield littered with many aspects of this very issue. It would be ridiculous to describe Lewis as "evil." Rather, she is highly popular precisely because of her role in leading the teachers' strike. Since then, Lewis and her union have been among the most visible forces of opposition to Mayor Rahm Emanuel's neoliberal agenda. She is an extremely appealing figure who would be a great champion for labor and its allies. As a candidate, she could carry the banner of a fighting labor movement into the race and provide a voice for working people and people of color that would not otherwise be heard in this election. There are few candidates with the potential and ability to galvanize class politics the way she could

Unfortunately, Lewis has taken a right-turn in recent months as described in a sharply critical article by Lee Sustar and Brian Bean in Jacobin [1]. While in the past Lewis has spoken eloquently about the effects of racism, she has suddenly begun pushing pro-police rhetoric, commenting on the "tired, demoralized" Chicago police force and calling for more cops to be hired. Additionally, "Lewis spoke approvingly of an agreement between Illinois Governor Pat Quinn and Emanuel to bring in forty state troopers to help Chicago police officers." This in a city in which police tortured false confessions

out of over 100 Black men [2], sending many to prison and even Death Row.

Even worse, Lewis has sunk to pandering to racial resentment among middle class ethnic white voters. When Emmanuel announced a plan that would give hiring preference in the police and fire departments to graduates of Chicago Public Schools—the schools that her members teach is—she shot back. "Lewis claimed," Sustar and Bean write, "that this mild affirmative action proposal smacked of religious discrimination—and even racial bias against whites—because many white cops and firefighters send their kids to private Catholic schools." This is dreadful stuff coming from somebody as promising as Lewis, as Sustar and Bean document quite well.

What they are less clear about is the fact that—even though the mayoral race is non-partisan—she is campaigning as a Democrat and has been doing so for some time. Rather than just continuing to hope that she will run as a left-wing independent, we need to deal with the far more likely scenario—that she will continue on her current course, which has already been harmful to the labor movement.

Lewis recently pushed CTU to endorse Governor Pat Quinn for re-election [3], stating that he "believes in public schools and I know he will fight to make sure every child has a great education." This is the same Quinn that signed SB 7, a law that attacked teachers' seniority and their right to strike. The bill was also endorsed by Lewis [4]. "We're going to encourage every CTU member to turn out for Governor Quinn in November," she said in a press release. If the Left is going to build an alternative to lesser evilism, it must oppose this—not just Quinn, but Lewis's efforts to push labor into his arms.

Before moving toward her own candidacy, Lewis showed her enthusiasm for Democratic Party Alderman Bob Fioretti [5], the other major candidate in the mayoral race. She even helped Fioretti with fundraising, suggesting the likelihood that she will throw her support behind him if she is not able to proceed. The Chicago Sun-Times [6] has suggested that an alliance with Fioretti could be a powerful

tactic to bring down Emanuel, though Lewis hardly needs their advice on this. She is also encouraging her supporters to donate money to her exploratory committee via ActBlue [7], a fundraising platform for Democrats. Her fundraising page describes her as a "Progressive Democrat."

The Chicago Mayor's race may technically be non-partisan, but we cannot seriously expect to find solace in the gray area of electoral technicalities. Lewis has embraced the strategy of working within the confines of the Democratic Party some time ago and the fact that she has done so in a far more appealing manner than others does not make it better. In fact, it makes it worse. She will be far more effective at bringing her supporters to the right than anybody else in the labor movement or in Chicago politics. Whether or not this is her actual goal is irrelevant when compared to the consequences of her actions.

Many will see Lewis's campaign as an opportunity—though an opportunity for what exactly is not clear. The Chicago teachers' strike and Lewis's leadership of it opened an opportunity to build a fighting opposition to the Democratic Party. That opportunity is rapidly being closed by Lewis herself. This poses a number of real problems for the labor movement. Lewis is being pressured by Emmanuel's supporters to step down from the CTU leadership in order to show that she has no conflict of interest as she would be negotiating a raise for her members while defending the taxpayers' interests [8]. This is, of course, business-speak for not being too generous to the working-class. Whether or not she complies, we can expect this rightward pressure on her campaign to continue and potentially affect the CTU as well.

The American Federation of Teachers has promised \$1 million for Lewis if she runs and has suggested they would launch a Super PAC to help her campaign [9]. For a candidate without Emmanuel's big-money backers, \$1 million is a substantial sum and one not likely to be kept available if her fiery rhetoric turns too militant or her campaign takes on a fight with anti-labor Democrats like Quinn.

Furthermore, Lewis recently gave an interview to the editorial board of Crain's Chicago Business [10] and suggested her willingness to compromise on the ongoing pension negotiations, which the pro-capital paper described as "an uncharacteristic peace gesture." Will she accept a worse deal for her members in order to ease the concerns of Chicago taxpayer groups, or even just to get the issue off the table? Will anybody oppose her on this?

The pressure on Lewis and her allies in CORE will be enormous as such a compromise would probably make for good mainstream electoral politics. However, it would make for horrible class politics. We do not know whether the negotiations will go in this direction or if they will simply continue sputtering endlessly without an agreement. But if Lewis goes down this road, the Left in CORE and CTU cannot support this, regardless of whether she runs as a Democrat or a socialist or an insurrectionary anarchist. This would not be class struggle unionism or social justice unionism but good old fashion Democratic Party machine politics. If Lewis can compromise on this issue without a fight then she can compromise on far more. A labor Left that cannot be clear about this is hardly a labor Left at all.

Providing an opposing voice to this direction will be highly unpopular in some quarters but that is precisely why it is so important. The Democrats succeed in co-opting the most popular figures in social movements so as to make their party more appealing to liberals. This is exactly why Lewis's direction is so damaging for the labor movement—hardly anybody will want to oppose her, even when she is cutting deals and throwing around rhetoric that labor militants cannot possibly support. The fact that Lewis is such a strong figure and is probably totally well-meaning does not change the consequences of her actions one bit.

The Left is uniquely positioned in the CTU both in the rank-and-file and in the elected leadership and some of them may find this interesting or even awkward. Yet, this position is presumably exactly what they always wanted when they got involved in union politics in the first place. We all know well

the many stories of union leaders who sell out their members for any number of reasons. The value of having the Left active and even elected in unions is to resist these efforts, not to abide by them or even defend. If the Left cannot lay out a clear strategy to oppose Lewis's current trajectory—in a clear and comradely way, but clearly opposed to her political strategy—it will find itself in the graveyard of social movement regardless of whether they endorse her as a Democrat or not. A labor Left that does not have a clear sense of purpose and strategy around these issues will find that it has no sense of purpose at all, other than to wait for a better leader or a better Left to come along and do it for them.

A similar challenge is facing the campaign of Jorge Mújica, an openly socialist candidate for Chicago alderman running in a largely Latino neighborhood against a Clinton Democrat, as Dan La Botz described recently [11]. By many accounts, this campaign provides a great place for the Left to unite in a non-sectarian platform that can project its politics to working-class people. That is still true, but the Karen Lewis campaign poses a whole new challenge. Back in August, Mújica expressed his enthusiasm for Lewis entering the race [12]. And why shouldn't he have? But as the weeks have gone by it is less clear that socialists can endorse her, and the potential problems this could cause in the campaign are real.

There will likely be many in the campaign, not to mention the electorate, who will want Lewis to run even as a Democrat. Nobody will want to disagree with the enthusiasm of people who want to support the most popular labor figure in Chicago, and possibly the country, but downplaying this problem is a concession to the suicidal politics of lesser evilism. Quietly accepting the direction in which Lewis is taking her supporters, while doing nothing to challenge her from the Left so as not to alienate important allies, cannot be an option. If the goal is to build an alternative to the politics of lesser evilism, then the campaign must have clarity around this, otherwise it is just the Left holding hands and patting themselves on the back and feeling good about

being socialists. This stark description should in no way be taken to be a prediction of what exactly this campaign will do or a judgment on its many hard-working supporters. This is simply a statement of a very difficult problem which the Left has stumbled over many times in the past and that, hopefully, the Mújica campaign can overcome.

The Dead End of "Future Opportunities"

There is a clear opportunity now to have out a debate in the organized labor movement about the role of the Democrats. The fact that one of the US labor movement's greatest champions is embracing the second party of American capitalism should not be seen as an awkward problem that we hope will go away. On the contrary, it is an historic opportunity—even if a very difficult one—to build an organized, political grouping within labor that understand the anti-union role of the Democrats. There are many radicals in CORE including in the leadership who are now uniquely situated to carry out a political campaign around this issue, but avoiding the debate in the hopes of not alienating valuable allies will mean that it simply never happens, or it happens when it is too late and nobody is paying attention.

There are so many opportunities for the Left, but often these are misunderstood. There is always some future opportunity that the Left does not want to lose sight of and therefore difficult problems now are avoided in order to carry out a much more powerful struggle in the future. But those struggles rarely come, because the real fight is usually the one just before us, the awkward fight with our compromising allies that just may break up the alliance we have worked so hard to build. On the other hand, the fight in front of us today just might build the clarity and organization that labor actually needs to carry out those bigger battles.

Karen Lewis's campaign poses problems not just for her supporters but for the allies of her supporters; her supporters may allow her to go down this road so as not to alienate the allies who follow her. But every challenging problem provides the small kernel of a solution. The Left today that can resist the pull of the Democratic Party, even coming from a figure as admirable as Karen Lewis, will be hardened for even greater challenges down the road.

8 October 2014

New Politics

HONG KONG

What They're Talking about on the Streets in Hong Kong

BAI RUIXUE ·

Last night I was in Mong Kok and joined one of many of the discussion groups that have been taking place at the protest sites. Participants in this discussion were concerned with the movement's goals and how best to achieve them in light of the current situation. The discussion is worth commenting on as the majority of participants were ordinary working people of different generations, (instead of students) as well as a few local activists, who had initiated the discussion. Previously working class and lower middle class people in Hong Kong have tended to be more politically apathetic and this is only something that has begun to change recently, beginning first amongst the young people. What started as a small group discussion, last night, quickly drew in a bigger crowd of participants with those passing by also stopping to give their views.

When I first arrived, the issue of which protest sites should be maintained was being discussed. It was commented that while the site in Causeway Bay, was significantly shrinking and may be difficult to maintain, there were many people keen to keep the site in Mong Kok. One person commented on how the Mong Kok protest was like a following river, and that even if there were those who wanted to call for a retreat to Admiralty, it would have little impact as people would keep coming back here anyway. One participant then raised the issue of what sort of impact would this have on the small businesses and the self-employed in Mong Kok, while a passerby stopped to criticize the traffic disruption caused by the protests.

Someone then asked whether it was really possible to sustain the protests for 30 or 60 days and this soon led on to the more important question of how long the movement should go on for and when should the protests end. On this question there was a lot of debate about what should be achieved before the protesters withdraw. One man commented on how while it was necessary to be tactically flexible in negotiations, principles should never be sacrificed. He believed that while our goal is universal suffrage, we also want regime change and do not just want another CY Leung as Chief Executive.

Another participant expressed his opinion that the movement reminds him of the HKTV protests, where thousands of people came out, and then it just died down. He believes that this only encouraged the government to be more offensive and was therefore concerned that if the protesters retreat now, without winning again concessions, the government will only attack more ferociously next time.

Several argued that we should only leave the streets when we get real universal suffrage, while others disagreed and argued that this was a war to be won in stages. It was argued that it was important to assess whether the movement is expanding or not and that it didn't mean giving up if we were not occupying this or that street. Despite the different views, however, there seemed to be agreement that regardless of whatever happens it is important not to give up principles and to remember the goal of universal suffrage and civic nominations.

In the discussion, some also turned their attention to how far the students could represent them. One man commented that while the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and Scholarism did

not represent us, it is still important to give support to them now as they are a medium between us and the government. He thought that it was important that the HKFS should come out to brief people during the negotiations. Someone also commented that the HKFS does not have the power to tell protesters what to do in the streets, while another also warned that if the students did enter into negotiations depending on the results there would be the danger that they would lose credibility among the people. The question of whether it would be possible to give the students some type of mandate was also raised, although nobody seemed sure exactly how it would be possible to do this.

On the issue of the negotiations, someone commented that they are just symbolic and it might be the best result if they break down. Others were concerned that they would just be manipulated by the government. One participant commented that they felt pessimistic that the government was not making any concessions, while HKFS seemed to be. Another person expressed the view that we are just at the beginning of the movement and do not actually want a result right now.

Criticism of the pan-democrats was also a topic of discussion. One woman commented on how the Legislative Council does not have the mandate of the people, including the pan-democrat councilors and then went on to criticize how when the protesters were attacked with teargas, some of the pan-democrats did nothing and just folded their arms. "Why should we re-elect them?" she asked. Another

participant observed how the pan-democrats never consult the ordinary people. Meanwhile one person was critical of how some pan-democrats have said that it is alright if we lose the movement now as the seed of democracy has already been sown. He went on to argue that you only have to look at China after the crackdown 25 years ago to see that an entirely different seed has been sown. He also said that after so many people have sacrificed so much it is not alright for the pan-democrats to simply tell them to go home.

The discussion session concluded with a well-received speech by a long time political activist who commented on the challenges made to the protesters by pro-Beijing groups when they say that everything that Hong Kong people enjoy comes from China. His response to this challenge was that actually our rice does not come from the Communist Party but from the peasants, while consumer goods are produced by the workers. Even the natural water is only polluted by the Communist Party. He also commented on concerns about the divisions in society, and said that while any division between people who were born in Hong Kong and people who have migrated here is entirely unnecessary, the split between the crony tycoons and the ordinary people is a necessary division and that the more this grows the better until it grows to such an extent that the people will take over.

October 9, 2014

New Politics

SYRIA

Kobani, the Kurdish issue and the Syrian revolution, a common destiny

JOSEPH DAHER ·

The city would actually have fallen long ago if it was not for the resistance organized by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (YPD which is linked to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), and its military forces, units of people's protection (YPG), and also the active participation of at least three battalions of Arab fighters in the city: the revolutionary battalion of Al Raqqa, the battalion of " the northern Sun" and the battalion of "Jirablis". On 4 October the Free Syrian Army (FSA) also decided to send a thousand fighters to defend Kobani.

The city Kobani is a strategic location for the IS. First the city lies between the cities of Cerablus and Tell Abyad, which are both under IS occupation, and its capture would allow a territorial continuity for the IS, and secondly the city is also a gateway to Turkey.

Kobani, a key city in the Rojava autonomous regions

The city of Kobani is the third Kurdish city of Syria and was the first Kurdish city to be liberated from the Assad regime on 19 July 2012.

Kobani is also the center of one of the three cantons (with Afrin and Cizre) that established themselves in "democratic autonomous regions" from a confederation of "Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turkmen, Armenian and Chechen" as stated in the Preamble of the Rojava (name of western or Syrian Kurdistan) Charter. Experiences of self-administrations in these regions are very interesting, particularly regarding the rights of women and religious and ethnic minorities. Some contradictions never-

theless exist, especially regarding the authoritarianism of the PYD forces that have not hesitated to repress activists or to close institutions towards them.

We should not forget that the PYD, like its mother organization the PKK, lacks democratic credentials in its internal functioning and in regards to other organisations considered as rivals or just, as we have seen, critical of it. We must remember for example the protest movements in late June 2013 in some cities of Rojava, such as Amouda and Derabissyat, against the repression and arrests by the PYD forces of Kurdish revolutionary activists. [1]

The PYD is however far from being the only organization in this case in Syria, and within the Syrian opposition.

That does not stop us from providing a full support to the Kurdish national liberation movement in its struggle for self-determination in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran against authoritarian regimes that oppress them and / or prevent them from achieving their self-determination. It is also why we should demand the removal of the PKK of all lists of terrorist organizations in Europe and elsewhere.

We can indeed criticize the leadership of the PKK or the PYD for some of their policies, but as argued before, a fundamental principle of revolutionaries is that we first need to support all forms of liberation and emancipation struggle unconditionally, before we are entitled to criticize the way they are led.

The coalition and Turkey or the struggle against the Kurds

The bombings of the international coalition led by the USA and with the collaboration of the reactionary monarchies of the Gulf have failed to stop the offensive of the IS since September 23. At that period the IS was at 60 km of Kobani... today the IS has entered and occupied several districts of the city. The IS has also destroyed several houses and administrative buildings.

This military intervention shows once more that it is not designed to help the local populations in their struggle for freedom and dignity, but serve the objectives of Western imperialists, with the agreement of Russian imperialism, and of all the regional sub imperialists, participating directly (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) or indirectly (Turkey), or not opposing it like Iran. All these actors want to put an end to the revolutionary processes in the region and restore its stability with authoritarian regimes that serve their interests and not those of the popular masses of the region.

For its part the Turkish government of the Justice and Development Party (known as AKP) has once again demonstrated its opposition to any project of Kurdish self-determination that would challenge its political interests.

The Turkish government has also accused the PKK of being terrorists similar to the IS. The Turkish government, through these accusations, wants to harm the Kurdish organisations operating on its territory or at its periphery, or at least co-opt some of them.

The main objective of the Turkish government is actually to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous zone along its border with Syria. This is why the government in Ankara has made the creation of a buffer zone in Syria one of its main demands to the coalition and the international community, and not as the Erdogan government claimed to protect the areas held by the Free Syrian Army, which are now fighting alongside Kurdish forces against the IS.

In the same context, the Turkish government has also prevented and continues to prevent fighters

from the PYD to cross the border to join the city of Kobani to help the their Kurdish comrades in their fight against the IS. The Turkish authorities imposed a curfew for the first time since 1992 in six provinces the country populated mostly by Kurds after large demonstrations by members of the Kurdish community against the government's policy of not wanting to help the city of Kobani and of refusing the crossing of Kurdish fighters to Syria.

After four days of rioting, the Interior Minister Efkân Ala presented a very heavy first official report which reported 31 dead and 360 injured, over a thousand arrests and impressive damage, mainly in the southeast Kurdish majority in the country. The victims, injured and arrested were in their far majority Kurds.

The leader of the PYD, Salih Muslim, urged Turkey to let the crossing of fighters and weapons for Kobani, while adamantly opposing he intervention of the Turkish army in the city, which according to him would be similar to an "occupation".

On its side, the imprisoned leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan also warned that the fall of Kobani would mean the end of all peace efforts that have been going on for the past two years between Turkey and the PKK.

As a reminder there are still more than 8,000 Kurdish political prisoners in Turkish jails accused of terrorism.

Kobani and the Syrian revolution

The fall of the city of Kobani and its occupation by the IS would represent a double defeat: for the self-determination of the Kurdish People and for the Syrian Revolution. Although let be clear not the end of both processes.

The autonomous self-administration of Rojava is a direct and positive result of the Syrian revolution and would never have been allowed or able to exist without the popular and massive movement from below of the Syrian People (Arabs, Kurds and Assyrian together) against the criminal and author-

itarian Assad regime. These same popular forces also united against the Islamic reactionary forces that attacked in the past and continue to attack nowadays the Rojava regions. Today the FSA and the Kurdish forces are fighting side by side against the IS in Kobani, while we have also seen demonstrations of support in other liberated areas of Syria in solidarity with Kobani.

The revolution from below of the popular masses of Syria, Arab and Kurds, is the only solution against sectarianism, racism and national chauvinism.

The self-determination of the Kurdish people has been strengthened by the Syrian revolution and this has to continue. It is a dialectical relationship and both are linked.

A defeat of the Syrian revolutionary process and of its objectives would mark most probably the end of the Rojava autonomous regions' experience and of the hopes of the Kurdish people to decide their own future in the face of the opposition of multiple actors : Western and Russian imperialisms, Arab and Turkish nationalist chauvinisms and Islamic reactionary forces. On the other side the Syrian revolutionary process would not be complete without the

possibility of the Kurdish people to decide freely of their own future: separation or participation and struggling with the democrats and progressives for a Democratic, Social and Secular Syria with its national rights guaranteed.

This is why we have to oppose all the attempts to undermine both the Kurdish self-determination and the Syrian revolutionary process because their destinies are linked, whether from the Assad regime, the Islamic reactionary forces, the various imperialisms (USA and Russia) and sub Imperialisms (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar).

All the counter revolutionary forms must be opposed because they want to divide the popular classes through sectarianism and racisms.

Viva the Syrian Revolution

Viva the self-determination of the Kurdish People

Viva the brotherhood of the people in struggle for Liberation and Emancipation

People in struggle are one!

*Republished from **Syria Freedom Forever.***

ISRAEL / PALESTINE

The massacre in Gaza - Hamas has emerged victorious, but at what cost!

MICHEL WARSCHAWSKI ·

A semantic remark: the media and international public opinion talk about the "Gaza war". This definition is part of the gigantic propaganda machine set up by Israel and taken over by the so-called international community and a large part of the means of mass communication. How can we talk about a war when one side is the fourth largest military power in the world, and the other a population that has been enclosed for seven years in a total blockade, and which to defend itself possesses only homemade rockets whose human and material damage is negligible?

Massacre in Gaza

If we take the last two months, if we count the number of dead (which is very unpleasant to do and to say, but which still needs to be calculated): on one side three Israeli civilians, on the other 1,800 Palestinian civilians. This is not a war, but a massacre: to bomb, from the air and with land and naval artillery, 1.8 million people packed into an area no bigger than a medium-sized French town, is necessarily to target the civilian population, an act of mass terrorism.

The means used by the Israeli state are totally disproportionate to any military objective. But what is really the purpose?

Initially, Israel accused, without any proof, Hamas of having ordered the kidnapping and murder of three young settlers in the West Bank; Hamas not only denied it, but the logic of the agreement on the Palestinian government of national unity that it

had just signed was in contradiction with such an action. But if it wasn't you it was your brother...

When we say Hamas, we are saying Gaza, where Hamas is in power. For Israel, Gaza = Hamas = terrorism, so what if more than a million and a half human beings live there. For most Israelis, Gaza is not a territory or a people, but a bomb of mass destruction which must be defused at any cost. Moreover, in common parlance in Israel, when people want to say "go to the Devil" they have said for a long time now, "go to Gaza."

The settlers killed were quickly forgotten, and the discourse turned (again) to the rockets being fired at the Jewish localities which surround Gaza. These rockets have been drizzling down for years without causing any real damage ... and without disturbing the tranquility of the people in the rest of Israel who do not feel in least affected by what is called the "periphery", the equivalent of the poor suburbs in France.

And then with the ground offensive, they found the offensive tunnels (not to be confused with the tunnels through which passed the products that were necessary for the survival of the inhabitants of Gaza, until the coup d'état by the Egyptian army, allied with Israel, which immediately destroyed the tunnels). We knew that there were tunnels, but the surprise of the Israelis was quite real when they saw the size of the tunnels and the technological means that they implied. Another failure of the "best intelligence services in the world", which have never failed to be surprised, from the Palestinian-Lebanese resistance to the invasion of 1982 to the ability of Hezbollah to resist in 2006, via the Intifada (1987-1990). You wonder what use their huge budgets are...

In fact, the ineffectiveness of the intelligence does not come from a lack of training or technology, but from political reasons: colonial arrogance prevents them from understanding, and even from seeing, the colonized. Just as the Israelis were surprised in 1982, discovering that there were tall buildings and beautiful cars in Beirut (sic), they cannot imagine that Gazans can build ingenious tunnels under their slums.

So now it was the war of the tunnels. But why flatten entire neighborhoods of Gaza and cause nearly two thousand victims among the civilian population? What is Israel looking for?

Objective Mahmud Abbas

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is not Gaza and Hamas that are being targeted, but the public enemy number one of Hamas - the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmud Abbas.

Indeed, no one wants a peace agreement with Israel more than Mahmud Abbas, at the cost of compromises which for many Palestinians already amount to surrender. The Palestinian president is supported by the "international community", which has entitled him "essential partner for peace" in Palestine/Israel. Peace, even a peace on the cheap, supposes a halt to colonization and withdrawal from (most of) the West Bank.

This is in contradiction with the strategic objective of the various governments that have been in power in Tel Aviv, at least since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, that is to say the pursuit of the colonization - and the de facto annexation - of the West Bank. It is a long-term strategy, planned and implemented systematically by Yigal Allon and Ariel Sharon from the early 1970s onwards.

For the Israeli government, a Palestinian government that is open to compromise is a threat, and an international community - that is to say, above all the United States - that has decided to make things move, is a disaster. The second part of this equation is not on the agenda, as demonstrated by the hu-

miliating failure of the Kerry mission a few months ago.

The formation of a government of Palestinian national unity reflected a broad popular aspiration. In Israel, it was seen as a godsend: "You see", people cried in Tel Aviv, "Abbas and Mashal [the political leader of Hamas] are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, they are all terrorists, more or less openly, not partners to make peace with. Move along, there is nothing more to see." However, Hamas had, in this agreement, made serious political compromises, agreeing to let Abu Mazen [Abbas] continue his second-rate negotiations with Israel.

The problem for Netanyahu is that the government of national unity has secured the support of the international community, including from the Obama administration, of which Netanyahu does not hide his dislike... a dislike that is, moreover, shared at the White House, without however the strategic structural link that unites the two countries being put into question. It is here that we understand the aggression against Gaza and its primary motivation: neither rockets nor tunnels - it is a question of breaking Abbas and the threat of negotiations.

The attack on Gaza and its failure

It ought to have been an easy operation: more than 60,000 reservists were mobilized, along with powerful artillery, hundreds of tanks and especially air power. The initial objective was not clear. Stop the rocket fire? Bring down the Hamas government? The Israeli cabinet could not agree. What is certain is that initially there was no question of a ground operation.

After several weeks of unprecedented bombing and massive destruction, the army was forced to take stock: it was a failure because Hamas continue firing its rockets and was managing to reach Greater Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and even the suburbs of Haifa, in the North.

In Tel Aviv, it was then decided to enter Gaza City, which turned out to be, as might be expected, a

trap: More than 50 soldiers were killed in the ground operation, and Hamas defended itself effectively, keeping most of its offensive and defensive positions. Rocket fire continued unabated.

Commissions of inquiry will certainly be set up after the cease-fire to try to explain the fiasco, especially of the intelligence services, which were completely unable to predict either the scope and sophistication of the tunnels, or especially the ability of Hamas and the population to resist.

The price paid by the population is huge, but Israel lost the war. The agreement that will sooner or later be signed will be for Hamas - and the Gazans - better than the previous situation, especially by some easing of the blockade.

To this must be added a further deterioration of Israel's image around the world, not just in the eyes of the activists and sympathizers of the Palestinian cause: even the US administration, which has, however, not skimped on the rapid strengthening of the military capacities of its strategic ally, is angry with Netanyahu's policies, which it says it has difficulty in understanding, and from the humanitarian point of view, in accepting without reacting. Fortunately for Netanyahu, there are still Hollande and Valls...

Negotiations have begun under the auspices of Egypt, which is far from being an "honest broker", a neutral mediator. They have been suspended by Israel, but it is obvious that they will soon be taken up again and will establish a status quo that will last as long as it lasts: which is entirely, or almost entirely, dependent on the will of the Israeli leadership to exact a revenge that it hopes will be more successful.

United Front in Israel

As we wrote at the beginning of this article, Gaza scares the Israelis and all justifications, even the most senseless, for attacking its people are accepted. The rare voices of commentators who try to inject a bit of reality into their analyses are drowned out by the consensual choir. This is what explains

the absence of mass opposition to the aggression and the massacre to which it led.

Although there were, from the first days, anti-war rallies in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as in Arab localities, they remained modest (a few hundred) and were organized by what in France is called the "far left", in other words they were marginal.

It seemed for a moment that the public was beginning to wake up: on July 26 several thousand people assembled on Kings of Israel Square - where Rabin was assassinated in 1995 - in the largest anti-war demonstration to date. But was it really a demonstration against the war? Had the majority of the protesters come to express their disgust for the massacre and their solidarity with Gaza? I do not think so: with the exception of about a thousand activists, what motivated these citizens of Tel Aviv was Israel, and its rapid transformation into a fascist society: the petty bourgeoisie of Tel Aviv, educated and wealthy, is in the process of losing its country to a populist far-right and increasingly violent fascist groups.

It is the old Israel, and more particularly Tel Aviv, prosperous and open to the (Western) world, that the protesters came to defend, and much less the martyrs of Gaza. This Israel is melting under their eyes, which may explain the demoralized discourse of some young people, talking about leaving the country of which they can literally no longer stand the stench. All the more so as the "left intellectuals" have not been noted for their critical position, with the notable exception of Professor Zeev Sternhell and, of course, the great humanist, the *Haaretz* columnist, Gideon Levi.

In my blog I wrote recently that Gaza will rise from its ashes, but will Israel be able to rediscover a minimum of humanity? Nothing is less certain and everything seems to indicate that a new stage has been reached in the suicidal march of the State of Israel and its society.

Indispensable international solidarity

All over the world, actions protesting against the crime of Gaza and expressing solidarity with its people have been numerous and massive. To the legitimate rage there has been added a strong demand to end the impunity enjoyed by the Jewish state.

The French government has, one more time since the victory of François Hollande, distinguished itself by its wretched behaviour against these protests, which are not only legitimate but natural, by twice prohibiting demonstrations in Paris. Fortunately, the French people has more moral and political feeling than those whom it elected, and was able to challenge these iniquitous bans. Valls and company then pulled out the weapon of last resort, by equating support for the Palestinian victims with anti-Semitism. This sordid manipulation has become threadbare, but it continues to impress the most moderate people, especially in the media. This identification with Israel on the part of the Socialist government (but not all its parliamentarians) and the policy of double standards can only play into the hands of anti-Semites and their stupid discourse about the "Jewish lobby pulling the strings"; it can also contribute to excessive reactions in the solidarity movement, especially among the less politicized protesters, who are sometimes blinded by their rage.

The thousands of deaths in Gaza, this huge massacre of innocent civilians, have marked people's spirits, deeply and no doubt lastingly. What is needed now is to capitalize on this outrage by building an ongoing movement at the national and international level, a movement that is not only based on natural indignation, but can arm itself with a long-term strategy against the Israeli colonial state and its policies.

This is where the BDS (Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions) campaign takes on its full importance: Israel must be outlawed in the public space, rejected by the international community, and as long as this is not the case, put in the dock by civil societies and institutions, movements, political parties, trade unions and even businesses. It can be done, it is being done, and there is no doubt that the Gaza massacre will significantly contribute to the strengthening of this global movement.

As part of the BDS campaign, it is urgent to demand that governments and international bodies indict those Israeli political and military leaders who are responsible for Gaza, before local and international courts: there is no statute of limitation for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Together we must shout out loud and clear: No impunity for the killers of Gaza!

TURKEY/KURDISTAN/SYRIA

A call in support of Kobanê, against Turkish buffer zone

Urgent Call: Stand Against Demands for a Buffer/Security Zone Between Turkey and Syria

Kobanê, one of the three autonomous Kurdish enclaves in Northern Syria, on the border with Turkey, is once again under attack by the IS. The Islamic State (IS – formerly known as ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) has besieged Kobanê on three separate fronts and is at the moment shelling the city relentlessly.

The border between Syria and Turkey is a straight line that runs mainly through flat plains. A tank or armoured car can sail through these plains with no difficulty. The plain is inhabited by peoples of diverse ethnic or religious background: Arab tribes, Yezidis, Syriac Christians, Armenians and Kurds. Many of the Kurds are relatives of Kurds on the Turkish side of the border and have been in constant interaction in the past. Kurds had been living in Syria without any formal citizenship status. After the start of the uprising in Syria, they declared their autonomy in July, 2012. These autonomous zones are small enclaves where the majority population is Kurdish and which are separated from one another by zones inhabited by Arab tribesmen. Since 2012, the Kurds of Syria have tried to establish a democratic form of self-rule where everyone would be equal, regardless of ethnic or religious identity and of gender. They have called these enclaves of self-rule Rojava, or The West. Kobanê is one of these enclaves and, since September 15, the target of fierce attack by IS, armed by superior weapons.

Local observers ranging from international reporters to Kurdish inhabitants of the region and the Kurdish forces of Kobanê have regularly claimed that the Turkish-Syrian border is systematically

transgressed by the IS. They obtain, it is said, personnel and ammunition from supply routes through Turkey. This has led them to conclude that Turkey is using the IS to clean the region of its Kurdish inhabitants.

The Turkish government has, since the inception of the Syrian civil war, made no effort to hide its opposition to the Assad government and has provided support to various Islamic groups fighting in the Free Syrian Army. It is now claiming that the best way to fight Assad and the IS, is to establish a buffer/security zone between Turkey and Syria. This zone can be in no other place than in Rojava.

We, the women from the Women's Initiative for Peace see this proposal as a disingenuous move to kill many birds with one stone. The Turkish state has initiated a peace process with the Kurdish guerrilla forces (the PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party) with which it has been waging what it called a 'low intensity war' for over thirty years. In spite of talks between the Turkish state and the imprisoned leader of the guerrillas, the government of Turkey has been refusing to honour the agreements they have reached and does not take the steps necessary for the peace process to go forward, steps which the Kurdish side has been waiting for, for more than a year. It is in this atmosphere that we now see the state of Turkey at best allowing the IS to raze Kobanê to the ground and proposing a buffer zone which will allow the declaration of Rojava as an empty land. According to the Kurds, this is another way of fighting a dirty war against the Kurds, another way of not recognizing the will of the Kurdish people. They say talking to the Kurds in the north (Turkey) while fighting those in the West (Kobanê) means ending the peace process and the ceasefire that has lasted almost two years.

We, women, want the Turkish state to honour its pledges. We do not want the peace process to end. As women, we know that war targets women and that women pay a very high price during war. Turning overnight into refugees, women have crossed the Rojava border and flocked into Turkey, a country that does not grant legal refugee status to persons arriving from its southern borders. Refugee camps, forced resettlement, the declaration of their homes as empty land is the bleak future that Rojava women now face.

This future need not come to be. Lobby your government, lobby the Turkish government, and lobby the UN. We are sending attached template emails/fax that you can send to the UN and the Turkish government. Do not let them establish a buffer zone in Rojava. Tell them:

Rojava is not empty.

Kurds have a government there.

Not having a state should not mean not having a home.

Stop the forced eviction of Kurds from yet another of their homelands.

Please send the attached letters to the Turkish government and to the United Nations.

Addresses for the United Nations:

Ban Ki Moon, fax: 1 (212) 963 4879; email: bkm@un.org

UNHCR, fax: (41) 22 739 7377; email: hunbu@unhcr.org, swest@unhcr.org, furley@unhcr.org

UNICEF, fax: 1 (212) 887 7465/7454

WHO, fax: (41) 22 791 0746

Addresses for the Turkish government:

E-mail: assembly@tbmm.gov.tr

The speaker of parliament Cemil Ç?ÇEK

website : baskanlik.tbmm.gov.tr

E-mail : cemil.cicek@tbmm.gov.tr

: facebook.com/mvcemilcicek

Secretary of the Board of Spokespersons Dr. İrfan NEZİROĞLU

website : www.irfanneziroglu.com

E-mail : neziroglu@tbmm.gov.tr

Signed

Women's Initiative for Peace

Use the letters below

Letter to the United Nations

To whom it may concern,

We have been watching the recent developments in Northern Syria with great concern. It has become clear to us that an atrocious massacre is imminent in the region. We have also heard that the government of Turkey is lobbying for the formation of a buffer/security zone at its borders with Syria and Iraq. We know that this is an area called Rojava, where Kurdish people live alongside Assyrian, Armenian, Arab, Êzîdî peoples under their own autonomous government. In our opinion, this plan for a buffer zone is an attack upon this region. Carving out a buffer or security zone in this area, against the will of the peoples who inhabit it, is equal to mass displacement and invasion. Moreover, as long as the Turkish government does not prove that it is NOT providing ANY assistance to ISIS, in our eyes, it shall continue to be partly responsible for ISIS's war crimes and massacres. Thus, we as women, demand that the United Nations IMMEDIATELY;

Stand against these plans for a buffer/security zone.

Take the necessary precautions against a massacre in Kobanê, so that what happened to Êzîdîs in Sinjar does not repeat itself.

Increase its humanitarian aid for refugees from Sinjar and Rojava

Take the necessary measures to find the women who have been kidnapped by ISIS and sold into slavery.

[Date]

[Signature]

Letter to the Republic of Turkey

To whom it may concern,

We have been watching the recent developments in Northern Syria with great concern. It has become clear to us that an atrocious massacre is imminent in the region. We have also heard that your government is planning the formation of a buffer/security zone at its borders with Syria and Iraq. We know that this is an area called Rojava, where Kurdish people live alongside Assyrian, Armenian, Arab, Êzîdî peoples under their own autonomous government. In our opinion, this plan for a buffer zone is an attack upon this region. Carving out a buffer or security zone in this area, against the will of the peoples who inhabit it, is equal to mass displacement and invasion. Moreover, as long as your government does not prove that it is NOT providing ANY assistance to ISIS, in our eyes, it shall contin-

ue to be partly responsible for ISIS's war crimes and massacres. Thus, we as women, demand that the Republic of Turkey IMMEDIATELY;

Cancel all plans for a buffer/security zone and

Avoid any transgression of the borders of the autonomous government of Rojava by the Turkish military, against the will of the peoples of the region

End attacks upon civilians on the Syrian border

Close its borders definitively to ISIS and any logistical support to this organization

Increase its humanitarian aid for refugees from Sinjar and Rojava

[Date]

[Signature]

Alliance for Kurdish Rights

SYRIA

Syria and the international coalition intervention

JOSEPH DAHER ·

Targeting only Daech?

The initial declared objective of the USA led coalition was to target Daech military facilities and training camps, but more particularly the oil facilities under its occupation to try to stem a source of revenues for the group.

Before the military operation initiated by the United States, IS earned about 3 million dollars (2.4 million euros) in revenue per day through oil. But since the strikes began, pumping in the fields under their control virtually ceased.

The USA led coalition has nevertheless targeted since the beginning of its operation not only Daech, but also Jabhat al Nusra (official al Qaida branch in Syria), the affiliated Khorasan Group in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, as well as civilians. The strikes also destroyed very important civil infrastructures such as electric production center and the city's grain silos in Minbej and bombed important oil installations and refineries, and recently targeted a key gas production facility in Syria's eastern province of Deir al-Zour.

The U.S.-led air campaign has killed at least 233 persons, including 211 jihadists and 22 civilians, according to the Observatory in the first week of the bombing.

The USA led coalition has also awaited September 30 to strike some Daech armed forces close to Kobani/ Ain al-Arab, which is nevertheless still under the threat of the jihadist force. Daech was still threatening the city as we speak, while the Turkish army was not only witnessing the advances of the IS but also preventing Kurdish fighters to come and help the city of Kobani.

Despite airstrikes by a US-led international coalition to stop Daech, the militants have made advances and captured 70 villages surrounding the area near Kobani / Ain al-Arab. This has resulted in at least 180,000 people fleeing across the border into Turkey,

Once more this new military intervention in the region in a so called fight against "terrorism" has caused more civilian casualties among the population and strengthen on a medium and long term these reactionary groups that will present themselves as the only true opponents of the Assad regime and anti imperialist against foreign western powers, hiding their undemocratic and sectarian nature.

On September 26, more than 200 fighters had actually joined Islamic State in Syria's northern Aleppo province since U.S. President Barack Obama said the United States would strike the jihadist organization.

Counterrevolutionary progresses

The bombings must also be understood as an attempt by Western imperialist forces and regional authoritarian regimes led by Saudi Arabia, the main counter revolutionary actor in the region, to re-establish their hegemony over the region. It should be noted that Iran and Russia have also welcomed the bombings despite criticisms of the form that the coalition has taken. Once again, imperialist and regional rivalries fade when the stability of the global imperialist system is threatened, and this proves the futility of analysis based on opposite camps.

The Syrian regime, which has welcomed the strikes from the USA led coalition on numerous occasions since the beginning of the operation, sees moreover

an opportunity to regain a new "legitimacy" with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism.

As a reminder, the Syrian regime has started to target the IS only from mid August 2014, whereas previously the areas under its controlled were not the targets of attacks of the regime, unlike the territories under the control of the Free Syrian Army and popular committees.

This situation is not ignored by many groups of the Syrian armed opposition, from the Free Syrian Army and Islamist groups, as well as many popular organizations pro revolution that condemned and opposed the bombings as a violation of Syrian sovereignty and denounced them as a way to end the Syrian revolutionary process.

Solidarity with democratic and progressive forces as a solution

This new foreign intervention will most likely benefit the two counter revolutionary forces in the region: the Assad regime on one side and the Jihadist and Islamic reactionary political forces

In addition, to believe that we can overcome the IS and other similar organizations with the same tools that created them is a big mistake or a reflection of insanity. These reactionary forces are actually the consequences firstly of the criminal and authoritarian regimes of the region that have used sectarianism to divide the people (eg Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) and then of the interventions of international (the United States and

Russia) and regional (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran) actors. This new military intervention does actually not have the objective of overthrowing the Assad regime, on the opposite the "Yemeni solution" still remains relevant, which aims to maintain the Assad regime with the integration of some sections of the opposition linked to the Western countries and the Gulf monarchies.

As a banner held by a Syrian protester in Aleppo last week said: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, Albert Einstein" and below "Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014.

We must support and express solidarity with all the democratic and progressive forces in Syria and Iraq as well as the Kurdish democratic forces that resist against the two actors of the counter revolution.

In this perspective it is necessary to defend a local dynamic of self-defense rather than increasing stranglehold of imperialism and therefore we should also support the provision of weapons and arms to these democratic forces in the region to combat both counter revolutionary forces.

A third progressive and democratic front gathering the objectives of the revolutions (democracy, social justice and equality) and able to oppose all foreign imperialist and sub imperialist forces have not been able yet to constitute itself as a credible alternative political force until now for the masses on the regional basis. All efforts should be put forward to build this third democratic and progressive alternative.

DENMARK

The RGA against Danish fighter jets in Iraq

MICHAEL VOSS ·

Back in September the RGA supported the decision to deploy one military Hercules aircraft to Iraq with the task of supplying Kurdish forces fighting ISIL with arms.

The two different votes are in line with the basic approach that the RGA want to support local progressive forces fighting ISIL or other reactionary armies, but that the party opposes US, UK or Danish direct military intervention whether is bombing campaigns or ground forces.

That is also the reason that the RGA – also on 1 October - tabled a proposal in parliament that Denmark help to supply weapons and humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Kurdish/multi-ethnic areas in Northern Syria. A few days later the RGA itself started collecting money for weapons to the Kurds.

Tail-ending big powers

During the debate in Parliament, Nikolaj Villumsen, MP for the RGA said:

"The government is proposing a bombing campaign that may last more than a year according to the prime minister. These bombings may very well lead to a strengthening of ISIL and of creating even more chaos. When civilians are killed and foreign military again is bombing Iraq, it may increase the recruitment of ISIL.

Many hidden agendas are involved in this alliance that the government want Denmark to join. It is a 100 percent certain that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states do not want democracy in Iraq. Likewise, Turkey does not want Kurdish self-government anywhere inside or outside Turkish borders. I fear that Denmark just will be tail-ending the interests of big powers in the region.

"What we ought to have learned from the previous wars that Denmark participated in, is that we should rather support those local forces on the ground that fight for democracy and human rights. That is why the RGA proposes direct support for the Kurdish militias in Syria. They have defended themselves against Assad and ISIL for three years. But now ISIL have conquered heavy American produced weapons from the Iraqi army in Mosul, and they are launching an offensive against the Kurdish territory around the city of Kobane. The Kurds have real problems in resisting them.

"Turkey is a close ally of Denmark in NATO, and they are closing their borders for arms supply to the Kurds, while they for years have accepted ISIL-soldiers to pass this border. Official Danish policy towards the Kurds is defined by the government in Ankara. Right now the victims are the people living in the Kurdish areas in Syria. Here, Kurds, Arabs and Christians need our support. We want Denmark to supply weapons to the secular Kurdish forces to make the able to defend themselves against ISIL – plus humanitarian aid so that the civilians can survive."

Solidarity

Of course, the proposal for arms to the Kurds was defeated with only the RGA voting for. Two days later, on 3 October, at a press conference the RGA handed over 40,000 DK (5,500 €) to Saleh Muslim, a representative of PYD, the party of Kurds in Syria that works closely together with the PKK of the Kurds in Turkey. The money is earmarked for weapons.

At the press conference, Nikolaj Villumsen said:

"Since the offensive of the jihadists against Kurdish areas in Syria began, we have tried to

convince the government and the other parties to supply the Kurdish defence forces with weapons and humanitarian aid, with no effect at all. Now, ISIL is just outside Kobane, and 400.000 civilians are in danger.

That is why we have collected this amount of money among the local branches of the RGA at only a few days' notice. It is only a symbolic amount, but we will continue collecting money. We call on all

democratic and progressive forces in Europe and the rest of the world to support the fight against ISIL."

Since then the RGA has repeated its call to the government for arms to be supplied to the Kurds several times and used all parliamentary options for raising the question. As of 8 October the only result has been that the Socialist People's Party (SF) now also supports the proposal.

SYRIA

Solidarity with Kobanê – an urgent task

SARAH PARKER ·

?

Update

The situation in Kobane is getting tougher by the hour – fierce fighting around the outside and in the outskirts between the defenders of the Kurdish town and ISIS forces. Protesters are still contesting the border held by the Turkish army, the Kurdish leadership has called for millions of Kurds from Turkey to go to the border. Kurds are protesting all over Europe. [1]

People on the net keep predicting the fall of Kobane – of course Kobane might fall quickly, but the resistance has been astonishing so far, and there must be quite a few thousand fighters in there, plus the whole remaining population is mobilised. They are preparing to fight street by street, ISIS won't find it easy.

So it is very important for us not to take the fall of Kobane as a foregone conclusion, but to keep making protesting and demanding weapons for the defenders. The more protests there are, the more pressure there is on the coalition to restrain Turkey and provide effective military assistance to Kobane, and the longer it goes on, the more people support the Kurds and understand how disgusting the coalition tolerance of Turkey's behaviour is, so the higher the price the coalition countries will pay whatever the upshot in Kobane. Foreign Minister Davutoglu has said they don't want Kobane to fall (not) – but nothing is being done to stop that by Turkey or its allies, in fact the opposite, as Turkey is more and more blatantly supporting ISIS, moving in new weapons, treating wounded fighters in Turkish hospitals.

Millions of people are seeing the battle on TV – anyone who has Hotbird satellite can watch it. If

there is a terrible massacre, millions of people will know that this has been tolerated by the coalition because they politically support Turkey against people who want independence. Six months ago nobody had heard of Kobane, but now half the world is watching and seeing that the coalition is doing nothing to assist Kobane against ISIS. This will not be forgotten, by the Kurds or by other people. If you don't have Hotbird, you can find footage on the Kurdish TV websites – Google Med Nuce, Sterk, Ronahi, Newroz. The BBC and Al Jazeera can get live stream and pictures from the Kurdish channels that are there, even if there are no foreign correspondents there.

People should be joining Kurdish demos, posting stuff, as you are, writing to MPs and councillors, whatever is possible. There are thousands of people in Kobane, and if the town fell, who is to say that Turkey wouldn't also fall back a bit and let ISIS loose among displaced people and refugees who are inside Turkey and not far from the border. Anything to justify Turkish army action when it suits them.

Today's news is that PYD leader Salih Muslim was in Ankara for talks with security officials and requested that Turkey open the border to allow the passage of Kurdish fighters and weapons into Kobane – quite a good move since it puts Turkey and the coalition and indeed the South Kurdistan peshmerga forces on the spot. Presumably he is asking for PKK, KDP and PUK forces to be allowed to come through – hard to imagine Turkey will agree to PKK, but KDP and PUK have been feebly saying they would send people but cannot because of the security situation. It would give them a chance to put their money where their mouth is and, in the case of the KDP, recover a bit from the disgrace of telling people in Shengal and the Plain

of Mosul that they would protect them and then abandoning them to ISIS.

Lastly, if Kobane falls, ISIS will be free up more forces to take more of Syria and Iraq; while doubtless leaving Assad free to reassert control of Aleppo.

6 October 2014

Socialist Resistance

The city of Kobanê in Aleppo province, northern Syria, is being heroically defended against ISIS by local people and by the People's Protection Units (still mainly Kurdish but including Arabs and Assyrians). A high proportion of the fighters are women, mainly young but also middle-aged, and some Free Syrian Army forces who have moved to Kobanê are also fighting there, but the defenders have no heavy artillery and only a few home-made armoured vehicles, while ISIS have all the heavy weaponry and vehicles they captured in the summer from the Iraqi army and possibly from the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party), as well as weapons and vehicles given them by their sponsors. ISIS is able to shell heavily from great distances, and have concentrated most of their Syrian forces round Kobanê, so for some days the situation has been critical, although the defenders are very determined and seem to be just about coping.

Since 15 September ISIS has been staging its heaviest attack so far on 3 sides of Kobanê, one of the Kurdish three autonomous regions in Syria (the fourth side is partly covered by Turkish army). ISIS is receiving ever more blatant assistance from Turkey, which the US and its allies seem to be doing nothing effective to hinder. Recent More than 100 and villages in the enclave have had to be evacuated to reduce the number of civilian casualties and to allow the self-defence forces a clear run and by now more than 130,000 non-combatants have fled into Turkey. The remaining population, normally 200,000 but doubled in size by refugees from Sinjar and Aleppo and elsewhere in northern Syria are at risk of massacre if Kobanê falls.

Mass protests by Kurds on the border at Kobanê have been taking place, and sometimes people have managed to rush the border at Pirsus /Suruç to go into Kobanê to aid the defence effort. One report from villagers who came through to Kobanê said that they had seen about 3000 men escorted over the border into Syria in the middle of the night by Turkish soldiers, presumably to reinforce ISIS. This follows previous reports that the old Berlin-Baghdad railway line is being used by the Turkish army to resupply ISIS. Protesters, some having travelled from distant parts of Turkey, are patrolling the border, watching out for Turkish soldiers helping ISIS recruits to cross the border. Some clashes have broken out, including near the Iraqi/Turkish border in Kurdistan. So the Turkish army does not have full control of the border, which means there is some hope that people can get in with ammunition and more weapons.

YPG forces from the next autonomous canton along to the east, Jazira, are also fighting ISIS around Serekani to try to get through to the west relieve the siege of Kobanê. On 30 September news agencies reported fighting around Rabia in Northern Iraq; it sounds as if peshmergas and YPG (Kurdish People's Defence Forces) have jointly driven ISIS out of Rabia, which in theory will make it easier to clear ISIS out of the rest of Shengal and to allow Kurdish fighters to go from Iraq to Syria, into the Jazira autonomous area. This will allow reinforcements to Jazira, which will make the task of breaking through to the west more likely.

Public and diplomatic pressure on Turkey is key to restraining its actions around Kobanê. Far left leaders from Turkey including leaders of ODP (Freedom and Solidarity Party), EMEP (Labour Party) and HDP (People's Democratic Party) visited a couple of days ago. Kurdish politicians from Turkey have visited several times. The Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party) leaders in Syria, in the Qandil mountains in Iraq, and in Turkey are calling for actions to demand that NATO restrain Turkey from helping ISIS in Kobanê. Kurds have been stepping up their demonstrations throughout

Turkey and all over Europe, including occupying Schipol and Frankfurt airports, and increasing numbers of hunger strikes, including outside the European Parliament, where Salih Müslim, co-chair of the PYD in Syria, is holding meetings with European politicians this week to ask them to put effective pressure on their governments to push Turkey to change its lethal support for ISIS. We need to support the Kurdish actions, as the situa-

tion in Kobanê is extremely serious, and predictably a deafening silence is coming from governments and most politicians around the coalition, as Turkey is a key ally, and imperialism does not like the radicalism of YPG in Syria or its ally PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party).

1 October 2014

Socialist Resistance

SYRIA/IRAQ

The ISIS threat

SARAH PARKER ·

Why and how we should oppose ISIS

2 October 2014

Why we should oppose Isis:

It controls or is contesting major areas of Syria and Iraq, and some important parts of Kurdistan, it has made an incursion into Lebanon (Ersal).

It is running a reign of terror in Mosul and everywhere else it controls, executing people in its path who do not conform to its misogynist Wahhabi ideology and carrying out large scale massacres (Shias, Kurds).

It surrounds Baghdad with a ring of forces and allies. A fight for Baghdad would be horrendous.

It abducts young women and subjects them to a regime of extreme abuse, torture, sexual violence and slavery, including often forcing them to phone their families and describe what has happened to them, the point being to visit further humiliation, fear and grief on themselves and their families; some are sold as slaves.

It has been fighting to destroy parts of the Syrian opposition for example in the area of Deir a Zor and in and around Aleppo, the second biggest city in Syria, which at the moment seems to be at risk of falling to ISIS

ISIS has been besieging the majority Kurdish area of Kobanê in Syria for two years.

Since 15 September, ISIS has been staging its heaviest attack so far on Kobanê, one of the Kurdish three autonomous regions in Syria from 3 sides; the fourth side is partly covered by Turkish army.

It massacred hundreds and perhaps thousands of Yezidi Kurds and drove the survivors out of their ancient homes round Sinjar; fighting in some of the

villages is ongoing and at least 3,000 women are unaccounted for

It has driven all the Christians / Assyrians and Turkmen out of the towns of the plain of Nineveh (near Mosul). The alliance being formed by the US seems to be involved in Kurdish peshmergas' plans to retake Mosul; so far some villages have been taken back.

It derives financial and political / religious support from at least Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, all members of the "coalition of the willing" now starting to bomb Iraq again and Syria as well.

It derives increasingly open military support from Turkey in Turkey's attempts to crush the Kurds of Kobanê.

It has massacred unknown but substantial numbers of Shias from the Iraqi army.

It has a large arsenal of powerful American weaponry left behind by the retreating Iraqi army, possibly by the retreating KDP "peshmergas" round Mosul and Sinjar, and gained from Syrian opposition forces who have joined it and it must have captured plenty of Syrian army and airforce equipment, all of which is being used to attack people in many parts of Iraq and Syria.

It has executed an American, and American-Israeli and a Briton and posted videos of their executions.

It acts as a pole of attraction for naïve or angry and disturbed Muslim youth from Europe and elsewhere.

It is reputed to have experienced jihadis from Libya and Chechnya in its ranks

It has demolished parts of the FSA by incorporating FSA fighters into its ranks (numbers not clear but as a phenomenon this is reported frequently).

Its activity massively feeds Islamophobia, very useful as a tool of division for western leaders.

How should we oppose Isis?

We should oppose ISIS by supporting people in the region who reject the rule of ISIS and are defending themselves against it, many of whom believe in democracy, self-determination and social justice. The more successful in self-defence the local people are, the more they can assert their independence from imperialism, resist subordination by imperialism, and generally cut across US/British/EU plans to exploit the presence of ISIS to reassert control over Iraq and Syria.

We would support organisations such as the FSA opposition groups still functioning in Syria (whom SR already supports via the Syria Solidarity Movement), YPG (Kurdish People's Defence Forces), and anti-sectarian organisations in Iraq, including women's organisations. Kurdish organisations all over Europe and the Middle East are holding mass demonstrations, occupations and hunger strikes constantly. A Europe-wide women's organisation called Roj Women, based in London, is launching a campaign in solidarity with women in Kurdistan, Iraq and Syria which we should support.

If people want to help with medical aid, they can do so via Hand in Hand for Syria or Heyva Sor (Kurdish Red Crescent).

We should also do the maximum to expose the direct help that ISIS has been getting from outside states – Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and we should point to the US/British policy of fostering sectarianism in Iraq over the last 10 years including via the Maliki government, and their encouragement of the most right-wing forces in Syria, while failing to arm the popular masses, all of which have assisted the rise of ISIS. In the case of Turkey, which wants to have part of north Syria as a "buffer zone" which they control, where they can do what they like with ISIS, and which is empty of Kurds we don't know exactly what the US view is of this, but

it seems unlikely that the US will want to encourage the autonomous Kurdish areas, let alone the breaking down of the border with Turkey. If the US really wanted to assist people in Kobane they would put more pressure on Turkey and insist that some of the weapons allegedly going to the KRG in Iraq would be sent to Kobane – this is not happening and I doubt it will.

Coalition airstrikes

We oppose coalition air strikes. The US is using ISIS as an excuse for interfering again in the affairs of Iraq and Syria. It is more worried that a new regional power could get out of control than about deaths or human suffering. If this was not the case, then we would have heard more about the sectarian killings that the inhabitants of Baghdad and other places have had to live in fear of since the invasion in 2003.

The air strikes are unlikely to be very effective against generally mobile forces like ISIS, they are already killing civilians who are in the wrong place at the wrong time, and they are certainly not being used to deter ISIS forces from massing around Kobanê, for whatever reason.

Recent air strikes in Syria, such as those near Erbil a few weeks ago, are generally aimed at protecting perceived US interests – in other words at weakening ISIS, not at assisting the people of the region. We should also note that several non-ISIS opposition groups have had their leadership targeted in recent days, in some cases clearly by the Syrian regime. US sources claim to have killed 170 ISIS members in their overnight strikes of 22/23 September. They have probably done quite a lot of damage to the ISIS "capital" of Raqqa, but there are still thousands of fighters active, with all their weaponry. Civilian casualties of course are also being reported. So their targets and the rest of the Syrian opposition, as well as Kobanê are still under heavy pressure.

We should support weapons for those in Iraq and Syria opposing ISIS, but we recognise that the im-

perialists are unlikely to arm progressive forces, which will have to rely on their own resources or on solidarity. Coalition propaganda says there is no alternative to bombing, but if it were willing to arm the resistance to ISIS, then that resistance would be much stronger as would have been the case with the Syrian opposition that arose 3 years ago. If the people of Iraq and Syria have the right to defend themselves against ISIS, then they should get the arms necessary to defend themselves.

After making a big announcement in August, the US led "coalition" seems to have been sending some equipment via the Iraqi government, much of which is probably being held up for political reasons, and has sent some limited amounts to the KDP forces. Recently PUK sources complained that they are not seeing any of the new heavy weaponry. It also appears that YPG in Syria are not getting any weapons – contrary to the hopes of the Danish Red-Greens who voted to allow the Danish government to send military equipment. Those defending themselves against ISIS and the brutal repression of Assad should obtain weapons. As Syria has shown, outside powers give significant weaponry to the most reactionary elements, while the more progressive and democratic forces have had to rely on their own resources.

We must oppose air strikes because they are intended to increase western imperialist control over the area, not to rescue people suffering at the hands of ISIS. Furthermore, air strikes always end up killing a lot of innocent bystanders. We should support the people in Iraq or Syria who are defending themselves against ISIS. Many in the West seeing the news will not be happy about airstrikes, but will also want assistance for those defending themselves against ISIS. That is why support for people in the region who are defending themselves will cut across the waves of Islamophobia we are seeing as the US and its allies go to war once again.

Socialist Resistance

Kurds resist Islamic State butchers

22 August 2014

If we are looking for any signs of hope in the long-running tragedy of the people of Iraq, suffering from the rapaciousness of outside powers and the tyranny of sectarian party rule, we should pay close attention to recent events in Northern Iraq. Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Defence Forces) guerrillas from Syria, who fought to open a narrow corridor through the desert from Sinjar and out of Iraq into the YPG controlled area of northern Syria permitted the dramatic rescue of thousands of Yezidi Kurds and others from on Mount Sinjar, where they had fled to escape the onslaught of Islamic State.

Why did YPG need to go to Sinjar?

It was necessary because the Yezidis had fled after at the culmination of a process lasting two months in which the Iraqi army and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) forces had abandoned first the city of Mosul and then the towns and villages in the adjacent area of the Plain of Mosul /Nineveh to "ISIS".

First the Iraqi army fled Mosul, and the important Kurdish city of Kirkuk, and the explanation was said to be poor morale. But regional news programmes soon showed Baathist leaders popping up in Erbil TV studios doing interviews, and some Iraqi army generals who abandoned their posts were helicoptered off to Erbil in the Kurdistan Regional Government area (not back to Baghdad), and it seemed clear that there was some sort of understanding between the KDP and "ISIS" that ISIS and their allies would not enter obviously Kurdish areas, while the local KDP forces would not attempt to stop the taking at least the west side of Mosul with its mainly Arab population, well-known as a stronghold of Baathism.

I thought East Mosul would be defended by the KDP, since it was more mixed, contained the university area, had a big Kurdish population, and was home to many ancient historic and religious sites such as the Tomb of Jonah. I assumed that the KDP and the local Kurdish Zebari tribe with some

10,000 armed men would not allow ISIS free rein. The media didn't seem to be saying much about who was in control of East Mosul initially, but after a while it became clear that in fact ISIS were in fact being allowed free rein – first the Baghdad authorities complained that ISIS had stolen a large amount of uranium from a laboratory in the university; and soon after, ISIS blew up the Tomb of Jonah and several other monuments and shrines, severely punishing locals who protested when they saw explosives being rigged up around the tomb complex.

Worse was to follow the inaction in Mosul, and it is not yet clear to outside observers whether the understanding between ISIS and the KDP continued, or broke down. The KDP systematically withdrew in front of ISIS – from various Christian / Assyrian and Turkmen towns in the plain of Nineveh / Mosul, plus Sinjar and the Kurdish town and refugee camp of Makhmur, leaving some new weapons for ISIS, just as the Iraqi army had done. It is pretty clear they were told from the top (Masud Barzani), not to fight, but to pull out. What we still don't know is if the KDP were surprised or not by the attack on the towns of the Nineveh Plain and on Sinjar, but their retreat was certainly disgraceful, and I have read or seen many interviews with refugees, both from Sinjar and from places like the Christian town of Bartella, who complained that the KDP had promised to protect them, and even disarmed them saying they would not need weapons, and then pulled out just before ISIS arrived. Possibly the expectation was that the ISIS and Baathist forces were going to go straight down to Baghdad; which is still surrounded by a network of ISIS / Baathist activity, so the move on Baghdad could still happen. Or possibly the KDP were expecting the ISIS forces to move north to join the attacks on YPG, and south-east to attack PUK forces.

For days the mainstream media ran a story saying "the peshmerga" retreated; therefore there was "a question mark over the abilities of the famed peshmerga to take on ISIS"; therefore, US bombing and other "help" was required. This is still the dominant narrative.

Longstanding resistance

There was no mention of the fact that YPG had been defending Kobane in Syria against ISIS for 2 YEARS, that they and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) came over into Iraq as soon as the crisis in Sinjar (which is near the Syrian border) began, and forced a corridor from Sinjar to Syria, through which many thousand Yezidis and others escaped; that the PUK peshmergas (from eastern South / Iraqi Kurdistan) had also been combatting ISIS reasonably successfully in parts of Diyala and had kept them out of Kirkuk and the surrounding area, and that PUK and YPG and PKK together have kicked ISIS out of Makhmur, and are co-operating in the area of Kirkuk. Apparently the KDP forces are now also participating in the fight against ISIS.

The dramatic events in Northern Iraq have evidently afforded the US and Britain and other EU states a chance to meddle again in Iraq, this time entirely under the guise of the war on terror and lending a humanitarian hand. Actually, the fact that YPG (in the three autonomous cantons in Syria), FSA and Jabhat Al Akrad units (in a few towns in Syria and in parts of Aleppo), and YPG, PKK, PUK, have all held out against heavy ISIS attacks (as well as regime attacks in parts of Syria) shows that ISIS are not invincible. Probably the main American motives are to make sure that ISIS does not exceed certain limits, to try to consolidate a puppet Kurdish entity run through the KDP in order to defend US strategic and oil company interests in Kirkuk and elsewhere in Iraq, and to push Iran and the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad into some sort of submission, whether the US wants to see Iraq formally stay together, or not.

For socialists, beyond condemning ISIS and more US and British war-mongering, the task is to see which forces in Syria and Iraq, and indeed the region, contain some emancipatory potential, and to support them. The present conflict and the plight of people in Northern Iraq, is bad enough, and although ISIS should not actually be too hard for the Kurdish forces to contain, if there are no more

tricks played by the KDP, the US (and maybe Britain) seems already to be bombing more widely than frankly admitted, and it is not impossible that the war could widen and shift in scope and targets. The three most obvious targets beyond ISIS are the Syrian government, the self-declared autonomous majority Kurdish areas in Syria, and Iran. The conflicts in Northern Iraq are unlikely to be over quickly.

YPG and PKK should be given every credit for their prompt action in Shengal, where they are still fighting ISIS and have helped Yezidis to set up self-defence units. It is also important that many more people take a look at what the Kurdish organisations have achieved in Syria, where ISIS is still attacking them and the FSA. The three self-declared autonomous cantons have been running themselves with a fair amount of popular participation, including by women, for some months. It is important to note that the Syrian organisations are close to PKK and have clearly been affected by the search for ways of increasing popular participation and local decision making that has taken place since Abdullah Ocalan, imprisoned leader of the PKK read and was impressed by the ideas of Murray Bookchin on grassroots organising and the need to save the ecology of the planet. This, together with long years of hard work, organisation and sacrifice is why the PYD (Party of Democratic Unity) and YPG (People's Defence Forces) were able to take the initiative and launch the autonomous areas after the Syrian government had been embroiled with defending itself, and why the KDP, which has numerous organisations in Syria, have not been able to build anything of substance.

Turkey's negative role

The Kurdish movement in Turkey around the PKK was set back by the capture of Ocalan in 1998 but by no means defeated. At present there is a strong popular struggle against Turkish state efforts to build new military posts in Kurdistan, and the Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas stood as presidential candidate in this month's election, and

won a majority of the vote in Kurdistan, which shows that Erdogan's wooing of Kurdish voters with promises of a solution to the Kurdish question and financial inducements (while backing the utterly reactionary ISIS killers in Syria and Iraq) has not paid off. Demirtas's candidacy was a first for an openly Kurdish politician, and he stood for a broad party with progressive policies for all the oppressed in Turkey, with the usual electoral co-operation between the Kurdish legal wing and the Turkish far left organisations. The guerrillas are combating new Turkish army operations in several areas of Kurdistan in Turkey, as well as reinforcing the YPG in their difficult battle against ISIS in Kobanê, which still continues: evidently the Turkish army, in spite of its would-be apartheid wall along sections of the border between Syria and Turkey is not able to prevent fighters crossing.

The fact that PKK has been able to sustain all this, and during August send people to Shengal and down from Qandil mountains into several parts of South Kurdistan to help the South Kurdish forces against ISIS shows that the organisation must be pretty strong. The PKK has had the reputation of being a fairly authoritarian and sectarian organisation, but they seem to be getting a lot of things right at the moment, which suggests that some lessons have been learnt over the years, otherwise it is hard to see how they could be in their present position. They have always maintained that while they wanted the liberation of Kurdish people, they were committed to international solidarity generally and to rights for minorities, and this is clearly one of their strengths in the present period. In Syria PYD has treated as normal the participation of other nationalities in the experiment of self-government, there is a mixed Arab-Kurdish force in Aleppo (Jabhat Al-Akrad/ Kurdish Front), and there is some co-operation with parts of the FSA, at least sometimes. Although the background of many Kurds in Turkey is Sunni, the Kurdish movement has always organised amongst the Alevi and promoted religious tolerance – towards the Alevi and other religious groups in Turkey. These principles have meant that

it was naturally a moral and human imperative for YPG and PKK to act swiftly when disaster struck the Yezidis in Shengal, who are mainly Kurdish speaking but have pre-Islamic elements in their religion and have often been attacked by outsiders. YPG had also been issuing warnings about the ISIS threat for some time, including to the KDP, who they thought underestimated the dangers posed to the Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq by ISIS, so it was also a matter of political judgment. Here too, their judgement was proved right, unfortunately, and whatever the reasons, the KDP by its complicity in Turkey's machinations and its failure to face ISIS or to ask the rest of the Kurdish national movement for help in time, has allowed ISIS to kill at least many hundreds of people in Northern Iraq, to abduct large numbers of Yezidi women, and to turn upside down the lives of several hundred thousand more people.

Kurdish demands

In this situation, we should support the demands made by the Joint Diplomatic Committee of Kurdistan Organisations on 17 August (from a meeting including representatives of the Syrian Kurds, the Kurds of Turkey, the PUK, and two Southern Kurdish Islamic parties), for UN aid for the displaced persons, including in Rojava (Western Kurdistan), to which little or no UN aid has penetrated, an end to the siege of Rojava, the opening of UN offices in the region, condemnation of the countries which give support to ISIS, recognition that the attacks on Sinjar amount to genocide, and consequently for political support in the face of that genocide. The statement evaluated "the stance of the international community, in particular that of the western states and the United Nations, against ISIS attacks as positive", though without commenting on the US air strikes. We should also take the opportunity to call for the removal of the PKK from the British and US terror list, since the US have found themselves obliged to work with YPG and PKK on the ground in Shengal and no doubt elsewhere.

There is a bit of a debate on the left about whether to support the sending of arms for the Kurds. My view is that the question of arms is not critical – as explained above, determined and competent forces can deal with ISIS, though it is not easy, and the Kurds are not unarmed. I think it is more important to uncover and break the roots of the support for ISIS. In any case, the US and others are currently rushing to supply weapons to the Kurdish forces – though we should be on the alert to protest if it seems that far more are going to the KDP than to YPG, PKK or PUK forces, because there is certainly a risk that if the wind changes, the west could encourage the KDP to use the new weapons against their rivals. Clearly the people of Northern Iraq, including obviously the Yezidis, the Christians, the Turkmen, the Shia, and any Sunni who are not happy with ISIS, are entitled to get weapons to defend themselves against ISIS if they want to, and we should not oppose their obtaining them from wherever they can. The question should certainly be asked why the two big Southern Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK did not manage to acquire more weapons for defence of the area and the peoples over the last 23 years – the KRG has not been short of money, frankly, and it is hard to understand why they did not buy suitable on the open market, if the US affected to wish only to supply the Iraqi government.

Another positive point for the Kurdish liberation struggle is that Kurds from all four main parts of Kurdistan have been fighting together against ISIS (Iranian Kurdish fighters have also joined the battle), which gives the chance for people to mix and break down some of the barriers. We should not be complacent about the situation however. Whatever US motives for getting involved in the battle against ISIS and the defence of Erbil, the US does not want to see a strong independent Kurdistan thronged with guerrillas concerned with social justice and stopping the destruction of the ecology, so it is vital socialists do what we can to support such forces.

We should also support the rights of the displaced people of Sinjar and Mosul and the plain of Nineveh to rebuild their lives, whether by leaving Iraq or by removing ISIS from their midst. There have been a few reports of resistance to ISIS, from women doctors in the hospitals of Mosul, to tribes who do not like the new dispensation, and we should also seek ways of supporting their struggles without falling into compliance with the current US and British governments' agenda of using the advance of ISIS to manipulate the political situation both in Iraq and at home.

The question of how ISIS ambitions towards Baghdad will turn out is a major question, but cannot be addressed here.

Who are ISIS?

ISIS in Iraq and Syria seems to contain several political trends; in Iraq some of the leaders are probably Baathists using militant jihadism opportunistically as a recruitment and fighting tool. In some places they seem to be working with other Baathist and Sunni tribal forces. But media reports usually do not distinguish between these elements, so it is often not feasible to differentiate between them when referring to their activities. In terms of personnel, total numbers are not clear, but certainly several thousand, and including mercenaries and jihadis from many parts of the world, including substantial numbers from EU states.

There is no doubt that ISIS forces are utterly reactionary. Even in western Mosul, a city with widespread support for the Baathists, and where Maliki's sectarian Shia security forces took plenty of revenge for crimes committed under Saddam Hussein, the ISIS honeymoon is over; and to those who situate ISIS in a context of Sunni paranoia and despair and feeling of victimisation, which narrative sometimes becomes an excuse, we should point out that oppression doesn't automatically make people behave better or worse – it depends on the conclusions they draw from it. We support people who understand oppression and then use it to try to

liberate themselves and other people, not people who use it as an excuse to damage more people.

In terms of sponsorship, much ISIS activity is clearly supported by Turkey; one could compare this to Turkey's creation and use of Hizbollah / contra-guerrillas in the 90s. Many commentators believe that Saudi Arabia and Qatar (or some of their "rich individuals") assist some of the groups. What the real relationship of US and Britain (as opposed to the public attitude) is to these three close allies' sponsorship of ISIS is not yet clear; they have run many dirty wars in the last 60 years, including the fomentation of sectarianism in Iraq since 2003. Playing off national groups against each other is a familiar tactic of US and British statecraft, employed in the region for example at the time of the Iran-Iraq war. Obviously disgruntled Iraqi and Syrian Sunnis form the base for the IS setting up shop in south-west Syria and north-west Iraq, but that location is also excellently suited for putting pressure on all other states in the area: on the pro-Shia government of Iraq, Iran, Syria, an emergent Kurdish entity, (if its political complexion were wrong), even on Jordan or Saudi Arabia. The area ISIS is trying to control also matches "Sunnistan" on the American military "Peters Map" (published in the Armed Forces Journal in June 2006), and one obvious interpretation of the rise of ISIS is that it is partly a reflection of US plans to redraw the map of the Middle East. Some commentators think there is evidence for some Syrian state involvement, as a way of rolling up the genuine opposition. One account I read said, perhaps with some merit: "Everyone has their own ISIS".

It has often been noted that ISIS frequently spends more time attacking "fellow" oppositionists rather than the Syrian army. There seems to be plenty of evidence that the Turkish state and Masud Barzani have been helping it against YPG in Syria (Barzani doesn't like rival groups that have aspirations to social justice and independence of the powers that be, to put it at its lowest). We should be aware that US officials regard the KDP as a counterweight to the potentially less pliable PUK (for example in 1996

during the war between the 2 parties, the US gave the KDP the green light to ask the Baathists in Baghdad to invade Kurdistan, which they obligingly did, thus stemming and reversing a successful PUK thrust into the Barzani area), and that they are pretty much pledged, unsuccessfully so far, to the destruction of the PKK. One imagines they do not view the three self-declared autonomous Kurdish majority regions in Syria with enthusiasm, and certainly US ally Turkey does not. So there is the potential, if not perhaps the beginning yet, of a war within the wars in Iraq – KDP and its allies against YPG, PKK and PUK. There is probably a truce on this in Iraq at the moment, probably not in the war on Kobane in Syrian Kurdistan; but we should be

aware of this possibility for the future, especially as one of the outcomes of the present war in Iraq may well be more independence from the centre, up to separation, for Kurdistan, so the question of who has most power in Kurdistan is not going to go away and could become very sharp, while the situation in Turkey will probably also sharpen in my view over the medium term – the Turkish army has started a lot of new operations, presumably hoping to tie down PKK forces and weaken them on many fronts, but Erdogan will face plenty of resistance from the Kurdish / leftist/ post-Gezi movements.

Socialist Resistance

Good starting points for news on Kurdistan and on the region.

9-N: obedience and disobedience

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

"Now is the time for politics" has been heard often in the last few weeks. Without a doubt. But this should not be interpreted as the time to transfer the political initiative from the street to institutional management. In these critical weeks, more than ever, the social pressure to move forward is going to be crucial. The key to the success of the entire process since 2012 has not been the parliamentary political forces, and still less the Mas government, who have controlled the agenda and the timing.

Mas unsuccessfully requested in November 2012 an "exceptional majority" to manage the sovereignty process. In reality, the absence of such a majority has been positively determinant. A weak Catalan government has been the best guarantee that the process would not be truncated by any partisan agenda. The complex balance of negotiations between parties under the pressure of a sustained mass movement has, in the end, allowed us to get to this point.

The Mas government has, in reality, little room for manoeuvre. Their preferred option is to go toward "plebiscitary" elections as a substitute for a referendum. But calling them without an agreement with ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*) for some sort of joint candidate would lead to almost certain defeat.

Mas is uncomfortable with a logic of institutional disobedience that he has been reluctantly pushed to although, paradoxically, he has very little to lose by holding out until the end. Demonstrating a strong will to organize the referendum is, in reality, the last chance to try to curb the irreversible decline of Convergència. A president who is half hero, half

martyr, it would be an excellent way of reversing what seems like an inexorable electoral decline.

Contrary to the initial fears after the demonstration of 11 September 2012, the sovereignty process has not worked in favour of CiU [2]. On the contrary, it has entered into long-term decline under the weight of its erosion by austerity policies and corruption scandals [3] and the doubts that have been raised on its commitment to the independence process.

The time when CiU was the same thing as Catalonia, the party that personified the nation, has gone, never to return. "It's just nobody knows, honey, where love goes. But when it goes, it's gone, gone", Bruce Springsteen sang in "When You're Alone" on his album *Tunnel of Love* (1987). The same thing happens with votes: when they go, they are gone. The same thing happens with political credibility: when it goes, it is gone.

CiU undoubtedly feels a nostalgia for a future that will not be, evaporating in a present that is no longer, clarified by a past that is soon to become a museum piece and an increasingly distant and harmless memory. The apparently never-ending story of the hegemony of CiU is coming to an end. Almost unexpectedly. Almost without noticing it. Almost without expecting it.

The Catalan party system has been crippled by the dual, disengaged and sometimes contradictory, pressure of the independence movement and the 15-M [4] and its subsequent manifestations. The result is a rampant crisis of the three parties that are associated with cuts, corruption and the major decisions that have marked Catalan and Spanish politics over the past 40 years: CiU, PSC (Party of Catalan Socialists, *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya*, sister party of the PSOE) and PP (Peo-

ple's Party, *Partido Popular*). The first is favourable to the national transition process. The last two are bitter opponents. The corollary of this is the promotion of those forces that, rightly or wrongly, are perceived as new, or at least as alien to the policies that have led us to this point.

The pre-eminence of the independence debate over resistance to austerity policies explains the consolidation of ERC as a dominant new alternative, a force that plays outside of the rules in the domestic arena, but absolutely within them in the economic field.

Without doubt, the challenge from the point of view of those who want to decide on everything, those who want to get out of the present crossroads with a change of political and social model on a democratic and egalitarian basis need a new alternative and a an anti-austerity pro-sovereignty force that can weigh decisively on Catalan politics in relation to the Convergence-ERC forces. Without this, all the potential of the democratic debate on independence can just evaporate, condemning us to wander in impotent resistance in a period where the lack of social victories will sooner or later begin to have an impact.

What happens between now and 9-N it is unpredictable. There is little point in attempting forecasts. But one thing is clear: to maintain the preparation of the referendum is the only way to remain faithful to the cry unequivocally expressed on 11-S. [5] Institutional disobedience to the Constitutional Court is simply the other side of obedience to the majority feeling of Catalan society. The Zapatista principle of "leading by obeying", in obedience to the will of the people, appears here as an absolute requirement.

The problem with "plebiscitary" elections is clear: they have less legitimacy than a referendum, mix the debate on independence with the different options of society, and relegate all the other issues within Catalan society (cuts, public services, employment and so on) to a secondary plane that only

benefits those who today hold economic and political power.

"Plebiscitary" elections would serve to promote the sovereignty process working to the benefit of Convergencia and Esquerra, whose relation of competition-cooperation is reflected in ERC's lack of desire for early elections, since it is aware that its support is steadily rising and not yet at its zenith.

The strategists of Convergencia have long cherished the idea of refounding its declining political space by forging some kind of partnership with ERC in pursuing the construction of a new broad Catalan nationalist party. After the historical role of Convergencia has become exhausted and its electoral hegemony ended, this is the only way forward.

ERC as a party has nothing to gain by allying itself with Convergencia. It still has some way to go alone. But at the same time it knows it cannot govern or steer a process of independence alone. Party interests can collide with the logic of "State". The pressures for a "unitary" list of parties and "civil society" can be enormous and, perhaps, unavoidable.

9-N is not only about the possibility for the Catalan people of deciding their future and their relationship with respect to the Spanish State. There is much more at stake than the discussion on the independence of Catalonia. At stake is the model of democracy in the Spanish State. If the 9-N referendum takes place the Spanish state will be a more democratic country and the cracks in the regime would only deepen.

It will be the first great defeat for Rajoy [6], opening the door to the next one. Good news for those who are opposed to the draining away of the most elementary democratic mechanisms brought about by the austerity policies of the PP-PSOE.

9-N also highlights the tension in Catalonia between those who have defended an institutional management controlled from above of the right to decide against those of us see it as a first step toward a general democratization of the political system and society. As a starting point towards the

perspective of a constituent process, in which is expressed all the energy of a society that from 15-M to the demand for a referendum has electrified a soci-

ety that, far from being resigned, is prepared to continue fighting for a better future.

PALESTINE

Lessons of Gaza

JULIEN SALINGUE ·

False pretexts and real goals

Many people have raised the question of the timing of this new aggression, in order to understand the real objectives of the State of Israel, beyond the eternal pretext of rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip, which was already invoked in the previous bombing campaign in November 2012. At that time Israel already claimed to be intervening for the sole purpose of "protecting" its people from rocket attacks. However, before the start of the offensive in 2012, no Israeli had been killed by a rocket for over a year. History repeats itself: Gaza has suffered this summer a deluge of iron and fire, while the last time an Israeli died due to rocket fire... was in November 2012, during the previous Israeli operation.

Without wishing to go into gruesome details, let us recall a few facts: in the seven years since Hamas took control of Gaza, and before the last attack, seventeen Israelis had been killed by rocket fire, ten of them during the "Cast Lead" (winter 2008-2009) and "Pillar of Defence" (November 2012) operations. In other words, more than half of the victims of rocket attacks were killed during Israeli operations, and the figure of seventeen must be compared with more than 2,000, the number of Gazans killed during the same period ... an imbalance that reflects the reality of the military relationship of forces, making it all the more scandalous to talk about the "threats" and "violence," of which the State of Israel is supposedly the victim and against which it is only "defending itself".

The real reasons for the attack must be sought elsewhere. For Netanyahu, it was first of all an operation of domestic policy. At the head of a coalition of the right, the far right and the settlers, Netanyahu chose once again brutality in order to satisfy partners and an electorate that are united in their ha-

tred of the Palestinians. After the discovery of the bodies of the three young Israelis who had gone missing near a West Bank settlement and the sharp increase in violence against Palestinians, Netanyahu chose to respond to hate speech by striking at the population of Gaza, to which it is however totally fanciful to attribute the deaths of three Israelis near Hebron ...

The operation was secondly aimed at diverting international attention which, over the previous few weeks, had focused on the West Bank, Jerusalem and Israel, with increasing calls for hatred and revenge, followed by acts: from the horrible death of the young Mohammed Abu Khdeir (burned alive) to the beating up by the police of his cousin Tariq, to the racist attacks carried out by settlers, the dozens of criminal actions committed at that time showed, for anyone who refused to see it, the true face of the violence and racism of the State of Israel, for which the primary responsibility falls of course on the Israeli leaders themselves, despite their hypocritical and insincere statements condemning the atrocities committed against the Palestinians.

Breaking Palestinian national unity?

A third factor must be taken into account, without however being overestimated: the "reconciliation" agreement signed at the end of April by Hamas and the PLO, and the establishment of a government of "national agreement" in early June. This agreement, even though it is highly unfavourable to Hamas (see below), was intolerable to the State of Israel, to the extent that it helped normalize Hamas on the regional, but also international political scene, all the more so after the recognition by the European Union and the United States of the legitimacy of a government formally supported by the two main components of the Palestinian national movement.

One of the constant features of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians is in fact the will of the colonial authorities (in the grand tradition of colonialism) to choose their own representatives of the colonized people, and therefore the potential interlocutors of hypothetical negotiations. From the boycott of the PLO, designated as a "terrorist organization", in the 1970s and 1980s to the refusal to recognize the results of the January 2006 elections (won by Hamas) via the marginalization of Yasser Arafat in the early 2000s, Israeli leaders have indeed always wanted to impose on the Palestinians to "choose" "representatives" who correspond to the aspirations of Israel, and not to the interests of those most concerned.

In this sense President Mahmud Abbas was the ideal partner for Israel, for at least two reasons, seemingly contradictory: he has been known for decades for his "moderation" and his ability to accept "compromises" that look more like surrender; in other words he is ready to abandon the defence of the essential content of Palestinian national rights in exchange for some material and symbolic advantages; since the victory of Hamas in January 2006 and the Fatah-Hamas war in Gaza in the summer of 2007, Abbas has had no power and no control over the Gaza Strip, and cannot therefore claim to have the support of all Palestinians in the occupied territories.

A tendency to capitulate and weak legitimacy are in the eyes of Israel the main qualities of the President of the Palestinian Authority (a president whose term expired more than five years ago ...), to the extent that they allow the occupying power to maintain the illusion of a hypothetical "negotiated process", to which Abbas regularly gives some credence by taking part in negotiations under American patronage; the Israelis know perfectly well that Abbas is unable to impose on the Palestinians any "peace agreement" that would amount to a capitulation. Abbas is an essential piece in the process of transformation by Israel of a provisional situation into a permanent one: "Yes, we occupy, we colonize, we expel, we imprison, but

all that will not last, the proof is that we negotiate with the representatives of the Palestinians".

The reconciliation agreement, fragile as it was, partly changed the situation: Mahmud Abbas would indeed have been able to claim to have a new legitimacy, and what is essential, Hamas would have been symbolically associated with the negotiations and thus recognized as a potentially legitimate interlocutor on the international stage. An intolerable situation for Israel, which refuses that a Palestinian organization which has not refused to disarm and is strongly implanted in the society of Gaza and the West Bank should be able to acquire the status of a legitimate representative of the Palestinians in the eyes of the countries of the region, but also in Western countries. Hence the offensive this summer, one of whose major goals was to push Hamas to make mistakes and to once again cast discredit on the Islamic resistance movement by making it appear as a "terrorist organization."

Bringing out the contradictions of Hamas

The signature by Hamas of the reconciliation agreement last April should indeed be seen as a significant shift in the orientation and strategy of the movement. The terms of the agreement were in fact very unfavourable for it and the "government of national unity" that was set up a few weeks later looked like nothing so much as the government that had existed up till then in Ramallah: "The Cabinet of the agreement is thus the continuation of the unilateral and illegal practice that preceded it (the same Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Economy, Planning, Health, and Jerusalem Affairs); just as before the "reconciliation", the Cabinet, and especially the Prime Minister, are simply puppets of the presidency, devoid of any legislative investiture" [1].

This clear retreat by Hamas is understandable in the light of recent regional developments and of the realization by the Islamic resistance movement of its growing isolation and the risks that it incurs by its inability to improve even slightly the living con-

ditions of the inhabitants of Gaza. Whereas the year 2012 had been a real blessing for Hamas, the regional dynamics since the summer of 2013 have been very bad for it and have forced it to accept an agreement with Mahmud Abbas, under Egyptian patronage. Let us remember that in the context of the dynamics of the (badly named) "Arab Spring", Hamas had acquired an unprecedented status. The boycott of the movement, decreed by the vast majority of Arab states following the 2006 elections, had been seriously breached. In January 2012, Ismail Haniyyah, Prime Minister of the government of Gaza, was welcomed as a guest by the new Tunisian authorities; in July, he was officially received by the newly elected Egyptian President, Mohammed Morsi, a meeting unthinkable during the Mubarak era, which was accompanied by a considerable easing of the blockade on the Egyptian side; the high-profile visit of the Emir of Qatar to Gaza at the end of October was the final event that consecrated the new regional centrality of Hamas as a political actor.

But the evolution of the situation in Tunisia, the putsch against Mohammed Morsi in the summer of 2013, the massive repression against the Muslim Brotherhood that ensued, the deterioration of the situation in Syria, as well as the meanderings of Qatar, a political dwarf that dreamed of becoming a diplomatic giant, have significantly eroded this centrality, thereby revealing its precarious character. The strengthening of the blockade of Gaza resulting from the accession to power in Egypt of Marshal Sissi, the drying up of financial aid from Iran, which was not very satisfied with the anti-Assad positions adopted by Hamas, and the refusal of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah to pay the salaries of civil servants hired by Hamas in Gaza, put Hamas in a perilous situation: "The risk of a social explosion against [the authorities in Gaza] became a plausible hypothesis, since the blockade could not eternally exonerate it from any responsibility, in a situation where no major change in the diplomatic situation was to be expected in the short term." [2]

These are the reasons that led a severely weakened Hamas to accept a "reconciliation" that was not really one, to the extent that the agreement contained essentially technical provisions (merging of civil services, return of the Presidential Guard to Gaza, organization of general elections, etc.) but by no means a political programme.

This "reconciliation" was the result of two weakened actors and was contested on the Palestinian political scene. Let us not forget that in the last election held in the West Bank, namely the municipal elections in autumn 2012, the defeat of Mahmud Abbas was almost complete, despite the boycott of Hamas: low level of interest (few candidates, 80 towns with no list), low participation (only 50 per cent, as against 73 per cent in the previous election), and especially the defeat of the majority of Fatah candidates who were supported by the Abbas leadership (in general, they were beaten by Fatah dissidents, as in Nablus, Jenin and Ramallah).

The "reconciliation" is thus in reality tantamount to "a kind of cease-fire between two rival brothers [who have] decided to put off any definitive metamorphosis of the Palestinian situation, while at the same time knowing how to adapt to the changes in the regional and international situation" [3]. For Hamas, this involved in particular waiving (temporarily?) the exercise (and the wear and tear) of power in the structures of the Palestinian Authority, refocusing on its more traditional activities (network of associations, management of mosques) while breaking out of isolation and becoming once again an element of the Palestinian political scene that could not be ignored. This was a pragmatic attitude on the part of the Islamic resistance movement, which was able to draw the balance sheet of the experience of Mohammed Morsi and its own experience in power, and which put it in contradiction with its own rank and file, which was more convinced of the need to pursue the resistance against Israel than to (co)manage the apparatus of a puppet state.

This significant inflection was unacceptable to the State of Israel, which cannot tolerate a Hamas that is in the process of normalizing and is inclined to compromise, any more than is Palestinian "unity", as formal as it is, acceptable. The offensive this summer was essentially directed against Hamas, with the arrest of hundreds of activists and dozens of cadres in the West Bank and a large-scale offensive against the military apparatus of Hamas in Gaza, aimed at weakening the structures of the movement and pushing Hamas to return to the path that it had abandoned for nearly two years, that of armed resistance. The State of Israel could thus hope to kill two birds with one stone: temporarily put Hamas out of action and compel Abbas to abandon any agreement with an organization that was "hostile to peace": "The Israeli offensive is therefore absolutely not a response to some radicalization of the Palestinians or of Hamas. On the contrary, it is an offensive against the concessions made by Hamas and against the Palestinian reconciliation" [4].

Political and military defeat of Israel

The least that can be said is that Israel has not achieved its goals, or only very partially and in a collateral manner. Hamas does not come out weakened, but rather strengthened by this new offensive, during which it notably demonstrated unprecedented military capabilities. Despite the impressive Israeli deployment, including the recall of 60,000 reservists and the development of a firepower that Gaza had never experienced, including during the offensives of winter 2008-2009 and autumn 2012, Hamas (and the other Palestinian resistance organizations) to a large extent "held out". The firing of rockets, even though they caused Israel very few casualties, never ceased, and especially the Israeli ground invasion resulted in the deaths of more than 60 soldiers, incapable of neutralizing the armed groups and really controlling the neighbourhoods invaded. The "cease-fire" was therefore signed while Israel had absolutely failed to attain its military objectives.

What is more, despite the terrible human suffering and the material damage caused by the Israeli aggression, the inhabitants of Gaza did not, in their majority, abandon their support for the armed fighters, as was particularly evidenced by the strong attendance at the funeral of the three military commanders of Hamas assassinated in mid-August by Israel and the repeated appeals by personalities and organizations of civil society in Gaza supporting the right of Palestinians to resort to armed struggle. Another indication: contrary to what happened in the winter of 2008-2009, Mahmud Abbas and his supporters were unable to denounce Hamas or to blame it for the tragedy that Gaza experienced this summer. It was national unity that prevailed, and we could even see a certain number of Palestinian diplomats representing the authorities in Ramallah speaking on Western television channels to affirm their support for all Palestinian organizations, including Hamas, and for armed struggle.

Even though the Gazan population had many grievances against Hamas, it was able to put things into perspective: "There was an accumulation of grievances against Hamas, which is perfectly understandable. People attributed their misfortune and misery to the presence of Hamas, especially after the Egyptian turnaround. For Gazans, Egypt is fundamental. And to know that those who govern them are the new bogeymen of the regime in Cairo is not easy. However, Gazans see also that the Israeli offensive took place at a time when Hamas was beginning to take the turn that everyone wished for. That is to say, reconciliation and a change of course, on a more moderate line, to break out of the asphyxia that has been their lot for so long" [5]. A "moderation" which was also embodied even in the terms of the "cease-fire" finally obtained at the end of August.

No victory for the Palestinians

The Palestinian demands with regard to the cease-fire testify indeed to the absence of any "radicality" in the Palestinian camp. What were these demands? The lifting of the blockade, of course,

which particularly involves the opening of the borders with Israel and Egypt, the reconstruction of the port and airport (destroyed and closed since the end of 2000) in Gaza, the extension to 10 kilometres of the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza. As pointed out by the lawyer Francesca Albanese, who has worked for eight years for the UN, "none of these demands are new. The United Nations, among others, has regularly demanded the lifting of the siege, a siege that is illegal under international law, as a necessary condition for ending the disastrous humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Facilitating the movement of goods and people between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had already been stipulated in the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) signed between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 2005. Even the building of a port and the possibility of an airport in Gaza had been stipulated in the AMA, while their actual implementation never followed. The request to expand the permitted fishing zone is less than that envisaged in the Oslo Accords in 1994 and it was already part of the arrangement of the cease-fire in 2012 " [6].

There is nothing "maximalist" or "radical" in such demands, which simply reflect the minimum necessary for the subsistence of the people of Gaza, and which are recognized as legitimate by all international organizations. It is these demands that Israel refused to listen to, demonstrating once again that what the occupying power refuses, in the name of its alleged security, is not the satisfaction of Palestinian national rights (which are also enshrined in international law) but the establishment of the conditions for the satisfaction of their most elementary needs: travel, housing, healthcare, decent food, education. Hence the exasperation of the people of Gaza and the Palestinian resistance organizations, and the widespread feeling among the inhabitants of the enclave, despite the violence of the assault, as it was summed up by Raji Sourani of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR): "Better to die than to go back to the previous situation."

So there is no intransigence on the part of the Palestinians, but on the contrary a certain moderation, since no organization has asked for the satisfaction of all Palestinian national rights (the end of the civil and military occupation, self-determination and the right of return for refugees) in exchange for a cease-fire, but only basic rights and a little oxygen. The intransigence is to be found, once again, on the side of the State of Israel, which has demonstrated to anyone who wanted to forget it that it is pursuing, supposedly in the name of its "security", a meticulous enterprise of destruction of Palestinian society in order to prevent it from being able to demand its rights collectively. That was one of the unspoken objectives of the aggression against Gaza: to send this little coastal strip back to the Stone Age so that people's concerns are linked not to the struggle to end the occupation but to the struggle for survival and reconstruction.

It is therefore difficult, in such conditions, to talk about a real "victory" of the Palestinians, who have only obtained satisfaction on a part of their demands, which are however already moderate, with a partial easing of the blockade, an extension of the fishing zone and future discussions on the port and airport in Gaza. In short, no guarantee of a genuine lifting of the blockade and of a significant improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinians of Gaza. It is obviously not a question of being uncompromising and defending a strategy of "all or nothing", and we can only celebrate the fact that Gazans are no longer under bombardment. It must however be noted that the celebrations organized by Hamas following the signing of the truce and the fiery speeches of its leaders on "the immense victory of the Palestinian resistance" are very much at variance with reality, something which Gazans will not fail, and are already not failing, to observe.

Now what?

Developments following the Israeli attack this summer confirm that the fundamental dynamics have not changed: the announcement in early September of the seizure of 400 hectares of land in the West Bank by the Israeli authorities indicates that they

have in no way renounced the pursuit of the Zionist colonial enterprise, and even want to speed it up; the inability of Hamas and Mahmud Abbas to agree on the practical implementation of the "reconciliation" agreement confirms that it was very formal and precarious; the multiplication of (severely repressed) demonstrations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem suggests, in the wake of those that took place this summer, that the total stabilization of the system of occupation remains an elusive goal, despite the open collaboration of the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.

Whereas the US administration claimed less than a year ago, to be "restarting the negotiated process" for the signing of a comprehensive and lasting settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, the offensive against Gaza, the deadliest in recent decades, confirms that it is futile to try to "negotiate" with Israel, and that all those who accept the rules of the "peace process" are acting, consciously or unconsciously, against the national interests of the Palestinians, maintaining the illusion of a possible peace with the occupying power. The Palestinians do not need a pseudo-government of "national unity" and technical and specific agreements between the main Palestinian organizations, even though these agreements may be interpreted as positive by those who are fighting against the poison of division. The duties and powers of such a government are in fact those that the State of Israel is willing to accord it, and it is therefore futile to think that it could be a point of support for building a real relationship of forces against the colonial power.

What the recent sequence of events in Gaza and to a lesser extent in the West Bank has shown is that the Palestinians were never as strong and united as when they were fighting the occupation forces together. The only lasting "national unity" can be one built on a programme and a strategy of struggle and resistance, and not on the distribution of roles and positions within a pseudo-state apparatus, the Palestinian Authority, whose role is not to organize the Palestinian national struggle but to channel it

and, if necessary, to destroy it. The PA is in fact a structure that was designed during the Oslo Accords, in order to neutralize Palestinian resistance and the Palestinian population, and to give the illusion of autonomy and of legitimate interlocutors in order to "negotiate". It has since found its own *raison d'être* and there are many people, first of all in Fatah, then in Hamas after it took control of Gaza, who have chosen to sacrifice the interests of the Palestinians on the altar of the moral and material benefits that managing a pseudo-state apparatus brings.

Those who believed, like some people in Hamas, that they could transform the PA "from inside" now know what the situation is: the problem was not so much that of unscrupulous individuals, prone to collaboration, as of a pseudo-autonomy which is only the continuation of the occupation by other means. A certain number of lucid voices are today making themselves heard in Palestine, saying: what is on the agenda today is to rebuild the resistance (creation of unitary activist structures at the basic level, of a unified command of the struggle, of trade unions independent of the PA, of agricultural cooperatives, village committees ...) and not the sterile struggle for control of a pseudo-state apparatus ready to sign an agreement ratifying cantonisation and doomed to be a mere subcontractor, doing the dirty work for the Israeli army, or to be liquidated if you dare to demand rights for Palestinians.

The events of this summer indicate that the crises of the "peace process" and of the Palestinian national movement will continue, as the Oslo parenthesis (and the illusion of "autonomy" leading to a lasting negotiated peace) closes. Future crises and confrontations are to be expected, whose form and outcome are uncertain, all the more so in that they will be largely dependent on developments in the regional revolutionary process. Although the first condition for the building of a new relationship of forces against Israel is indeed a break with the logic of Oslo and the development of structures and strategies for the reconstruction of Palestinian nationalism, it would however be unwise to forget

that only a new regional relationship of forces, allowing the Palestinians to escape from their head-to-head confrontation with a State of Israel sup-

ported by all the Western countries can make it possible to imagine a brighter future.

HONG KONG

Massive rally "Citizens Stand Against Violence/Peaceful Resistance" called in Admiralty

BAI RUIXUE ·

Despite yesterday, however, protesters are still continuing to occupy the streets in Mong Kok and Causeway Bay. Furthermore tens of thousands were once again in Admiralty this evening, where a rally "Citizens Stand Against Violence/Peaceful Resistance" had been called. At the rally there were speeches from protesters who were attacked yesterday, as well as other students, lawyers, teachers, performers and Occupy Central leaders. Some performers also sang songs.

Meanwhile this evening the Hong Kong Students Federation have also issued another statement saying that it would meet to discuss with the government, provided the government meet two conditions: Firstly that the government promise to investigate the enforcement of the law over the last few days concerning the thugs (who attacked the protest), and secondly that they will only meet with the Chief Secretary Carrie Lam, and not Chief Executive CY Leung who has only continued to ignore public opinion and use the police to violently suppress the peaceful demonstrators.

I was only able to attend part of the rally, but below is a summary of some of what was said when we were there:

One lawyer, who was attacked yesterday in Mong Kok, said that when peaceful protesters are attacked by pepper spray or when a mob attacks protesters it is an insult to the rule of law. He also reported how a friend was pushed to the ground in a supermarket for wearing a yellow ribbon. He said that he has never seen anything like this before in Hong Kong and that he was previously proud of

Hong Kong for having the rule of law and giving high priority to civic values.

Another lawyer spoke of how on learning of yesterday's attack, lawyers lit 800 candles and held a vigil to symbolise how the light of democracy could not be blown away by any violence. He said that lawyers will continue to defend the students who are attacked and arrested and called on everyone to come out and defend the students.

Meanwhile a third lawyer appealed to the international media and described what we are seeing tonight as "the purest form of courage that you will ever see on this planet." He said that the presence of the media was extremely important in keeping the Chinese government from harming the students.

Academic Wong Wai-gwok read out a statement signed by a group of academics, condemning yesterday's attack. We want to tell the police that they shouldn't just fold their arms and we demand that the government respond to the citizens' aspirations for democracy. Only this can solve the crisis.

Chua Hoi-wai, the head of the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, said that he was moved by all the people who were there sharing their experiences. Yesterday when he watched TV he was distressed about what he saw happening in Mong Kok. He thinks that we should condemn the violence. However he then went on to appeal to the Hong Kong Federation of Students to review their decision not to talk to the government anymore. He said that leading a social movement is not easy as not everybody has the same idea, however he appealed to the protesters to follow the decisions and advice of Occupy Central, HKFS and Scholarism even if they decide it is time to call off the action.

A film director commented on how while there are lots of people in the performance arts who support the students but there are also those who are against their actions. He reported on how he had heard someone remark that it would be easy to get rid of the occupiers. All that would be required is to ask the communications companies to cut off their connections. He has also heard another actor express how he thought it would be good if the protesters were adversely affected by the weather, while another had complained about the occupation having a negative effect on the economy. He reported how he had felt very emotional when he heard this as they are his friends. However he then reported on a forth actress who had said that even if it seems useless to fight for democracy, we should still do this anyway.

A teacher, who said that she hasn't taught any classes recently as her students are boycotting classes, spoke about the two Hong Kongs that she has seen in the last few days; the beautiful Hong Kong, where everything is clean and tidy, there are poems written on protesters' banners, posters written in different languages, where educated people are sitting here and technically breaking the law by blocking the road, and the very ugly Hong Kong witnessed yesterday in the attacks.

One speaker spoke of how the road to democracy is very long and winding, but that the number of

those who are awakening are huge and growing. "Now with so many people coming out we fear no more. I think the awakened citizens, young and old, should hold our hands together and confront the government."

Another speaker, who said that he had been at Admiralty since the early morning after hearing that the protesters might be attacked again, made the comment that in 1989 Zhao Ziyang had come out to meet the students but how today none of the high officials have ever greeted the students.

Amongst several singers who had come to perform songs at the rally, one commented on how they wanted to pay tribute to the young people who are not afraid to sacrifice their future careers to fight for the people. Despite foreseeing bigger difficulties in the future they appealed for the protesters not to be afraid. "Now there is lots of discussion about whether we should retreat or not. But in the long run there are still many tasks for us to do together. The silent majority, including my family do not understand. I want to abandon all the language used by the mainstream media, academia and politicians and instead use human language. It is simple. The present package is evil. If we use simple language then everybody can understand more easily."

4 October 2014

HONG KONG

Chinese Government Sends in its Mafia

AU LOONG-YU ·

Looking at the current situation, the government hopes to shift Occupy Central with Love and Peace into a massive riot and make the Hong Kong public angry with the protesters.

At the same time, they also have agents in the crowd planning to create serious casualties, hoping that the public opinion will change and justify the government's action to disperse the public.

It is the Communist Party's classic tactic to use one group of people against another group. Before this, they kept assigning people like Robert Chow to start a battle to shift public opinion. Now they have mobilized the gangsters and started violent fights. This tactic will cause no end of trouble, but this also means C.Y. Leung has no other tactics to play with.

The most urgent thing to do now is to continue to adhere to our principles. Protect our bases. Be persistent. Win public support. Tell them how the government is lining up with the gangsters. All these actions will not only make C.Y. Leung's plan fail, but will also lead to backlash to his actions. The gangsters were paid to do their dirty work, but they cannot beat the persistence of hundreds of thousands of people. Stay until midnight so that we can start planning ahead and avoid another round of attacks.

We have been asked: Why are you so sure that they are from the mafia? Come and have a look and you will know. Here is the list of tactics they used to provoke people:

First, a gangster (possibly a woman) starts shouting to get attention.

Then another gangster, depending on the reaction at the scene, he may pretend to be an opponent or a supporter.

The public starts taking photos and among them there is always a video camera.

The gangsters continuously provoke the protesters and may last for up to two or three hours. The gangsters wait until the movement's marshals come and ask the public to calm down - then they start harassing the marshal.

The gangsters do their very best to provoke a conflict - including pushing fences, pulling tents, attacking protesters.

They do the same thing on the other side of the occupied zone - use the same tactic.

Photos can be found here.

Strong Condemnation of Violence towards the Occupy Movement;

Support of Hong Kong Citizens Fighting for Universal Suffrage

Left 21 - 4th October, 2014 – a Statement from the Movement

Boycotts of classes by university and secondary school students initiated by the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholars begun on September 22 in the fight for genuine universal suffrage escalated to the full-blown Occupy Movement on the evening of September 26. Attempts by the government and police to evict protestors with violence on September 28 just triggered another wave of ever-expanding autonomous occupation across the territory.

On the evening of October 2, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government eventually responded to the Occupy Movement and the open letter of Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) by sending the Chief Secretary of Administration Carrie Lam to meet with HKFS. It

is the first concession of the SAR government since the Occupy Movement started, and it is largely because of the anger of Hong Kong citizens against the earlier violent eviction by the police. In the meantime, Hong Kong citizens began occupying areas in the vicinity of Chief Executive Office, which is the political center of the SAR government. Authorities who wished to suppress the movement with violence have obviously been dragged into a prolonged battle by the people. Although we do not have high expectation on the negotiation with the government, such progress shows that our effort in the past 11 days have definitely not in vain.

Nevertheless, the SAR government is far from sincere to negotiate with the people. Today the peaceful Occupy Movement has been severely threatened by hooligans with destruction to the occupied areas and physical violence against participants, while the SAR government and the police turned a blind eye to the chaos. This is unacceptable and has to be strongly condemned. After the violent clashes in the occupied areas, HKFS has announced the suspension of talks with the government. Authorities managed to suppress the people with the legitimate power of the police and with huge amounts of money, but what we possess is merely flesh and solidarity. We need more people coming out to support the Occupy Movement, to urge the government to bring the suppression to an end, and to enforce universal suffrage.

We hereby urge the SAR and central government to:

1. Stop any kind of suppression to the Occupy Movement, which includes illegitimate force by the police and driving other social groups to disturb the occupying crowd with violence.
2. Hold Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying responsible for the violent eviction and force him to resign
3. Withdraw the National People's Congress (NPC) resolution on political reform
4. Implement genuine universal suffrage with civil nomination and abolish functional constituencies of the Legislative Council.
5. Repeal all political prosecutions

We also call upon our fellow Hong Kong citizens to:

1. Continue participating in the Occupy Movement and pressuring the government with civil disobedience in order to fight for genuine universal suffrage
2. Convince as many people in your community as possible to join the democratic movement, so as to strength public pressure for universal suffrage and the resignation of Leung Chun-ying.

Photos can be found [here](#).

3 October 2014

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USA

Beyond Obamacare

A. W. GAFFNEY ·

Yet however important such details, stories, and analyses may sometimes be, we lose sight of the larger meaning of the ACA if we narrow our vision to its technological travails or to the latest enumeration of the insured. For those of us who are seeking a more fundamental and egalitarian change within the U.S. health care system, it seems particularly important at the current juncture to instead take a step back and appreciate the larger political, historical, and health policy significance of the ACA, to appreciate how we've come to have it, what it achieves, and what it leaves entirely undone. Understanding where we are and where we came from is, however, only the beginning of the story.

Moving forward, a focus on alternatives to the ACA, and of ways to achieve them, must increasingly be at the forefront of our discussions. A crucial question in this regard relates to how the struggle for true universal health care could fit within—and potentially propel—a larger popular mobilization against inequality. But to ask these questions, we should begin by looking back, to understand the road already travelled, as we seek to break off on a new, and bolder, path.

The Politics of Passage

The ACA fell well short of what many of us had hoped for at the end of the hundred-year war for health care reform, which had begun with the Progressive-era campaign of the 1910s. It eliminates neither uninsurance nor underinsurance, as we shall soon examine in greater depth. It also leaves intact a grossly inefficient (if profitable) system of funding and organization.

But why did the ACA fail to achieve what most construe as "universal health care"? I would argue that there are two ways to interpret the outcome. The first is to emphasize the particular proximate political conditions at the time it was passed, namely the role of corporate interests, the machinations of partisan politics, and so forth. The second interpretation—and one that has received less attention—would be to understand the ACA in the context of the dynamics of a much larger and lengthier neoliberal turn within the United States—and, arguably, global—political economy of health care.

Now with respect to the first approach, it seems fair to conclude that disappointment could have been predicted before the health care reform brawl even broke out. The boundaries of health care reform had been largely drawn by the time that the 2008 election delivered the presidency and both houses of Congress to the Democratic Party (including, by July 2009, 60 votes in the Senate). As sociologist Paul Starr put it, Democrats had committed to only "minimally disruptive" reforms going into the election. [1] Obama's health care proposal during the primaries, for instance, was less expansive than that of Hillary Clinton, and in some respects narrower than the ACA itself.

But why? The role of the so-called "stake-holders" is one crucial factor here. In the years leading up to the election, a "rapprochement on health reform," as Starr calls it, had formed between mainstream liberal groups and key industries. The corporate interests within this rapprochement seem to have perceived that the status quo of rising costs and uninsurance was politically—and economically—unsustainable. In 2008 the Board of Directors of America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP)—the national lobbying group for the health insurance industry—released a statement that actually endorsed

"universal coverage," which it defined as a combination of "guarantee-issue coverage with no pre-existing condition exclusions with an enforceable individual mandate." [2] In other words, if the government required everyone to buy private insurance, the industry would be happy to provide it, and would even stop discriminating against the sick. The document additionally endorsed government subsidies for those making less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level to enable them to buy private health insurance. These proposals, ("guaranteed issue," an individual mandate, and subsidies for the purchase of private insurance) were core elements of the ACA, together with a limited employer mandate and a large expansion of Medicaid.

Other ideas that were not contained in the AHIP statement—for instance the proposal for a "robust" public option—had a less successful career. AHIP was, not surprisingly, rather lukewarm about the prospect of a competing public insurance plan, however "robust" or puny it might be. Though AHIP's president Karen Ignagni had earlier pledged support for Obama's health care reform, AHIP actually surreptitiously funneled some \$86.2 million to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for lobbying against the law in 2009 alone—just as debates about the "public option" got underway. [3] AHIP thereby succeeded in keeping its place at the bargaining table, while simultaneously working against the bill, which had the effect of making the final product more amenable to its interests.

The pharmaceutical industry similarly perceived it could both win and lose through health care reform. Most importantly, the industry needed to protect the great and treasured prize it had won in 2003, namely the clause in George W. Bush's Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) that explicitly prohibited Medicare from bargaining with insurance companies over drug prices. By some estimates, the elimination of that clause could have saved the public purse—and cost the industry—upwards of \$500 billion over a decade. [4] The other option would have been to re-import drugs—allow-

ing them to be purchased much more cheaply abroad where such negotiations do take place—which would be a more roundabout way to achieve a portion of these savings. However, after some tense negotiations between the drug industry lobby group (the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, known as PhRMA) and the administration, neither Medicare-drug negotiation nor re-importation was included in the ACA. [5] This was, one supposes, the "politics of the possible," though this merely speaks to the sadly impoverished range of possibilities in a political system permeated by corporate dollars.

Neoliberalism and the Political Economy of American Health Care

While these machinations (and many others) are important to appreciate, it's also worth evaluating the Affordable Care Act in the context of the much longer neoliberal turn in American health care policy and thought. Though this is a separate and much larger story than can be told here, we can capture a glimpse of this multi-decade transformation simply by looking at the shift of the health care political center. In 1969, Edward Kennedy proposed legislation that would have created a program of national health insurance, with no copays, means testing, or cost sharing of any type. Nixon's counterproposal in 1971, on the contrary, looked very much like the ACA, with an employer mandate and an expanded Medicaid-like program for the poor. Like the ACA, it also involved copayments and cost sharing, not just to save money, but as a "matter of principle." To paraphrase the historian Beatrix Hoffman, health care couldn't be made a right; it had to remain something you paid for. [6]

But as corporate and business interests began their powerful push for renewed preeminence in the late 1970s, the Democratic health care proposal—which in 1969 was basically a social-democratic universal system in line with those enacted by left and labor governments in Europe—quickly transmogrified into Nixon's plan. Jimmy Carter, though he argued in an interview in late March 2014 that "Medicare-

for-all" would have been preferable to the ACA, during his presidency actually made no substantial effort to pursue health care reform. Health care reform didn't return to the national agenda until the administration of Bill Clinton, who again didn't seriously consider a national health insurance system. Even his less ambitious plan for universal coverage via way of "managed competition" sunk. Mitt Romney's health care reform in Massachusetts, which drew heavily from Nixon's "mandate model" plan, was, conversely, successful.

However, evaluating the rise and fall of the health care reform agenda only tells part of the story. These same decades, as the work of Thomas Piketty has so clearly laid out, were also characterized by soaring inequalities in income and wealth; this was the result, in part, of amplified corporate dominance of the political system and the interrelated decline of the power of labor. It would almost be surprising if alongside these dynamics there had not been a corresponding shift within health care thought, policy, and organization that favored these ascendant interests. Such a shift is indeed visible, and the manifestations of it are multifold: the corporate takeover of the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) during the 1980s and 1990s; a move by health policy experts and economists away from support for universal national health insurance to an obsession with the "moral hazard" of free health care; the growth of for-profit health care companies (hospices, hospitals, dialysis-centers, nursing homes); and soaring profits for pharmaceutical companies, which was mediated by key legislative victories (for instance, the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 and the MMA of 2003). [7]

As the result of these changes, by the twenty-first century, the corporate health care sector had both unprecedented capital to spend and imperative interests to defend: there shouldn't be any surprise that lobbying money would flood—and not merely season—the health care reform debate of 2009. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, lobbying from the health industry reached an all-time high of \$554 million in 2009 alone.

Physicians' organizations—which once were the central lobby that could single-handedly make or break a health care reform initiative—were relegated to a bit part. Yet though it placated powerful interests, the ACA still contained some redistributionist elements, particularly with respect to the Medicaid expansion. In yet another sign of the shift of the political center, it thereby managed to deeply offend the Republican Party, even though (as Obama pointed out) its roots were to be found on their side of the aisle. To summarize, after all was said and done, a social-democratic alternative was barely considered, a Nixonian health care plan was barely passed, and more stayed the same than changed.

The ACA: Accomplishments and Shortfalls

Among those working towards more fundamental health care change (for instance, as I'll discuss below, a single-payer system), an assessment of the overall impact of the ACA is a frequent cause for disagreement. Is the law a (possibly wobbly) step in the right direction to be embraced and expanded, a harmful compromise to be denounced and discarded, or something in between? My own sense here is that global assessments are problematic and not that helpful: the massive law does many different things for many different people, and so is better dissected (and criticized) with respect to its specific effects and shortcomings rather than rejected or championed in toto.

For instance, whatever the failures of the law may be and whatever injustices will persist, moving individuals out of the vulnerable ranks of the uninsured is clearly a good thing, and no amount of political analysis should belittle the benefit to—and relief felt by—these individuals. The ACA reduces uninsurance mainly via two mechanisms. First, as mentioned, it expands Medicaid to everyone below 138 percent of the federal poverty level. Unfortunately, as a result of the June 2012 Supreme Court ruling that made state participation optional, only 26 states (and the District of Columbia) are participating in the expansion, ex-

cluding millions from the benefits of Medicaid. Second, the ACA requires the establishment of an insurance "exchange" where private insurance can be sold to those without Medicare, Medicaid, or employer-based insurance; those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level will receive government subsidies to purchase insurance on these exchanges. However, between these programs and the employer and individual mandate, the ACA will still leave an estimated 31 million uninsured (compared with an estimated 57 million without it). [8] In other words, triumphant proclamations notwithstanding, the ACA does not create universal health care in the United States.

Now if eliminating the problem of uninsurance was our only goal, it seems that the ACA would be at least be a clear step in the right direction. Unfortunately, however, there is another phenomenon that has been evolving for some time, that the ACA neither created nor fixed but to some extent codifies, and which confers a highly inequalitarian element to our health care system: underinsurance. Underinsurance is often defined as having insurance but still having substantial out-of-pocket costs for medical care (i.e. greater than 10 percent of family income after premiums); it's clearly a growing problem, and it is by no means eliminated by the ACA. [9] The plans on the exchanges, for instance, incorporate high levels of cost sharing, or copays, deductibles, and coinsurance. They are graded into four metallic tiers based on their actuarial value (i.e. the percent of your health care expenses that insurance covers), beginning at a paltry 60 percent for the "bronze plans." Putting aside the deeply inequalitarian concept of dividing a population into different grades of metal (the allusion to Plato's Republic has somehow not yet been made), such plans fulfill the long-held concern of health policy "experts" that patients need more "skin in the game" (i.e. cost exposure), such that they don't whimsically procure medically unnecessarily procedures and diagnostic studies. Families will be subject to as much as \$12,700 annually in additional out-of-pocket costs for health care (after premiums

are paid) to keep the dreaded "moral hazard" of "free care" at bay. [10]

Putting aside what happens to the level of strictly defined "underinsurance," I would argue that there is a larger problem on the rise, which one might call "malinsurance," namely insurance that compromises the physical and economic health of the bearer. Malinsurance encompasses an even broader scope of problematic insurance plans: insurance where the price of the premiums impinges on a reasonable standard of living; insurance with unequal and inferior coverage of services, drugs, or procedures; insurance with "cost sharing" that forces individuals to decide between health care and other necessities; insurance with inadequate and inequitable access to providers or facilities; and insurance that insufficiently protects against financial strain in the case of illness.

Today, many (if not most) of us could in some ways be considered underinsured, while most (or maybe all) of us might be considered malinsured. This will, unfortunately, remain the case in coming years, even with the full and unimpeded enforcement of the ACA.

But what are the alternatives, and are they viable?

Moving Forward: A Single-Payer Solution?

A "single-payer system" is probably the best-studied alternative for the United States. Conceptually, it is quite simple: national health insurance, with a single entity (the government) providing health insurance for the country. Its core principles (as generally agreed upon within the single-payer movement) can be briefly summarized. First, everyone in the country would be covered by national health insurance. Second, the system wouldn't impose "cost sharing," so health care would be free at the point of care, with underinsurance thereby eliminated (assuming an adequate level of funding). Third, it would drastically reduce spending on health care administration and bureaucracy through elimination of the fragmented multi-payer system, and also through the global budgeting of hospitals. It would

also contain costs through health care capital planning, and through other measures like direct negotiations with pharmaceutical companies over drug prices. Putting this together, a single-payer system would constitute a markedly egalitarian turn in American health care. Access to health care would be made not only universal but also equal, with free choice of provider and hospital to everyone in the country, provided as a right.

Now, in light of the formidable resistance that could be expected from a wide-spectrum of powerful and well-funded "stake-holders" (for instance, AHIP and PhRMA), the actual realization of such a system is, to put it mildly, daunting. We can predict that the impressive resources that have been deployed in opposition to the ACA might be multiplied many times to counter even the specter of true universal health care. However, while our political prospects must always be judged soberly, there are also reasons for guarded optimism. The confluence of several of the following dynamics (and many others) may, for instance, create a political opening for such a project in the coming years.

First, dissatisfaction with our health care system will almost certainly rise, which I think will occur as we become more and more a "copay country," with high-deductible, high-premium, and narrow-network health plans becoming the new normal. One could imagine considerable public outrage and mobilization against this new commodified status quo, just as there was against corporatized HMOs in the 1990s.

Second, though politics at the federal level may remain inhospitable to the cause for some time, single-payer campaigns at the state government level may provide an opening for the construction of more limited single-payer state systems, while also providing an opportunity for grassroots organizing and movement building that would, in turn, strengthen the larger national campaign. [11]

Third, support for a single-payer system among physicians (which already has majority support in some polls) might be translated into more vocal

outrage in coming years. In particular, as patients pay more and more out-of-pocket at the time of care, physicians will increasingly be forced into the role of "merchants of health," [12] basing medical decisions not only on clinical evidence, but on their patients' income and wealth. I believe—and deeply hope—that such class-based medicine will be rejected by the profession.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, a broader mobilization against the politics of inequality now seems to be in the making. As it is perceived that the excessive costs of American health care are actually contributing to the problem of inequality—for instance, insofar as high premiums indirectly reduce income or as cost sharing directly consumes a greater portion of already stagnant wages—one can imagine that the drive for a single-payer system might become closely linked with a much larger, and more powerful, political mobilization.

Of course, the precise road by which fundamental change in the health care system could be achieved remains obscure. Currently, the ACA remains at center stage, drowning out discussions of alternatives. With time, however, the changes instituted by the ACA will become subsumed within the fabric of the health care system: we'll no longer be debating the benefits or shortcomings of Obama's signature legislation; we'll be declaiming the persistent injustices of our overall health care system. However powerful the opposition, if allied with a larger popular movement against ever-rising inequality, true universal health care may yet have its day in the sun.

At the same time, I believe that the struggle for health care justice—the fight for universal and equal health care for all—could, in turn, powerfully inform, and bolster, this larger movement. In polls, universal health care (and single-payer) garners support from a surprisingly large proportion of the country, generally a majority. In addition, Medicare has long remained a highly popular program, even (to some extent) across class and political lines. Perhaps, one might conjecture, this is because the

need for health care speaks to our intuitive commonalities as human beings.

We may have soaring inequality and a political system more and more indebted to corporate spon-

sors. But I believe that we'll ultimately reject the notion of class-based health care. The ideal of universalism still has great potential power; in time, we'll learn to harness it.

UKRAINE

Resisting nationalist polarization and Russian invasion; building a democratic left party

JEAN BATOU AND NINA POTARSKAYA ·

Potarskaya outlines certain basic democratic principles of the new party: the need for a popular membership, transparent funding, and participatory internal democracy—all of which says a lot about their wish to break with Ukraine's traditional party politics. When I asked what the founders of the new party meant when they declared themselves a party of the left, Potarskaya replied that the party will challenge social, economic, and gender inequalities, and the members are now in the process of drawing up a program with specific demands along those lines. For reasons outlined in the interview, the party has not taken a position on the national question and the war.—Jean Batou.

Q. Could you explain the social and political dynamics of the Maidan process, which led to the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime in February 2014, and could you try to contrast it with the course of events in Eastern Ukraine?

Nina Potarskaya: First, I'd like to recall the nature of the social protests in Ukraine before and after Maidan. Opinion polls show that during the last four years, the principal reasons for people's discontent, whether in Western or in Eastern Ukraine, had to do with economical frustrations. Therefore, in the last period, the social and economic deterioration triggered growing popular protests. This anger exploded after the non-ratification of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, which led to the first Maidan demonstrations, towards the end of November 2013. And every two or three weeks that followed, the evolution of the political situa-

tion provoked an escalation, as a growing number of people were taking over the streets, especially after special police forces began to beat and even kill demonstrators.

The situation was different in the East, because Russian-speaking people, who are predominantly listening to Russian media, populate the Eastern part of Ukraine, and their information about Maidan had nothing to say about the actual reasons for these protests. They heard about an uprising led by neo-Nazis, which had to be stopped by all means. Of course, the far right played an important role at Maidan, but it was wrong to say that it was a right-wingers' movement. So the Russian media explained to the people of the East that there was a serious danger for them, and they were provoked to the streets, because they thought they had to act to stop fascists.

I was one of the founders and organizers of the women's squadron at Maidan—because the demonstrators were divided into different squadrons. This group consisted of twenty or so very active women with a much broader influence. One of the actions of this women's squadron was to send a delegation to Kharkov, because there was an anti-Maidan movement growing there, in order to meet with women at a square occupied by anti-Maidan demonstrators. The first reactions of those women were very negative, and we were even physically assaulted. But when we managed to start a dialogue, after 15 or 20 minutes, we found a common language because we realized that the social concerns of our movements were absolutely similar. It was the media that was misinterpreting the nature of our movement, manipulating the population, and

creating a serious split between the Eastern and the Western parts of the country.

Q. How can you measure the respective role of Russian troops and Eastern Ukrainian activists in the growth of the separatist movement, which led to the formation of two self-proclaimed "People's Republics" in Donetsk and Lugansk, in April-May 2014?

NP: As people in Donbas were starting to act against what they saw as a potential fascist threat, many Eastern Ukrainians came to believe that—just as the Russians had been able to take over Crimea without bloodshed—the same scenario would be repeated in the East. At the beginning, because many Eastern Ukrainians hated both Viktor Yanukovich and his rival Petro Poroshenko, the prospect of a separate state was certainly popular, even if it is very difficult to say to what extent. But, since the situation is changing very rapidly, the public opinion is very volatile. When the Ukrainian army retook control of Kramatorsk in the Northern part of Donetsk in May, we had the opportunity to talk to the people of this town, and they told us that they hated all military uniforms, whatever they may be.

Anyway, as they realized that their situation was not that of Crimea, Eastern Ukrainians were hearing a lot of rumors that the official use or teaching of the Russian language was going to be outlawed, and that they had to act themselves to defend their rights. At the end of April 2014, elements of the Russian military began to infiltrate Eastern Ukraine, disguised as members of civilian self-defense units, and took over government buildings, immediately supplanting local anti-Maidan activists, who were already occupying these buildings. Russians are easy to recognize because they speak with a distinct accent and use some distinct words and sentences. When they entered Slavyansk, urging people to leave the streets, they employed a typical Russian term, never used in Ukraine, in naming the signs that separate roads from pedestrian areas. But when anti-Maidan activists realized that they were not going to be allowed to occupy the buildings again, they took to the streets, using pro-

Russian rhetoric and pro-Russian flags, probably influenced by Russian agitators.

Even if such demonstrations have been limited in size, it doesn't mean that they were not supported by a large fraction of the population. People from Lugansk recently told us that taking to the streets was a very uncommon way to protest in Eastern Ukraine. Therefore, you cannot infer from their limited size, that these demonstrations were not supported by a large part of the population. In any case, there is no accurate way to measure the share of the people that supported the two self-proclaimed "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk (April-May 2014). Concerning violence against civilians, it's also difficult to determine the responsibilities of both camps, since each side, depending on its nationalist inclination, accuses the other one. There is no independent source of information, and according to local people, both sides have behaved badly.

Q. How does Ukrainian national feeling interact with the social demands of the people? Do workers stop mobilizing themselves in defense of their interests?

NP: The question is how to push the social issue ahead of the others. But of course, in a situation of war, people stop thinking too much about social issues. In August, everywhere, we observed growing patriotic mobilizations driven by increasing nationalist feelings. There are growing anti-Russian and anti-separatist actions in the West, but the social and political reasons for which people took to the streets last year—for example, to fight against corruption—are less and less at the forefront.

There are two types of trade unions in Ukraine. The Federation of Trade Unions is rooted in the old Soviet culture and simply supports what the government says; it has only played a very limited role, to say the least, in reforming the labor legislation of the country. But there are also independent unions, which have been formed during the perestroika; they are much more active, especially at the local level, and some of them are extremely powerful.

However, the leader of these independent unions is a very strong politician; he supports the Ukrainian government, even though he tries to avoid any kind of provocative speech. There are conflicting political positions among this confederation, but nothing like a neutral position against the war.

Q. What was the result of the recent Kiev conference? Is there a possibility to build a united democratic Left party in Ukraine today? What are the forces that could cooperate in this regard? What could the program be of such a party? What makes this a left party? Is not the national issue dividing its ranks?

NP: We now have the opportunity to bring together independent trades unions, NGOs, and progressive political forces, all together under the umbrella of a left democratic party. That was the purpose of our last meeting in Kiev. This conference decided to create an organizing committee, which started to work on a founding document. We wanted to do that in a transparent and democratic manner, but of course, a democratic process takes time. We discussed our common commitment to doing politics in a different way, which we can sum up in a few simple points. First, we want to exclude from our membership the people who earn more than a certain amount of money. Second, the party finances must be an "open book," where all transactions are publicly reported: everything that we receive or spend must be transparent to everybody. Third, the decisions should be taken by open forums, involving as many rank-and-file members as possible; it is not up to the leadership to take decisions, but we should develop internet processes allowing all the members of the party to be involved. In a way, we opted for a mixture of the organizational principles of the European pirate parties [supporting civil rights, freedom of information, and direct democracy] and the social-democratic parties.

We didn't separate the pro- from the anti-Maidan forces. There were very different positions represented, but we decided to focus only on fighting social, economic and gender inequalities. Our com-

mon reference to the left means that we put social and economic rights at the forefront. We didn't raise the national question. This was the first opportunity for us to speak to each other in recent years. So people were of course interested to deal with a lot of different things, but we didn't deal with the national question this time. We mainly addressed the organizational principles through which some kind of unity could be built. What we, as organizer of the conference, tried to do was to create an atmosphere in which a common declaration could be made on the topic of the war. But in order to keep the unity of the group, the language of such declaration had to be very diplomatic and soft, and finally there was no declaration, but only a draft....

Q. What are the procedural problems to be solved in building a new political party in Ukraine today?

NP: Building a new political party is a very difficult technical process, with a lot of practical obstacles: most of Ukraine's existing parties were created at least ten years ago, when the legislation was much more favorable, and now it is almost impossible to form a new one. A well-known lawyer from Kharkov, who had been a member of the socialist party, but was expelled from it, succeeded (along with some other Kharkov socialists) in building his own political organization. He is a well-off politician, but has no backing from any of the oligarchs. He succeeded in having this new organization registered, and in being elected to the Parliament, with some members of his party obtaining seats in municipal councils. But step-by-step, his organization declined and disappeared, leaving him with nothing more than a registration without members. So he is offering us his registered organization as a vehicle to build a new left party that could adopt a new name.

Q. You are a member of the Left Opposition. Can you tell us something more about your organization and the role it played in the preparation of the Kiev conferences?

NP: The Left opposition initiated these conferences. Our influence is, however, low, since our membership is in the range of a few dozens, with a more limited number of active people, not only in Kiev, but also in Cherkassy (in the center of the country). Of course, we mobilize a broader bunch of sympathizers, who take part in our actions, in our debates, and spread our publications. The left opposition is made up of two sets of people: the first, which created the organization, came from the Trotskyist tradition. The other part is not interested in choosing between the different Trotskyist affiliations; it considers itself as anti-capitalist, socialist, anti-Stalinist, and anti-authoritarian, that's all. For me and for many other people, it is enough; and for many young people or new activists who join us, what we are fighting for or against is much more important than our historical background. In some sense, we are twin brothers of the Russian socialist movement (RSM).

Q. Does everybody agree on the electoral perspective of this democratic Left party under construction?

NP: No, we are still debating this. Our possible involvement in the forthcoming elections was a kind of spontaneous decision, which was just taken because of the opportunity to do so. But some people wonder whether we should be part of a parliamentary group. So, we decided to participate in the electoral process without aiming at getting elected. Instead, we'd like to use this campaign as an instrument for mobilizing and organizing people around us. Of course, some friendly political websites criticize our decision to enter the electoral process.

Q. What social force can resist today's nationalist polarization? At the beginning, you mentioned women. Could the attempt of Maidan women to bridge the gap with anti-Maidan demonstrators in Kharkov have a possible follow-up?

NP: It is difficult for the left to build an anti-war initiative, because very different opinions coexist in our ranks. And each time you discuss the possibility of an independent campaign, you have to oppose two dominant options: following the Russian or the Ukrainian propaganda. The nationalist responses dominate public discussions. The building of an independent feminist voice is made difficult by the very limited resources of feminist organizations. Social and political demands cannot be heard without adopting a more general stance on human rights. It was already the same during the Maidan events, when the left-wing groups couldn't easily participate as such in the political discussions, and it was possible only for women to get into Maidan and start debating the issues of nationalism, sexism, and discrimination. Even if the far right is traditionalist, and think that women should stay in the kitchen and have no voice in a political process, it could not exclude us from the debate. During two weeks of truce, the so-called "two weeks of silence" in the Maidan process, when the fighting stopped, we were able to launch very important debates around social issues, and to attract the attention of the media. We became very well known—one hundred people participated in our meetings, our comments on Facebook were spread everywhere, and the far right had to take account of us.

New Politics

SPANISH STATE

Women have won!

JUSTA MONTERO ·

Gallardón never tired of repeating that the preliminary draft for "protection of the life of the conceived and the rights of pregnant woman", his project to further restrict women's abortion rights, was the most important project of his career. But he could not even imagine what this would come to mean, since the defeat of this project has ended his political career.

It was a career of thirty years in which he has held a huge number of political positions, one plagued by disasters from the astronomical debt that Madrid citizens will have to pay back as a result of his mismanagement, his repeated Olympic failures, the curtailing of civil liberties perpetrated by the gagging law [1] and the conversion of justice into a luxury for the majority of the population. And as the icing on the cake: his misogyny and contempt for women.

It was of course the government that, in December 2013, approved the draft bill that Gallardón was defending, in a process that had lasted almost three years since they announced their intentions. In this time many women experienced a situation of anguish and fear in the face of uncertainty of what might happen if they needed to have an abortion. Feminist outrage increased as Gallardón reinforced his proposals, with the aim of trying to establish in which cases of malformation of the foetus a woman would have the choice of asking for an abortion.

The total failure of this draft shows the extent to which the government and those who supported it, with the Catholic Church as the most important of these, are distanced from real society, the reality of women, their different life projects and the various forms in which motherhood and sexuality are expe-

rienced. We are not willing to give up the profound changes we have won.

That is the reason for their attempt to harken back to the situation of the past century. It was a losing battle for then, but their arrogance and deep patriarchal conservatism did not allow them to suspect that such an error would cost them dear, as shown by the decomposition that is today visible among their ranks.

And the government will pay much more dearly if they try to use women as a currency of exchange, either to pander to an ultra-reactionary sector in permanent crusade against the sexual and reproductive rights of women, or by using our bodies and rights to climb in the polls of voting intentions before the next elections.

The farewell ceremony for Gallardón has had as a counterpoint the celebration of thousands of women in all corners of the Spanish state. Because the withdrawal of the preliminary draft is a first victory of the feminist movement, proponent of a profound change in our society, a victory that is the result of the mobilization that has been maintained on a sustained basis, sometimes very visibly, other times not, sometimes in large demonstrations, other times in more symbolic actions like flash mobs, in protests and occupations in health centres, in churches, also in meetings in parliament, in hundreds of initiatives by the most varied feminist groups. This was a mobilization that had significant support from health professionals among others, and in the final analysis by a significant mobilization of citizens. And always with the goal of explaining and convincing the public that the call for "free abortion, women decide", requires sovereignty over our bodies, and that when we defend our right to decide, we affirm our status as legal sub-

jects, with feminist demands for social justice and real democracy.

On Sunday 28 September, the International Day for the Decriminalization of Abortion, there are demonstrations organized by the feminist movement in many cities. It will be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate. After Gallardon, the government has already rushed to advance new plans that must be stopped: new attacks on the decision-making ability of young women, and a plan for "protection of the family". The current law effectively needs to be changed, but in a way radically opposite to that proposed by the government, to ensure that abortion is not criminalized and is normalized as a provision in the public health network.

This coming Sunday, doubly festive, is also the occasion to call for sexual and reproductive rights, among others, the right of lesbians to access to assisted reproduction, for all immigrant women have their social security card, for sex education in all schools, for respect for the autonomy and sexual identity of all persons. History says we are right in our determination not to give in to anything or anyone in the defence of the right to make decisions about our life, and in demanding rights for all women.

Madrid 24 September 2014

Viento del Sur.

NIGERIA

A country on oil

THADEUS PATO ·

The juice of wealth....

Nigeria is a paradigm for a collective addiction – it is on oil like a junkie on the needle. More than 80% of the government budget and 88% of the export revenue come from oil production. The country is rich – and since 2014 the biggest economy of Africa - but this is not reaching the mass of the population. The official minimum monthly wage (which is sometimes undercut even by state institutions) is 18000 Naira, which means, about 90 Euro. This is not enough to survive, because especially in big cities like Lagos, with its 20 million inhabitants, life is not cheap.

According to the so-called "inequality adjusted Human Development Index", therefore, Nigeria is listed as No. 153, even behind such pauperized countries as Bangladesh or Senegal. The official unemployment rate is over 20%.

The wealth is reaching only a small minority. In the first place there are the few rich families, who helped themselves to the petrol trade when it was privatized. Then there are the politicians, closely connected to the former, who switch between the two big parties as required, and help themselves generously to the state budget – Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world (and has the highest salaries for members of parliament anywhere: a senator earns about one million US dollars a year). And of course there are the international oil companies, which control oil production, who also profit hugely from the black gold, which will flow for at least the next 50 years.

...of movement.....

These companies' handsome earnings are not only down to their oil production. Nigeria still has only four oil refineries, of which two are not working properly most of the time. Therefore most of the petrol, diesel and kerosene, which is needed for the almost completely automobile-based transport infrastructure, has to be imported at world market prices – by the way, an interesting version of unequal exchange. The international, but also the Nigerian, oil companies again make money on this operation, while the government has to use part of its oil revenue to subsidize the petrol prices to a level that is more or less affordable for the people.

And petrol is not only needed for transportation. Hardly anywhere is the electricity supply permanent. In many regions, including the big cities, it lasts for only a few hours per day, and so everybody who can afford to, is running a more or less big kerosene- or diesel generator. If you pass Waterside Market, for instance, in Apapa/Lagos, you will see in front of almost every tiny shop a humming (and smelling) generator, producing power for light and ventilation in the windowless shops.

But the biggest part of the petrol is needed for the legions of trucks and petrol-tankers, and for the clapped-out collective taxis. Nigeria in fact is the biggest mobile car mortuary for German cars. All those cars which are no longer allowed on the streets in Germany (and other industrialized countries), you can easily find here. According to the German executive director of Con Truck Logistic lim., a shipping company for individual and commercial vehicles to West Africa, Nigeria is the biggest market for commercial vehicles in this region, with an increasing rate. According to him, in the

first place there is a demand for technically simple – that means: old – vehicles, the mileage is not important, but they have to be cheap. In fact, the Nigerian government introduced a law stating that vehicles over 15 years old may not be imported, but with no visible effect – bypassing laws in Nigeria is simply a question of the size of the bribe. Additionally, the transport industry plays a big part in the business interests of ex-high ranking state officials and army officers, who invest their property in it and who have excellent connections.

...of death....

That pipeline explosion in June only made it as far as the regional press. Such events are a regular occurrence, and this time the damage was of limited extent – there were between 8 and 20 casualties; with different reports putting the number at anything between zero (the police report) and 20 (the local neighbourhood's account). The biggest pipeline disaster took place in 1998 in the Niger Delta, causing 1200 deaths. In Lagos, similar ones happened in 2000, 2004 and 2006. In 2006 there were two, though in the bigger one 500 people lost their lives. Exact information is usually not available, because the owners and the authorities usually manipulate the figures. These accidents usually are caused by petrol-thieves tapping into the pipelines at night by drilling holes. Then a spark is enough to cause an explosion and a fire. Because the inhabitants of the surrounding areas immediately flock to the spot to get their share of the unexpected booty, and additionally the pipelines are deviating through populated areas, partly overground, partly underground, the consequences in most cases are disastrous.

Lagos is suffering from a chronic traffic jam. Among the main causes are the thousands of tankers and other trucks carrying goods and petrol from the harbour. More than 60% of Nigeria's imports are brought by ship through Lagos; because the only existing railway line to the harbour is out of commission, all this transport happens by road. The monstrous trucks, mostly antique Mack, MAN or Mercedes in disastrous technical conditions, of-

ten try to bypass the frequent holdups through small back roads. This sometimes fails: in January a kerosene-truck collapsed in the dense populated district of Ajegunle and the explosion and the following fire destroyed completely dozens of small shops and a bank building. Officially there were 8 deaths, but this information was most probably sugar-coated as well.

In the harbour area the soil is literally impregnated with oil and petrol; to get clean water, you have to drill a well sometimes more than one hundred metres deep.

In the (former) oilfields in the Niger Delta the situation is even worse. Shell has stopped oil production there long ago due to the resistance of the local population and is now drilling exclusively offshore. But the struggle over the clear up is continuing. Vast areas of the Delta are completely destroyed and biologically dead. Oil is constantly leaking from the former installations and out of the disintegrating pipelines. Yet even here, the impoverished local population, deprived of their former natural livelihoods, is trying to make the best of the situation: they drill into the old tubes and pipelines and run illegal small "refineries"; the oil is heated in the open air over fire and in this way roughly separated into kerosene, petrol and diesel. Then it is sold in barrels. The police look the other way in exchange for a share of the barrel-price. Overall, the oil-and-petrol-theft has reached such a dimension that the government has installed a special task force. The officials estimate the loss through oil theft and leakages in the whole country at 300,000 barrels – that is every day!

But even that has to be put in context. Shell claims that the losses and the pollution are almost exclusively caused by the oil thieves, who allegedly leave holes in the pipelines. But the fact is, many of the installations are simply shabby, and pipeline bursts happen frequently. In one case it was proved that Shell had tried to label a technical failure as "vandalism".

Additionally, most of the gas which accumulates during oil production is burned off on the spot, be-

cause there is no equipment for liquefying – with the respective consequences for the environment and the local population: life expectancy in the Niger Delta is by far the lowest.

....and no improvement in sight

Since the small Nigerian upper class, created during British colonial rule and now dominating the economic and political scene, is living excellently, thank you, on this extractivist and non sustainable system, a real change is not in sight. Instead of turning away from oil-dependency, huge investments are being made in oil-based power plants and a "gas city" in Yenagoa. Instead of a conversion of the transport infrastructure to mass transit sys-

tems, most investment is going into building highways. And the agricultural sector, which in former times guaranteed the country's self-sufficiency, is increasingly dominated by plantation agriculture and sold out to international land ventures. More than 60% of Nigeria's food now has to be imported from abroad.

Unless there is a radical change, one day, when the oil runs dry, what will be left is a country in which the conditions of subsistence are gone, vast regions of the formerly fruitful South are destroyed and, because of the consequences of the increasing migration to the big cities (also a consequence of the oil boom), social relationships have completely disintegrated.

SYRIA

An analysis of the International coalition intervention led by the USA

Several levels of analysis are needed to understand the dynamics of this intervention.

USA led coalition targets Daech, but others as well, including civilians

The initial declared objective of the USA led coalition was to target Daech military facilities and training camps, but more particularly its oil facilities to try to stem a source of revenues for the group.

Before the military operation initiated by the United States, IS earned about 3 million dollars (2.4 million euros) in revenue per day through oil. But since the strikes began, pumping in the fields under their control virtually ceased. The USA led coalition targeted various Daech positions.

For example on September 25, the USA led coalition targeted 12 Daech controlled modular oil refineries in eastern Syria.

On September 29, the coalition bombed the city of Tal Abyad, occupied by Daech, in A-Raqqa province and struck Tabqa airport eight times, a former regime base which Daech fighters captured in August.

The USA led coalition has nevertheless targeted since the beginning of its operation not only Daech, but also Jabhat al Nusra (official al Qaida branch in Syria), the affiliated Khorasan Group in Idlib and Aleppo provinces and the salafist group Ahrar al-Sham in Aleppo, as well as civilians and civil infrastructures.

The U.S.-led air campaign has killed at least 233 persons, including 211 jihadists and 22 civilians, ac-

cording to the Observatory in the first week of the bombing.

On September 29, coalition warplanes reportedly hit the city of Manbij, occupied by Daech, in the northeast of the city of Aleppo and one of the strikes may have mistaken the mills and grain storage areas for an IS base, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The strikes in Manbij appeared to have killed only civilians, the workers at the silos. The destruction of city's grain silos will provoke most probably a humanitarian disaster, according to the pro-opposition Aleppo Media Center.

According to local activists in Hasakah, the international coalition targeted the IS-held Ash-Shaddadi and the towns of Margada and al-Hol as well as the surrounding villages in the countryside of Hasakah on September 28, provoking mass displacement among civilians following the unexpected strikes. The coalition's air strikes also targeted the village of al-Fadgami (near the town of Margada), killing six civilians and injuring others though no IS members were present. [1]

On September 28, coalition warplanes struck the Daech-controlled Conoco gas plant in the city of Deir Zor, which is according to an activist, critically important, as it feeds several electricity generation stations in the country that produce electricity for approximately a quarter of Syria [2]. A raid also hit Kuniko gas plant, which feeds a power station in Homs that provides several provinces with electricity and powers oil fields generators.

On September 23 in the village of Kafr Deryan in northern Idlib, missiles (Tomahawk cruise missiles, which are in the US arsenal.) from the coalition killed at least two men, two women, and five chil-

dren. There is unverified information that the two men could have been members of Jabhat al-Nusra.

Once again civilians and civil infrastructure are the targets of a USA led intervention.

The issue of Kobani and the threat of Daech

The USA led coalition has awaited September 30 to strike some Daech armed forces close to Kobani/Ain al-Arab, which is nevertheless still under the threat of the jihadist force. On September 29, Daech was actually within 5 km (3 miles) from the Kurdish town of Kobani / Ain al-Arab near the Syrian-Turkey border.

This is the closest Daech militants have come to the city since Daech started their offensive two weeks ago. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the jihadists were firing rockets that hit the town center.

Despite airstrikes by a US-led international coalition to stop Daech, the militants have made advances and captured 67 villages surrounding the area near Kobani / Ain al-Arab. This has resulted in at least 160,000 people fleeing across the border into Turkey,

Meanwhile, Turkish security forces clashed with displaced Kurds protesting along the border Sunday and Monday, deploying water cannons and tear gas. Turkish authorities have also been intermittently preventing people from returning to Syria, worried about members of its own Kurdish guerrilla group, the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, trying to join the YPG in the fight against Daech.

By attacking Kobane / Ain al-Arab, Daech is attempting to consolidate control over its territory between strongholds in Aleppo's al-Bab city and A-Raqqa city. Daech began fighting joint PYD and FSA forces in the Kurdish-majority area of Kobane / Ain al-Arab in July. It escalated its campaign mid September by employing tanks, heavy artillery and surface-to-surface missiles, publishing photos of

the heavy machinery in action on Daech-affiliated media websites.

It is most probably in this framework of catastrophic situation and no alternative was provided to save these people leaving their homes to escape Daech that the Kurdish PYD leader Salih Moslem has declared its support to the US coalition's bombings. He stated that the US attacks were a positive step for the fight against Daech [3].

The bombings will benefit the counter revolutionary forces

These bombing are an attempt by Western imperialist forces and regional regimes led by Saudi Arabia to reimpose their hegemony over the region.

The only political groups that will benefit from these bombings are the two sides of the counter revolutions: the Assad regimes on one side and the reactionary Islamic and Jihadist political forces.

The Assad regime will most probably benefit on the short term from these bombings militarily with the weakening of strong military actors, Assad forces have actually continued its attacks on various areas of the country, but moreover the regime sees a chance to regain "legitimacy" with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism.

The bombing might probably weaken on the short term military Daech, Jabhat al Nusra and other reactionary forces, but will also most likely to prove counterproductive for the Syrian revolutionaries upholding the objectives of the revolution by increasing the popular support for IS, Jabhat al Nusra and other reactionary forces, driving even more recruits to their ranks. These forces are already painting themselves as the only serious anti-imperialist movement, rather than the reactionary and sectarian outfit they have.

On September 26, more than 200 fighters had actually joined Islamic State in Syria's northern Aleppo province since U.S. President Barack Obama said the United States would strike the jihadist organization. Rami Abdelrahman, who runs

the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said that the pace of recruitment in September was higher than average but below the surge in July, after Daech declared a caliphate in the territory it controlled in Syria and Iraq and called on Muslims to join a holy war. Most of the new men came from al Qaeda's Syrian wing, the Nusra Front, and were mostly Syrian. [4].

This had of course consequence on Jabhat al Nusra as well, which has not stopped to radicalize even more its discourse to prevent the departure of its members, especially foreigners, to Daech. Following the bombing of their positions in Idlib, some members have claimed their will and readiness to fight with Daech [5].

This summer for example, before the strikes, Al Jolani declared that "We took up arms to uphold the word of Allah and its arbitration, and deter aggressors, as stipulated by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah", and in another recording he said "Either Sharia arbitration or fighting for the sake of Allah". It is at this period as well that Jabhat al Nusra withdrew from the legitimate bodies of Damascus and Aleppo, working individually to expand its influence, and also launched campaign in Idlib's countryside to "deter corruptors", mainly targeting pro revolution activists.

On September 27, following the strikes targeting them, the leader of Jabhat a-Nusra actually threatened to target the West.

"The battle against our countries will come to you," said Nusra chief Abu Mohammed al-Jolani. "You won't be safe in your own countries unless you resist the decision of your leaders" to bomb Syria." Jolani's threats come a day after Nusra said that nations participating in the alliance have become legitimate targets for mujahideen "all over the world," describing international airstrikes as an "ugly crime against Syrians" and a "war against Islam" in a statement released by official spokesman Abu Firas a-Suri.

These bombings have definitely strengthened relatively the support of Jabhat al Nusra and other

Islamic political forces on the ground as we can see in several demonstrations such as in Aleppo [6] Idlib [7] and Homs, demonstrators chant "We are all Nusra" or "Jabhat al-Nusra came to support us when the world abandoned us" [8].

This increase in popularity will most probably be temporary, but will definitely strengthen these organizations.

The opposition to the strikes in Syria by the coalition and against Daech, Jabhat al Nusra and other Islamic reactionary organizations in no way should make us forget that increasing and multiple popular protests occurred against these counter revolutionary forces because of their authoritarianism and reactionary practices.

The Syrian regime approves the bombing

The Syrian regime has welcomed the strikes from the USA led coalition. In a statement from the official news agency SANA, Bashar Al Assad, although without specifically mentioning the bombing, said he supported "all international counterterrorism effort".

In addition, Ali Haidar, Syrian minister for national reconciliation said that "As for the raids in Syria, I say that what has happened so far is proceeding in the right direction in terms of informing the Syrian government and by not targeting Syrian military installations and not targeting civilians" [9].

The pro-regime news network Damascus Now hailed the strikes since the beginning as a historic moment, in which "happiness was etched on the faces of the majority of Syrians, because they found international support towards eradicating a cancer which has been rooted in the diseased Syrian body," referring to the revolutionaries.

On September 29, Syria's foreign minister said that his government is satisfied with the U.S.-led bombing campaign against the Islamic State group, adding that the airstrikes should be expanded to include all other militant groups in Syria. In an interview with The Associated Press, Walid al-Moallem

said the fight against terrorism has aligned Damascus with Western and Arab opponents in fighting the same enemy. Al-Moallem said the U.S. does not inform Syria of every strike before it happens, "but it's OK."

As a reminder the Assad regime only started to target Daech forces mid of August while before it led it spread to various areas while targeting democrats and the FSA battalions mainly. Before this date, quasi no military conflicts occurred between Daech and Assad forces.

Opposition of the Syrian opposition forces to the bombings

These bombings have resulted in wide range of opposition from groups on the ground and the popular movement, while also mounting strong suspicions to the objectives of the USA led coalition. The Syrian National Council and of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces have supported and welcomed the USA led coalition bombings.

Colonel Riad al-Asaad, Founder of the FSA opposed USA planned airstrikes before the beginning of the operations and declared that it will eliminate Syrians' revolution as it will strengthen Bashar al-Assad and his key ally, Iran. Al-Asaad called on moderate rebels to mass efforts for more unity to revive the Syrian revolution after saying that this latter was being kidnapped by radical Islamist groups and West-backed agendas [10].

Before this call, 10 armed groups in Eastern Ghouta suburbs near Damascus announced in video statement the establishment of the 'Nation Army' as a new armed faction seeking to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime as well as to protect civilians and cooperating with other armed opposition groups [11].

Harakat Hazm, a FSA battalion composed of few thousands men and that operated mostly in Hama condemned the US led coalition bombing on September 23. They denounced the strikes as "an attack on national sovereignty" and work to "un-

dermine the Syrian revolution". They added that foreign intervention "will harm the revolution, especially seeing as the international community continues to ignore revolutionary forces' calls for weapons," the group said, adding that "the only side to benefit... is the Assad regime, without any real strategy to bring about its downfall." [12].

Regarding armed groups, Abu Ammar al-Halabi, former leader of the Islamic Front in Aleppo, expressed his condemnation of the coalition's strikes because they do not target the regime "which used chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta -southern Syria- in 2013, killing 1400 people in one day".

A number of other groups have raised their opposition to USA led coalition strikes, such as the Jaish al-Mujadeen [13], Abu Ratib, head of the Al-Haq Brigade, part of the Islamic Front, characterized the intervention "a total war against Muslims" [14]; Suqour al-Sham, the main Islamic Front unit in Idlib, condemned the airstrikes and said they "will breed more extremism and terrorism" [15]; the Army of Islam, the IF unit in Damascus, also condemned the strikes; the FSA Forqat 13 issued a statement condemning US-led airstrikes as "aimed at weakening the revolution" in Syria [16].

A number of popular organizations and opposition armed groups have also opposed the international coalition bombings.

The LCC declared that "an end to the Islamic State needs to happen concurrently with an end to the equal terrorist threat represented by Bashar al-Assad's regime," and note that they "are herewith confirming their previous stances considering Assad's regime the foremost enemy of the Syrian people and assuring that extremism and terrorism were the products of the regime's crimes." See full statement

Several popular committees and organizations operating in Damascus and its countryside issued a statement rejecting the military operations of the international coalition led by USA and supported by some Arab regimes, which bombed several sites in Syria targeting civilians under the pretext of tar-

getting the organization of the Islamic State. They reject the strikes against jihadist groups that stood on the side of the Syrian revolution and the defense of civilians, while accusing these bombings of serving only the interests of the Assad regime, and not the interests of the Syrian people and the revolution. On September 27, a demonstration in Qaboun neighborhood of Damascus was organized to refuse the international military operations against Syria, and rejecting any kind of foreign intervention [17]

The Local Coordination committee of al-Hara City, in Daraa province, wrote on its facebook to condemn the bombings the following thing: "Screw you [lit. screw your moustache] and screw every Arab leader who participated in the oppression of the Syrian people and declared them fair game... Really, Arabs no longer have any shame."

At the same time, LCC in Salqin, Idlib, wrote on its facebook page that "The international coalition will pursue the destruction of infrastructure—roads, bridges, electricity stations, different economic institutions—and the goal is to destroy the life and resilience of our people."

We can also see in both videos (the first taken in liberated areas of Aleppo () and the second among Syrian refugees in Turkey [18]) that people oppose the bombings against other targets that Daech, no illusions exist in the USA led coalition and these bombings are not in the interests of the Syrian revolution but of the countries of the region and of the Assad regime.

The Violations Documentation Center has also opposed these strikes arguing that: "The present air strikes against those groups raise concerns that civilians may also pay a heavy price, as such groups establish command centers in civilian areas, in various Syrian towns and villages. Furthermore, a number of the command centers have been converted by those groups to become detention centers. Thousands of inmates and persons who have been kidnapped, including many activists and journalists are now detained in such centers. Those groups also control installations containing danger-

ous materials, including the Conoco gas plant, in the Khasham village near Dei Ezzor. This plant contains one of the largest ISIS centers. If its gas stocks are hit, this may cause enormous destruction as well as an environmental hazard of incalculable proportions."

We have also seen banners condemning the bombings or the hypocrisy of the regime such as "the planes coalitions showed the lie of the conspiracies ya "moumani3" (people who supports the regime on a so called "Resistant" and "anti imperialist" basis")

The Revolutionary Left Movement have opposed these bombing since the first day [19].

The National Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change in Syria also rejects USA intervention in Syria, even with the Syrian government's approval.

In the same time, some Syrian revolutionaries in the city of Dazl have condemned the fact that UN security Council have adopted a binding resolution to stem the flow of foreign jihadists in Syria and Iraq, and oppose the threat they pose to their country of origin, while not a single word was said of foreign fighters on the said of the Assad regime, particularly of Hezbollah and Iraqis sectarian militias, Pasdaran.

FSA and Kurdish coordinations and collaborations

The YPG (People's Protection Units), arm branch of the PYD, recently sealed an anti-IS alliance with various groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), founding what they call the Joint Action Center. Its purported goal is to liberate all territories held by IS in Syria. The announcement was made in a joint statement in the Kurdish city of Sari Kani in northern Syria.

In the statement both groups call on the international community to assist them militarily so they can eradicate the extremist group.

Conclusion

The objectives of the USA led coalition are not to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or to protect them from Daech or the regime. The objective is to reimpose their hegemony over the region and guarantee a form of stability, especially to the reactionary regimes of the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, by putting an end to the revolutionary processes.

These strikes are also in the framework of reaching a Yemeni solution, as it has since the beginning, in other words reaching an agreement between the Assad regime (or section of it) and the opposition linked to Western and Gulf regimes. The approval of the US Congress of the \$500 million to support President Barack Obama's plan to arm and equip five to 10,000 Syrian rebels, which Washington describes as "moderate" in their fight against the Islamic State and Syrian regime forces, goes in the same direction as we can see in the text of the resolution:

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

- (1)Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.
- (2)Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.
- (3)Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria."

The will of the USA to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests is nevertheless thwarted by the reality on the ground and the will of the opposition armed groups in their vast majority to collaborate only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Colonel Riad al-Asaad,

the leader of the Free Syrian Army, for example said it would not join the alliance against the Islamic State unless it receives assurances on toppling the Syrian regime. He added that "If they want to see the Free Syrian Army on their side, they should give assurances on toppling the Assad regime and on a plan including revolutionary principles." Other armed groups present in the Supreme Military Council of Syria, close to the USA, also expressed their resentment to the USA and other Western forces for their lack of support. In addition, they said that coalition airstrikes against ISIS targets were not enough. The strikes must also hit al-Assad's forces, they said. One of the commander said that "we need to deal with this problem at its root cause: Assad, the gangs that support him and Daech. Those are the three problems every Syrian deals with." Many armed groups were also critical of the way the strikes were being carried out and as we have seen many inside the country on the side of the revolution reject these bombings.

The Jihadist and Islamic reactionary forces are used by the Western imperialist and regional forces as the entry point for this new military intervention, but also because these they have gone too far in their process of expansion for Western and regional imperialist forces by ignoring State borders and creating unwilling instability for these powers. We should remember that Daech that was established in 2006 was of no interest to these powers when they were confined to specific geographic locations in Iraq first and later Syria and was even financially supported by some Gulf private networks in the beginning.

Although Daech and other sister organizations are a factor of instability for the global imperialist system, we should be clear they are in no ways actors for the emancipation and liberation of the people of the region, they are very much the opposite.

The revolutionary processes are in a difficult period with the domination of two counter revolutionary forces, represented first by the old regimes supported by Saudi Arabia such as in the case of Sissi's

Egypt, and Islamic reactionary forces, its best representative being the Muslim Brotherhood, supported by Qatar. We can nevertheless see once more that the rivalries between the various imperialist and sub imperialist forces can be overcome when they have shared and common interests, as it the case with the current bombings in Syria and Iraq by the USA led coalition and welcomed or at least tacitly by Russia and Iran.

A third progressive and democratic front gathering the objectives of the revolutions (democracy, social justice and equality) and able to oppose all foreign imperialist and sub imperialist forces have not been able yet to constitute itself as a credible alternative political force until now for the masses on the regional basis. All efforts should be put forward to build this third democratic and progressive alternative.

We are living a revolutionary crisis on many aspects as described by Gramsci: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear". Daech symbolized on many aspects "this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear", while old regimes are far from dead.

In the same time, the bombings from the USA led coalitions have killed more civilians and destroyed most needed civilian infrastructure.

These are the reasons why we should oppose these bombings.

In addition, to believe that Daech, Jabhat al Nusra and other similar organizations can be defeated with the same tools that created them is completely insane. These reactionary forces are indeed the consequences of the criminal authoritarian regimes (for example Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) and foreign international (mainly Western countries led by the USA at its head) and regional (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran) interventions. This new military intervention has indeed no objective of overthrowing the Assad regime.

As a banner held by a Syrian protester in Aleppo last week said: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, Albert Einstein" and below "Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014.

Only the popular mass movement is capable of confronting these reactionary forces and the authoritarian regimes.

We must support and express solidarity with all the democratic and progressive forces in Syria and Iraq as well as the Kurdish democratic forces that resist against the two actors of the counter revolution: the Assad regimes on one side and the jihadist and Islamic reactionary forces on the other side.

In this perspective it is necessary to defend a local dynamic of self-defense rather than increasing stranglehold of imperialism and therefore we should also support the provision of weapons and arms to these democratic forces in the region to combat both counter revolutionary forces. These are important element that could empower the democratic forces on the ground and give them the tools to defend them.

For the people who feel not at ease with the fact of demanding arms and weapons with no political conditions attached from the West, I would like to invite them to read the text of Trotsky "Learn to Think" and cite this passage:

"Let us imagine that in the next European war the Belgian proletariat conquers power sooner than the proletariat of France. Undoubtedly Hitler will try to crush the proletarian Belgium. In order to cover up its own flank, the French bourgeois government might find itself compelled to help the Belgian workers' government with arms. The Belgian Soviets of course reach for these arms with both hands. But actuated by the principle of defeatism, perhaps the French workers ought to block their bourgeoisie from shipping arms to proletarian Belgium? Only direct traitors or out-and-out idiots can reason thus.

The French bourgeoisie could send arms to proletarian Belgium only out of fear of the greatest military danger and only in expectation of later crushing the proletarian revolution with their own weapons. To the French workers, on the contrary, proletarian Belgium is the greatest support in the struggle against their own bourgeoisie. The outcome of the struggle would be decided, in the final analysis, by the relationship of forces, into which correct policies enter as a very important factor. The revolutionary party's first task is to utilize the contradiction between two imperialist countries, France and Germany, in order to save proletarian Belgium.

Ultra-left scholastics think not in concrete terms but in empty abstractions. They have transformed the idea of defeatism into such a vacuum. They can see vividly neither the process of war nor the process of revolution. They seek a hermetically sealed formula, which excludes fresh air. But a formula of this kind can offer no orientation for the proletarian vanguard."

This does not mean of course that we are uncritical of the leadership of the PKK and FSA democratic sections, which do not have a socialist leadership, but neither were the Palestinian Liberation Organization or the National Liberation Front in Algeria and this did not stop revolutionary to support them. We have to understand that the various International (USA and Russia) and regional (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) imperialist powers have been trying to smash these revolutionary processes and these groups as well because they challenge the global capitalist and imperialist system by their struggle against authoritarian regimes and reactionary groups, which were part of this system.

As a fundamental principle of revolutionaries, we first need to support these forms of liberation and emancipation struggle unconditionally, before we are entitled to criticize the way they are led.

September 30

Syria Freedom Forever

SCOTLAND

Independence loss contains seeds of future victory

MURRAY SMITH ·

Yet those who were expecting to see the supporters of independence dispirited and those who hoped that the issue of independence was settled for at least a generation were quickly disappointed.

This defeat bears the seeds of future victory, for at least three reasons. First, the way campaign unfolded. The rate of participation was massive. No less than 97 per cent of potential voters registered on the electoral roll: 118,000 of them did so in the month prior to the September 2 closure of the list. They are part of what was called "the missing million" those who never voted and were often not even registered.

This time they voted: the turnout was 84 per cent. You have to go back to 1910 — before there was universal suffrage — to find a higher level of participation. Many of these new voters had been mobilised and motivated by the Yes campaign through door-to-door canvassing, one to one discussions and meetings in local halls, in which the radical wing of the campaign played a key role.

Second, an examination of the vote leads to several conclusions. It was very clearly a class vote. The voting took place in 32 regions or cities. Yes won a majority in four of them. These were Glasgow, Dundee and two areas near Glasgow. Sociologically, these are working-class areas; they are the most socially deprived areas, with the highest levels of unemployment and of all the other symptoms of poverty. They have also been historically, and still are today, strongholds of the of the workers' movement. Furthermore, the information we have now indicates that everywhere the vote for independence was higher in poor neighbourhoods.

These are also areas that were dominated for nearly a century by the Labour Party, although the

Scottish National Party (SNP), which runs the government in Edinburgh, has made ??inroads in recent years. In contrast, areas that have been strongholds of the SNP since the 1970s, with more mixed populations, all voted no.

A survey released on September 20 gave a series of indications that show the limits of the victory of the No vote. The Yes vote was predominant in all age groups except 18-24 (48 per cent), 55-64 (43 per cent) and over 65 (27 per cent). The Yes vote was 71 per cent among 16-17 year olds, 59 per cent for the 25-34 age group, 52-53 per cent for those aged between 35 and 54. So it can be concluded that the result was obtained by the votes of older voters and that despite the narrow No vote among 18-24 year olds, the Yes vote won an overall majority in the population under the age of 55. We can respect this result from the arithmetical point of view. Politically it is anything but final.

This is confirmed by the motivations of those who voted Yes and No. For Yes voters, 10 per cent were motivated by the perspective of never again having a Conservative government; 20 per cent because they thought that an independent Scotland would have a better future; 70 per cent cited the principle that all decisions concerning Scotland should be taken in Scotland. The latter figure is perhaps the most important of the survey. These 70 per cent are for independence for the most basic of reasons: democracy, because the national question is basically a democratic, political question. Obviously not in the abstract, because those who voted Yes have also very clearly expressed their opposition to neoliberalism and war, for social justice and redistribution of wealth.

Project Fear

The corresponding figures for the No are just as interesting: 47 per cent were motivated by the risks associated with independence. This is the result of what the leaders of the No campaign themselves apparently called "Project Fear": a vote for independence would supposedly endanger employment, pensions, prices would go up, Scotland would not be allowed into the European Union, the English would not accept a monetary union, North Sea oil would soon run out.

Most of these fears would have proven to be unfounded or at least exaggerated if Yes had won. But they were assiduously circulated by the three unionist parties [1], the media and business leaders. Some employers wrote to all their employees to tell them to vote No — a practice that was justified by a Labour Party MP on the evening of September 18.

Twenty per cent voted no because they believed in the promise of more powers for the Scottish Parliament. The unionist parties called it a vow: increased powers would be sure and certain. Unfortunately the powers in question were never specified, among other reasons because the three parties do not agree on them.

And only 27 per cent voted No from attachment to the United Kingdom. These figures confirm what everyone should have known already: the motivations of supporters of independence are more solidly entrenched than those of their opponents.

Pro-independence parties surge

The third reason to doubt the soundness of the verdict of September 18 lies in what has happened since. It is astonishing. People are flocking to the pro-independence parties, which have all had a huge wave of recruits. The SNP doubled its membership in four days, passing the 50,000 mark. The Green Party went from 2000 to 5000 members. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) recruited 2500 new members. As for the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), a coalition of parties and movements of the left and of many who are in no party,

it has received at least 7000 registrations for its upcoming conference in November. By way of comparison, the two previous conferences in 2012 and 2013 had 900-1000 participants, which was already considered a success. [2].

People who commit themselves now are doing so to continue the fight, because nothing has been settled, not the fight to extract the maximum powers from Westminster, nor the fight to put independence back on the agenda as soon as possible. The survey cited above also asked people how long this result would stand. Among Yes voters, 45 per cent said five years, 16 per cent 10 years.

Ironically, therefore, the big winners of the referendum are the parties that lost it. And who will be the losers? The Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties have fairly negligible quantities in Scotland. The biggest loser is likely to be the Labour Party. In the No campaign ("Better Together") it played the central role, particularly through the intervention of former prime minister Gordon Brown, who thought up the "vow", in the last two weeks, when the No campaign was panicking at the prospect of a victory for independence.

But Labour's victory may well be Pyrrhic. To start with, 37 per cent of the voters of this fiercely unionist party voted for independence. And it seems that there is an opposite process to what is happening among the pro-independence parties, people are starting to leave the party. On the left of the movement for independence, there is a strong rejection of Labour. No one would think of accusing the Conservatives of having betrayed, they have always been the enemy. But the Labour Party will be held accountable.

There will probably be a change in its leadership: it is more than doubtful that this will be enough. Labour voters began to desert the party with the experience of it being in government between 1997 and 2010 in Westminster, and from 1999 to 2007 in Edinburgh. The experience of the referendum may accelerate and amplify the process.

How to assess the situation today? Compared to the hopes of September 18, the result is a disappoint-

ment. Compared to the situation at the beginning of the campaign for the referendum, it is a huge step forward. Not quite enough to win, but huge nonetheless. As we have seen, the victory of the No was largely due to the fears spread by the No campaign and to promises of which we have not yet seen the colour. In 2012 Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron thought he would win by at least 70%-30%. What a mistake that was; he came close to losing.

Profound politicisation

We saw in this campaign a large-scale mobilisation and a profound politicisation of Scottish society, which affected especially those who do not normally take an interest in politics, those among the poorest in society. We can be pretty sure that this genie is not ready to be put back in the bottle. Furthermore, every sector of the population was drawn into the campaign.

Since citizens of the European Union residing in Scotland could vote, we saw the appearance, for example, of "Poles for Independence". Then there was Women for Independence, well to the left, Scots Asians for Independence and last, but not least, "English Scots [sic] for Independence". Moreover, it appears that the majority of the community of Pakistani origin and about a quarter of English people living in Scotland voted Yes.

The pro-independence forces have a good strength to demand more powers from London. SNP leader Alex Salmond has resigned as first minister and as leader of the SNP. Nobody asked him to do that, his record was better than good. He did it to hand over power to the person who is virtually certain to succeed him, his very able deputy, Nicola Sturgeon. In her first interview after announcing her candidacy for the succession, she refused to rule out a referendum within five years if London does not give sufficient powers to Scotland. Perfidious Albion has been warned. As for Salmond, he has not retired, he will continue to sit in parliament and he will remain a force to be reckoned with.

'I am not a nationalist, I am an internationalist'

Let us hope that everyone outside Scotland will now have understood: the movement for Scottish independence is not based on narrow nationalism; for many of its participants, it is not nationalist at all. On the eve of the referendum, at a mass pro-independence rally in the main square of Glasgow, activist and lawyer Aamer Anwar was loudly applauded when he declared, "I am not a nationalist, I am an internationalist".

This movement is not anti-English; it is for democracy, social justice, for a new society, against war. The majority of its activists are on the left in the broad sense.

This character of the movement has nothing automatic about it. It is the result of changes that have occurred in the last 30 years. First, there was a change of leadership in the SNP in the 1980s and 1990s, the arrival of a group of leaders, personified by Salmond, who became leader of the party in 1990, which intended to outflank the Labour Party on the left and win its electors to the cause of independence. It must be said that the SNP was considerably helped in this by the evolution of Blairite New Labour.

Also, the major part of the radical left in Scotland succeeded in the 1980s and 1990s in going beyond a sterile ideological discourse that claimed that socialists had to oppose independence so as not to divide the British working class. The radical left started to support independence, giving it a socialist content. This development was important, because there is a space to be occupied to the left of the SNP. It was occupied between 1999 and 2007 by the SSP, before the crisis that struck it, and from which it now seems to be recovering. But this space still exists and it was very effectively occupied during the campaign by the RIC, the SSP, the Greens and by movements such as Women for Independence.

The radical left has an important role to play. The SNP may be to the left of Labour, but it remains a

centre-left, social-democratic party, which in the present situation is not so bad. That made it possible for the Greens and the SSP to be involved in the "official" campaign for the Yes ("Yes Scotland"), headed by the SSP, while also taking part in the RIC.

The SNP is relatively progressive on social issues, but it is not opposed to capitalism, either in Scotland or internationally. Early in the campaign Salmond gave some guarantees that he would not be too radical — for example by proposing to keep the Queen as head of state and abandoning the SNP's longstanding opposition to NATO. That decision was made by a small majority at an SNP conference. It led to the resignation from the party of two members of the Scottish parliament (MSPs); a

third MSP has resigned, explaining that he had waited until the end of the campaign.

Today some of those joining the SNP are doing so with the intention of pulling it to the left. We can wish them good luck; there is already a left in the SNP. But it seems more important today to create a political force to the left of the SNP, an anti-capitalist and pro-independence force, a radical left that fights for the republic and for socialism.

The elements of this left already exist and have contributed a great deal to the Yes campaign. Today they need to come together, to organise in order to face the new challenges.

Following the referendum, the audience for the ideas of the radical left has expanded considerably. That is a chance that should be seized with both hands.

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



SERIES : BRETTON WOODS, THE WORLD BANK AND THE IMF : 70TH ANNIVERSARY (PART 10)

The World Bank's support of the dictatorship in Turkey (1980-1983)

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT · 23 October 2014

The World Bank's strategy in Turkey clearly recalls its policy towards Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship in the Philippines from 1972, Augusto Pinochet's in Chile from 1973, and the economic model they promoted. Geopolitical reasons are once again a determining factor: a hinge between Europe and Asia, Turkey is an essential pawn on the Middle East chessboard. Consequently it is necessary to subordinate this country to Washington's interests by giving full support to an authoritarian regime. The World Bank works in this direction when, in perfect agreement with the military leaders, it develops neoliberal economic policies that open the door wide to investments by transnational corporations and suppresses both trade unions and far-left parties. Such policies consolidate the rôle of Turkey as a spearhead for the United States in a historic new context.

In the 1950s the World Bank got off to a bad start in Turkey. Its signing officer, Pieter Lieftinck, from the Netherlands, was expelled by the Ankara authorities on the grounds of excessive interventionism.

Under Robert McNamara, Turkey's geostrategic importance led the World Bank to increase its efforts to improve matters. A few months after becoming president, in July 1968, Robert McNamara visited Turkey. He knew the country well since it had been a military ally of the United States. As Defense Secretary until 1967 he was in close contact with Ankara. Anxious not to repeat what had happened with Pieter Lieftinck, the World Bank took

great care not to appear too openly intrusive in the 1970s [3]. By the end of the decade it had gradually increased its pressure on the Turkish government, particularly in 1978 when the left-wing nationalist, Bülent Ecevit, became Prime Minister. In particular, the Bank tried to force an increase in the price of electricity.

The September 1980 military coup, which resulted in a dictatorship that lasted until May 1983, was very convenient for the World Bank, since the military leaders agreed to maintain the neoliberal plan it had drawn up with Süleyman Demirel [4] and Turgut Ozal.

Extraction PDF The deadlocks of the left: health, pensions and employment

Turgut Ozal [5] had been appointed state under-secretary for economic coordination by the then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel. These two were to launch the neoliberal economic programme in January 1980. But its implementation was made difficult by TU actions, the sense of insecurity resulting from confrontations between right-wing and left-wing students, manœuvres in the Muslim Party which drove a hard bargain for its parliamentary support of Süleyman Demirel's minority government... and the army's thirst for power, intent on destabilising the government with the help of the US. However, the military regime, which dissolved parliament and put Süleyman Demirel in jail in September 1980, appointed Turgut Özal as plenipotentiary minister for economic affairs. He was then able to implement neoliberal policies for two years, until the financial crash that resulted in his eviction.

The World Bank enthusiastically supported the policies developed by the military leaders and

Turgut Özal since they led the way to "increasing export incentives, improving external debt management, eliminating the budget deficit (...), reducing the level of public investment." [6]

The historians of the World Bank wrote: "the Turkish program became a prototype for the institution's structural adjustment loan series." [7]

Several factors made such developments easier:

1. the close connections between Turkish political leaders and Turkish senior officers in the World Bank. In addition to already cited names we can mention Attila Karaosmanoghu [8] and Munir Benjenk [9] men of the Bank *par excellence*. [10]

2. In 1977 a highly indebted Turkey experienced a crisis, and contrary to other indebted countries it was granted significant aid by Western powers (United States, Germany), the World Bank and the IMF so that it did not go under. [11]

Turkey's neoliberal turnabout was not easy since the Constitution that had been drafted in the early 1960s stipulated that the country develop an industrialization policy aiming at import substitution, and implement both protectionism and public investment to this end.

The military coup in September 1980 therefore had the World Bank's wholehearted sympathy. It is likely that Robert McNamara knew about preparations for the coup for he entertained close relations with the Carter administration.

The example of Turkey is another illustration of how thoroughly the World Bank's policies are determined by geostrategic interests, particularly those of the United States.

Extraction PDF "Not one more!" - mass protests in Poland

Historians of the World Bank even acknowledge this openly: "Personally as a global statesman, **McNamara** was not blind to Turkey's geopolitical salience" [12]. Faced with the danger of the 1979 Iranian revolution that was hostile to the United States' policy, Turkey's stability had to be ensured

by supporting an authoritarian regime. [13] The military coup in Turkey was prepared with the help of the United States.

In neighbouring Iraq, Saddam Hussein's 1979 coup against a pro-Soviet regime was part of the same convergence of strategic interests. Later Saddam would serve the interests of the United States and of Western Europe when he launched the war against Iran in 1980.

This is not something the historians of the World Bank ever mention. However their comments on Turkey are clear enough: "The Bank seemed to take special pains to attribute benign motives to the Turkish military and avoid exhibiting displeasure at its interventions. The institution's formal comments to the effect that the military takeover in 1980 would not displace the Bank's lending intentions were extremely polite." [14]

En 1988, la Banque mondiale écrit : "Parmi les clients de la Banque, la Turquie représente l'une des plus spectaculaires réussites »

When the military leaders handed power back to civilians, Turgut Ozal and his Motherland party led the government.

In subsequent years Turkey received five structural adjustment loans (until 1985). In 1988 the World Bank wrote: "Among the Bank's clients, Turkey represents one of the most spectacular success stories." [15]

Such a self-congratulatory observation deserves comment. If we look at one of the Bank's major objectives, namely reducing inflation, there is little success to be celebrated: the annual inflation rate before structural adjustment was between 40 and 50 % at the end of the 1970s; under the military dictatorship that implemented adjustment, inflation reached 46% in 1980-1983, 44% in 1984-1988, 60% in 1989. In the following decades it reached an average of 70% with peaks as high as 140%.

In short, the objective of reducing inflation was definitely not achieved. The same applies to the public

internal debt which exploded and to the external debt that increased even further.

But if we consider the Bank's hidden agenda, it can indeed be said that it achieved a remarkable victory in the 1980s :

- * Turkey remained one of the Western powers' staunch allies;

- * it completely relinquished the industrialization model by import substitution with a high level of protectionism and a high level of public investment;

- * it developed a model focusing on exports by increasing its competitiveness, forcing down real wages and devaluing its currency in significant proportions;

- * the TU movement and both the reformist and the revolutionary Left were repressed thanks to the dictatorship.

From the end of 1979 to 1994 the relative value of the US dollar to the Turkish lira multiplied by 900; this process started with a 30% devaluation in 1980. In the 1970s real wages had significantly increased as a result of the trade unions' influence and the political position of the far left among young people and workers. The 1980 military coup made it possible to ban trade unions and strikes, reduce wages and increase profits.

Turkey thus became a veritable haven for corporate investments. Turgut Ozal was rewarded and elected

President from 1989 to 1993.

The World Bank steadily supported the military regime and the subsequent regime through loans of close to one billion USD per year.

In 1991, in exchange for its services to the United States and its allies in the first Gulf War, Turkey benefited from reparations paid by a defeated Iraq.

We can thus claim that the World Bank's strategy in Turkey clearly recalls its policy towards Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship in the Philippines from 1972, Augusto Pinochet's in Chile from 1973, and the economic model they promoted.

In 1999-2001 Turkey went through a financial crisis as severe as that of Argentina. Geostrategic interests again prevailed in the decisions taken: the IMF abandoned Argentina in December 2001 when it refused a new loan to President de la Rúa while it simultaneously pursued its policy of loans to Turkey in order to prevent social disruption that would destabilise an essential pawn on the Middle East chessboard.

Now, as everywhere else, the aid provided by the IMF and the World Bank only increases the debt of recipient countries and Turkish citizens have a right to refuse further reimbursement to the Bretton Woods institutions. The debt that was contracted to the IMF and the World Bank is odious by any standards.

Cadtm

SERIES: GOVERNMENTS SUBMIT TO "TOO BIG TO FAIL" BANKS (PART 5)

BCE / LTRO : what's that ?

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT · 23 October 2014

When attacking the weak links the institutional investors (among whom banks are a central element) were sure that the EU and the ECB would be forced to assist, in one way or another, the States that were the victims of speculation by lending them the funds necessary to continue debt repayments. They were quite right; loans were made or granted to the countries in difficulty. The loan conditions imposed by the Troika (the ECB, the European Commission and the IMF) aimed at producing brutal austerity measures, cuts in wages and pensions, and public-sector redundancies.

Despite the help of the ECB, in June 2011 the European banks entered a highly critical phase. Their situation was almost as serious as on 15 September 2008, after the failure of Lehman Brothers. Many of them were threatened with asphyxia because their massive needs for short-term financing (several hundred billion dollars) were no longer being met by the American Money Market Funds, who felt that the situation of the European banks was becoming more and more risky. [1]

The banks were in danger of being unable to honour their debts. That is when the ECB, following an emergency European summit held on 21 July 2011 to deal with the prospect of a series of bank failures, resumed massive purchasing of Greek, Portuguese, Irish, Italian and Spanish public-debt securities from the banks (on top of the aforementioned loans) in order to provide cash flow and relieve them of a part of the securities they had greedily purchased during the preceding period. Interest-rates too were cut on debts of countries in the periphery, to no avail; bank share values continued to crumble and interest-rates for countries

like Italy and Spain remained high. The decisive action that kept the European banks afloat was the extension by the ECB, beginning in September 2011 and in consultation with the Fed, the Bank of England and the Swiss National Bank, of an unlimited line of credit. Banks that were starved for dollars and euros were put on life support. They began to breathe again; but the treatment was insufficient. Their share prices continued to plunge. Between 1 January and 21 October, 2011, the price of shares in France's BNP-Paribas dropped by 33.3% and in Deutsche Bank 28.8%; Barclays dropped 30.5% and Credit Suisse 36.7%, and Société Générale plummeted 52.8%. The ECB was forced to deploy the heavy artillery.

What is an LTRO ?

An LTRO (Long-Term Refinancing Operation), a long-term loan mechanism for banks, was created. Between December 2011 and February 2012, the ECB lent over €1 trillion (that is, €1,000 billion) to more than 800 banks for a period of 3 years at an interest-rate of 1% (at a time when inflation was about 2%). In fact, the gift to banks was even more generous than is suggested by an interest-rate of only 1% (already very advantageous). Why? For two simple reasons. First, the interest is not due until the repayment date of the loan. If a bank borrows over three years for the full period it has no repayments to make, interest or capital, until the end of the three year period. And secondly, this rate has since been lowered several times, to 0.15% in June 2014 and to 0.05% in September 2014 [2].

Consider a bank such as Dexia, which borrowed more than €20 billion from the ECB over three years at the beginning of 2012: It will not be asked for repayment until the beginning of 2015, when it will also be called upon to repay the totality of the interest, which will be calculated as follows: A 1%

interest-rate until July 2012, 0.75% for the period from July 2012 to May 2013, 0.50% from May 2013 to November 2013, 0.25% from November 2013, 0.15% from June 2014 to September 2014, and 0.05% interest starting in September 2014. [3] It is clear that when having to repay, Dexia, or the Italian bank which has drawn €24 billion on the same terms, Intesa Sanpaolo (ISP.MI), will be unable to repay unless they draw out a new loan more or less equivalent to the previous loan. So who are they going to borrow from to repay the loan? The ECB, of course! Its president Mario Draghi has announced that at the end of the 3 years, the ECB will grant new loans, without volume limitation, for periods of six months, or more (Targeted Long Term Refinancing Operations – TLTRO). [4]

Initially, the ECB stated that the volume of new long-term loans would reach \$400 billion. We shall be able to take stock of the use that is made of these loans in February or March 2015 after the various TLTRO lines of credit have been granted. The TLTRO program began in September 2014 when a first liquidity facility of 82.6 billion euros was granted. A second liquidity facility will be made available in December 2014, which will coincide with the first repayment deadline to be met by banks that used the LTRO facility in December 2011. We emphasize that some of the banks that had used the LTRO in December 2011 chose to repay the ECB in advance as evidence of good health. The most fragile banks still owe the first LTRO

loans. So the deadlines in December 2014 (the first LTRO repayment) and February 2015 (second LTRO repayment) are important.

Imagine what would have happened if Dexia, and many other banks that were in trouble, had not had access to ECB loans; they would have simply switched off the lights and done a bunk. In fact, if they found lenders (which would not have been easy given the amounts needed), the banks would have had to pay more than 8% interest, and pay it regularly. Not only does the ECB assist private banks' finances by buying their *covered bonds* [5] and accepting structured products as collateral for the new loans that it grants to them, but the private banks also enjoy a monopoly in government financing. In the coming months, the ECB will be purchasing very large quantities of structured products (produced by the banks themselves and known as ABS).

The result of the double LTRO / TLTRO operation is clear: **protecting the interests of the victims of the crisis would have required other choices, such as, closing down failing banks while protecting savers' deposits, creating a bad bank for toxic assets at the charge of the major shareholders (without paying them compensation) and integrate the healthy part into a genuinely public body. The banking sector should have been socialised and given a genuine public service mission.**

CADTM

 SERIES : BRETTON WOODS, THE WORLD BANK AND THE IMF : 70TH ANNIVERSARY (PART 9)

The World Bank and the Philippines

 ÉRIC TOUSSAINT · 8 October 2014

The Philippine government was allowed to implement independent policies that fostered the country's economic development. However, American tolerance was short-lived. From 1962 onwards, and with the backing of the IMF and the World Bank, the Conservatives (who had won a majority of seats in the Philippine Congress in the 1959 elections) imposed radically different policies. These new policies sparked massive capital flight, crippling debts, devaluation, and a drop in wages for the population. It was in this context of crisis that Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972. The dictator earned the admiration of the World Bank for pursuing policies very much in line with Washington's expectations. Massive corruption increased popular discontent and brought about the downfall of Ferdinand Marcos and his replacement by Corazon Aquino in 1986. Aquino was the leader of the democratic opposition but was also closely connected to the plantation owners. She carried out intransigently neoliberal economic policies bearing the unmistakable imprint of the World Bank. To be sure, this was a great disappointment to the people.

The Philippines remained a Spanish colony until 1898, when Spain was defeated in a war declared by the United States. The US then occupied the country itself; this occupation was interrupted by the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. In 1946, the US granted the Philippines independence in exchange for its acceptance of a number of conditions: a fixed exchange rate between the Philippine peso and the American dollar to pro-

tect US companies against the effects of devaluation; free-trade agreements, and so forth. At the beginning, the arrangement worked relatively well since the US was bringing in a large amount of dollars to the Philippines, primarily through its strong military presence in the country.

However, in 1949 the flow of dollars slowed down dramatically. The Philippine government established strict exchange controls to avoid a heavy drain on the currency. Private companies were forbidden to borrow money from foreign investors. The US government and the IMF tolerated this measure in order to stay on good terms with their Philippine ally. The introduction of controls over currency exchange, capital flows and imports sparked an economic boom in the country, driven in particular by the growth of industry. This period of economic growth ended twelve years later, in 1962, when the control measures were abandoned under pressure from the United States, the IMF and the World Bank.

During the 1950s, the manufacturing sector grew annually from 10 to 12%, the annual inflation rate was kept below 2%, foreign-exchange reserves were strong and the external debt was extremely low. However, this was not to everyone's liking; American and other foreign companies complained about having to reinvest all their profits in the country's economy. Capitalist export firms were forced to deposit their hard-currency export earnings in the Central Bank, which returned them in pesos at an unfavorable rate. This was a source of enormous revenue for the state. In 1954, bolstered by its success, the Philippine government demanded that the US alter the rules of the game laid down in 1946 at the time of independence. Washington submitted to this demand, which strengthened the position of the Philippine authorities.

Of course, one has to be careful not to idealize the achievements of the Philippines in this period. It remained a profoundly unequal capitalist society, and industrialization did not go much beyond assembly and light manufacturing. Nevertheless, the situation of the 1950s was certainly promising in comparison with all that has transpired since 1962. Indeed, it was these promising developments that triggered the united offensive led by the US, the IMF and the World Bank — together with the most conservative sectors of the Philippine ruling classes — aimed at putting an end to the experience.

In 1962, the Conservatives, who had won a majority in the Philippine Congress after the elections of 1959, eliminated controls on capital movements. The IMF and the US government showed their approval by immediately granting a loan of 300 million dollars. The elimination of controls led to massive capital flight towards foreign countries; the resulting deficit was financed by one set of external loans after another. The external debt increased sevenfold between 1962 and 1969 — from 275 million to 1.88 billion dollars!

Transnational corporations and Philippine exporters of agricultural products and raw materials rejoiced as their profits jumped. On the other hand, the manufacturing sector oriented toward the domestic market rapidly declined. In 1970, the peso had to be sharply devalued. The incomes and earnings of small producers slumped.

It was in this context of a crisis of the policies supported by the United States, the IMF, the World Bank and the Conservatives, that Ferdinand Marcos set up a dictatorship in 1972. His objective was to consolidate neoliberal policies through force.

One year later, on the other side of the Pacific, Augusto Pinochet took power in Chile with exactly the same objectives, the same overlords and the same backing!

The role of the World Bank

The first loans granted by the World Bank to the Philippines date back to 1958. But the loans remained extremely low until McNamara became World Bank president in 1968. McNamara argued that the Philippines — where there were American military bases, as in Indonesia and Turkey — was of such strategic importance that it was absolutely necessary to strengthen its ties to the World Bank. Lending money was a way to get greater leverage. World Bank historians do not mince words: "McNamara and his staff were annoyed at the way the Philippines legislature was stalemating policy reforms. Thus the Philippines was an instance in which martial law triggered the takeoff of Banking lending. Marcos dismissed the legislature and started ruling by presidential decree in August 1972. McNamara and the Bank staff welcomed the move" [1]. One of the first measures taken by the Marcos dictatorship was the removal of the ceiling on public indebtedness, initially established by the Philippine Parliament in 1970. The regulation had established a debt margin of one billion dollars with an annual ceiling of 250 million dollars. Marcos put an end to this limitation, to the great satisfaction of the World Bank [2]. McNamara announced that the World Bank was ready to at least double the amounts granted [3]. At the time it was too late to increase the loans granted for 1973, much to McNamara's displeasure. That is why the Bank did the job in double quick time and increased by 5.5 times the total amount for 1974 (165 million instead of 30 [4]).

The World Bank and the IMF publicly supported the dictatorship to such an extent that they held their 1976 annual general meeting in Manila. That year, Bernard Bell, Vice President of the Bank for East Asia and Pacific Region, declared: "The risk in lending to the Philippines was lower than for Malaysia or Korea" [5]. It is also worth noting that the World Bank established one of the three centres of research on the green revolution in the Philippines, in partnership with the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.

However, Ferdinand Marcos did not quite carry out the economic policy the Bank had hoped for. The World Bank was disappointed since it was on very good terms with the dictator and the team of academics he had gathered around himself — some of whom became later officials of the Bank, such as Gerardo Sicat, Secretary for Planning and then President of the Philippines National Bank, the main bank of the country.

The World Bank did not criticize in the slightest the regime's repressive measures. However, it was concerned about the slowness with which structural reforms were being implemented. It wanted the dictatorship to replace what remained of the import-substitution industrialization model with the export-oriented industrialization model that it championed. In order to exert greater influence on the Filipino government, the Bank decided to grant two huge structural-adjustment loans in 1981 and 1983, aimed at export-promotion. The Bank was perfectly aware of the fact that most of these funds ended up in the bank accounts of Marcos and his generals; nevertheless, it considered it worthwhile to pay off members of the ruling clique in exchange for an acceleration of the neoliberal counter-reform.

At this juncture, in 1981, a banking crisis broke out in the Philippines due to a huge case of corruption involving the capitalists and sections of the state bureaucracy. The crisis spread gradually to the whole financial system, threatening the two largest public banks with bankruptcy. The crisis spread from 1981 to 1983-1984 and was exacerbated by the external debt crisis that broke out internationally in 1982. Foreign private banks stopped granting credits to the Philippines. This was a clear failure for the World Bank and its good friends, Ferdinand Marcos, Gerardo Sicat and Prime Minister Cesar Virata.

Popular discontent rose sharply. A number of key sectors of the ruling classes clashed with the Marcos regime. The crisis deepened following the murder of one of the members of the landed oligarchy opposed to Marcos: Senator Benigno Aquino, previously exiled to the United States, was

shot down at Manila airport upon his return to the country in August 1983.

In spite of the growing opposition to Marcos, the World Bank opted to stand behind the dictator. Departing from its plans, it massively boosted its loans to the Philippines: 600 million dollars in 1983, or more than double the previous year's loans of 251 million dollars. World Bank historians write that it was a matter of loyalty towards a good friend [6].

Extraction PDF Bringing Malcolm to Life

Popular mobilizations became more radical until the opposition within the ruling classes and the Army removed Marcos. They did so with the assistance of the Americans — represented in Manila by Paul Wolfowitz [7]

— who supported the Marcos regime until the end and then forced him into exile [8]. **Corazon Aquino** — leader of the opposition among middle-class and landed sectors and widow of Benigno Aquino — took over the reins of power in 1986.

The World Bank then hesitated over which course to follow. The World Bank President for East Asia and Pacific Region, Attila Karaosmanoglu (see the chapter on Turkey), wrote a rather unenthusiastic internal note on the new democratic regime: "We expect that the decision making process will be more difficult than in the past, because of a more collegial nature of the new team, the enhanced role of the legislative branch and the populist tendencies of the new government" [9]. Finally the World Bank, the IMF and the US sought to make the best of the situation by backing president Corazon Aquino since she had made a commitment to keep her country on the right side and even to deepen the neoliberal reforms. The World Bank lent 300 million dollars in 1987 and 200 million in 1988: it was all about greasing the wheels of the privatization of state-owned firms. Between 1989 and 1992, the World Bank lent the Philippines 1.3 billion dollars to finance structural adjustment. The US threatened to block these loans in the event that the Philippines carried out its plan to close American military bases on its territory.

As for the land reform demanded by the powerful popular movement that led to the overthrow of Marcos and became even stronger in 1987, Corazon Aquino sided with the landed oligarchy she came from. Between 1986 and 1990, the state only acquired 122 hectares [10]!

All told, the government of Corazon Aquino went even further than Marcos as far as the implementation of neoliberal policy prescriptions was concerned. This was cause for great satisfaction at the World Bank.

CADTM

ENVIRONMENT

Early Soviet Commitment to Environment Protection and its Decline

KUNAL CHATTOPADHYAY · 8 October 2014

Between 1918 and 1929, through complex struggles, but with a good part of the new state apparatus supporting them, the partisans of ecological conservation scored major victories. What was achieved was well in advance of anything that existed in the capitalist countries. It was Stalin's revolution from above, which ended the last traces of direct working class power and established a bureaucratic dictatorship, that also saw two waves of attacks on the conservationists. The relationship between state, party and scientists and environmental activists was transformed with the proclamation of dialectical materialism as super science over particular sciences.

The attack on Soviet biology and ecology, led by I. I. Prezent and T. D. Lysenko stressed that scientific theory had little use if it did not enhance economic competitiveness with the West or ideologically justify the growing dictatorship. By the mid-1930s, the idea of socialist conservationism was decisively defeated, but this was part of the transformation of the idea of socialism into a bureaucratic rule.

Socialism and Environmentalism

Instead of looking at hostile critics, I propose to start by citing a Marxist political document of considerable importance, adopted in the early 21st Century. In its 15th World Congress, the Fourth International adopted a resolution on Ecology and Socialism. While putting forward a Marxist case, the document stated, as something taken for granted:

"At present, we can distinguish among four currents in parties and unions that claim to speak for the workers: ...

d) The fourth current, in the minority, but far from negligible in numbers, is eco-socialism, integrating the fundamental achievements of Marxism - while ridding it of its productivist dross". [1]

In other words, that Marxism meant a productivist approach has become a routine position even among the left. I exclude those on the left for whom any concern with the environment is petit-bourgeois or utopian.

The first problem such an approach comes up against is the set of extensive notes and writings of Marx and Engels. The present writer has discussed that dimension elsewhere, and a much more significant work exists, namely John Bellamy Foster's Marx's Ecology. [2] In this paper we will be more concerned with the argument that twentieth century socialism had a purely productivist orientation, by looking at the experience of the Russian revolution.

In pre-revolutionary Russia there were three conservationist currents. Journals, societies, a semi-governmental commission, and a network of professional ties had linked them. One of these currents, which could be said to be anti-industry, anti-modernism, was represented by A. P. Semyonov-tian-shanskii, I. P. Borodin, and V.E. Timonov. They idealized an agrarian golden age when the earth had not been ruined by humans. They also tended to argue that humans had originally been children of nature, and by removing themselves from nature they were denying themselves the ability to satisfy human aesthetic needs. This current was profoundly influenced by neo-romanticism.

Hugo Conwentz, the German conservationist, influenced Borodin.

A second position was utilitarian. The most important Western study, that of Douglas Weiner [3], uses a translated term – wise-use—to describe them. They were growth oriented and rather statist. They defined resources narrowly, based on the criteria of contemporary utility. For them, conservation was selective. Things and beings whose economic value was as yet unproved were excluded from their concerns. The more extreme among them schematically divided life forms into useful and harmful categories, and desired the annihilation of the latter. They were not interested in maintaining the integrity of ecological systems. So they were willing to trim ecological issues to fit them into political and economic goals created without ecological considerations. One can mention here people like A. E. Fersen and the zoologist N. M. Kulagin.

The third position was taken by people like G. A. Kozhevnikov and V. V. Stanchinskii. They presented themselves as politically progressive scientific materialists. It has to be understood that in the context of pre-revolutionary Russia, this was an extremely radical stance. While by the early twentieth century one could be a sort of academic socialist or materialist, it was still hardly a stance likely to get governmental support. The desire of such people for planned and holistic ecological policies led them to become early allies of the Soviet power. These were also some of the key people who would try to resist Stalinist economic policies on ecological grounds. [4]

In the West, the dominant views, including arguments of socialists, are based on Weiner's writing. Weiner shows that he is opposed to the entire revolutionary socialist project, and makes little difference between Bolshevism and Stalinism. [5] The Russian scholar Feliks Shtil'mark, who had done pioneering work in the Soviet era but had not been able to publish till the end of the USSR, wrote and published his own study after 1991. Shtil'mark argues that materialist scientists and activists were

also motivated by deeply held ethical and aesthetic feelings about nature. This led them into a series of confrontations with Stalinism from the late 1920s. [6]

A quarter century ago, presenting a paper on Soviet biology and physics in an international seminar organised by Jadavpur University, I had pointed to T.D. Lysenko and I. I. Prezent as the principal immediate culprits for the unscientific attacks on Soviet scientists in the name of Marxism. [7] While studying soviet ecology, I discovered that even before their attacks on genetics, they had targeted ecologists.

The full story shows how a series of institutions were created, with sometimes enthusiastic support from sections of the Bolsheviks. It also shows how the creation of a new state apparatus led to conflicts over control. The most enlightened role was played by the Peoples' Commissariat for Education or Narkompros, headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky, with the Narkomzem or Peoples' Commissariat of Agriculture as its principal opponent. As long as, despite the one party state, there was scope for debate and opposition, it was possible to present and argue and lobby or fight for divergent positions. But from the late 1920s, opposition to the 'general line' increasingly became synonymous with counter-revolution. [8] Thereafter, legitimate dissent had less and less space. Between 1929 and 1937, both romantic and materialist environmentalism were smashed.

The Foundations of Conservationism

In 1908, G. A. Kozhevnikov had proposed the setting up of territories where pristine nature would be preserved, since otherwise many species would be doomed to extinction. These were not plans for so-called eco-tourism. Termed zapovedniki, these were to be free of humans, both to protect species, and to study how the environment operated when civilisation was excluded. In defending these areas, he and his associates argued that monocrop agriculture was damaging nature. They pointed out that in monocultures the natural enemies of pests

often cannot find appropriate niches to support themselves. A few private initiatives followed, with the support of well to do landowners like Fridrikh Eduardovich Fa'll's-Fein in Askania-Nova, in what later became Kherson Oblast.

This effort was soon to be shattered by the revolutions of 1917. In 1861, when the Russian Tsar Alexander II undertook the emancipation of the serfs, it was a move from above that tried to modernise Russia at minimum cost to the state and the ruling class. Consequently, peasants were given personal freedom, but for land, they had to make a further redemption payment. And not the entire land that they had cultivated as serfs were given to them through their communes.

Landlords retained, under direct ownership, in 1861, about 105,000,000 desiatins of land. Despite the growing crisis of the aristocracy, in 1905, they still had 52,104,000 desiatins. [9] The Royal family alone owned, according to one leading Marxist commentator of the early twentieth century, seven million desiatins. [10] In Kherson, as a matter of comparison, the average allotment for peasants was 0.90 acres, and for allotments of 2.9 to 5.8 acres, peasants had to pay redemption payment of 5 to 10 roubles.

Consequently, 18917 saw in Russia, the combination of a working class revolution, the feature of capitalism in its maturity, with a massive peasant war, a feature of the fall of feudalism and early era of bourgeois revolutions. Under such conditions, the initial hopes of the conservationists were dashed. Kozhevnikov, Fa'll's-Fein and others were part of a liberal conservationist movement.

The period between February and October saw a protracted dual power. Two institutions were created. One was a Provisional Government. It was an ad hoc creation, by liberal bourgeois and landlord figures, who wanted the monarchy to pay attention to it rather than to overthrow it, and who therefore even did not declare Russia to be a republic for several months. But the uprising that had toppled the tsar had been created by workers and soldiers, and

they made no distinction between the liberal bourgeoisie and the nobility, but distrusted both. They trusted the socialists.

In the initial stages, with a far greater preponderance of intellectuals, the Marxist current that dominated was the Menshevik wing of the social Democrats. Even stronger, among the soldiers, very often peasants in uniform, were the Socialist Revolutionaries, the heirs of Russia's famous "Narodnik" tradition, who talked about a peasant road to socialism. These two currents, however while setting up a Council of Workers and Soldiers Representatives (the Russian for council being Soviet), did not want power. Instead, they pleaded with the liberals and landlords to take power. But the workers and soldiers trusted only the Soviets.

As a result, while formally the Provisional Government was the government, in reality it had to get Soviet support for its actions. This created a fundamental instability. The peasantry was increasingly insistent that there should be a division of all the landed estates. To argue, in such a situation, that there were also ecological imperatives, would not have been easily understood, especially when the arguments came from people who were landowners themselves.

During the era of the Provisional Government, V. P. Semyonov-tian-shanskii put forward a plan for the creation of a countrywide network of zapovedniki. He suggested that 46 reserves should be created, basing themselves on a broad variety of geographical zones. But the peasant revolts of the autumn came as a blow to liberal policy. Concerned with taking over the landlords' lands, the peasants did not bother to check whether the Provisional Government, a much hated entity, had promised some of that land for conservation.

After the October Revolution, the conservationists had to turn again to the new government. But it should be noted, that though Semyonov-tian-shanskii's proposal lay buried for several years, under changed circumstances, and despite many of the destructive impulses of Stalinism on ecology, by the

late 1970s almost 80 per cent of the sites he had listed had become protected territories . [11]

The Bolsheviks

The October revolution brought to power the Bolsheviks, originally in a government responsible to the Soviets. As not only landlord and bourgeois Russia, but even the bulk of the moderate socialist parties rejected soviet power, and even chose to support armed violence against it, the democratic life of the soviets died down. [12] As a result, inclinations and ideas of individual Bolshevik leaders on various issues figure more prominently. While the Lenin cult was a creation of a later period, Lenin, as the Head of the Government, as well as one of the foremost party leaders, certainly exercised much influence. Conservationists also had the advantage of conscious support from Anatoly Lunacharskii, the Commissar for Education.

A brief discussion of Lenin's ideas would be relevant here. Lenin's view that Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country has been often quoted. But this is a simplification, for it suggests a narrowly productivist orientation by citing what was after all a speech ranging from the Treaty of Riga to inner-party debates. But the formula involves certain elements that need to be understood. He saw socialism and the overcoming of class antagonisms as a rational process, once the working class held power, where planning and a scientific approach were vital. At the same time, he stressed that it was necessary to understand the forces and laws of nature, because any desire for the increase of productive forces and the growth of socialism had to take place by obeying those laws and acting in tune with them. He was therefore fully interested in cooperating with scientists as scientists, regardless of their political positions.

During Lenin's last underground period, after the July Days, his readings included, according to Weiner, some amount of significant ecological material. In addition, as a diverse range of writers from Weiner to Paul le Blanc point out, Lenin had personal interests that tended to make him look

favourably upon conservationists. He was well known for preferring hiking and staying in nature. During his years in exile, he found relaxation in long hikes and treks in the Alps, the Jura, etc, rather than going to cinemas and so on.

All this does not prove, and it is not my intention to claim, that Lenin was therefore an expert in conservation or even that there can be something called the Leninist position on conservation. But the foregoing suggests why he responded favourably to approaches by scientists.

The Congress of Soviets in October (November) 1917, that had seized power, had also issued a Decree on Land, whose main text was drafted by Lenin, to which he had attached a whole series of peasant mandates published by the Executive Committee of the Peasants Soviets. This Decree had taken over all forests, waters and subsoil minerals in the name of the state. While the intention was to organise planned tapping of resources, the civil war that broke out from the early months of 1918 and the loss of a number of vital resources to the Whites meant that short term measures predominated economic policies and actions. State-led plunder rather than planning underlay the so-called "war communism".

Responding to the chaos, the council of Peoples' Commissars, or Sovnarkom, issued a law On Forests. According to the Soviet historian Kravchuk, Lenin, who presided over the making of this law, was keenly aware of the need to protect the forests and referred to problems associated with deforestation after the emancipation of 1861, recorded by the economist Shcherbina. [13] The law provided for the creation of a Central Administration of the Forests of the Republic entrusted with the responsibility of planned reforestation and sustained yield.

But by late 1918, fluctuating fortunes in the Civil War made all this little more than a promise for the future. The economy was controlled by the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh or Vesenkha), in order to centralise all resources

for the moment. It was with the end of the civil war and the introduction of the New Economic Policy that the idea of a gradual progress to a planned economy returned. In 1923, a new Forest Code was adopted. Clearing of forests was restricted and made subject to clearance from the Provincial Land Administrations or the Central Forest Administration (in cases where the area under forests was below 35 per cent). The Act also provided for a category of protected forests including zapovedniki.

Administrative and Political Conflicts and their Resolutions

Running a vast country took more administrative complexity than the bare bones of theory, even when augmented by the experience of the Paris commune and the pre-October soviets, had suggested. Different Commissariats had to be created. And they had overlapping responsibilities. Initially, it was the commissariat of Agriculture that took most conservation and resource utilisation decisions. But in 1919, Nikolai Podiapolskii met both Lunacharskii and Lenin. This resulted in a shift. An agronomist and a deputy commissar of the Astrakhan branch of Narkompros, Podiapolskii wanted support for the creation of a zapovednik in the Volga delta. For this, he met Lunacharskii, his direct head.

Strongly supportive of what he heard, Lunacharskii in turn wrote a letter of introduction to Lenin. Having heard out Podiapolskii, Lenin told him that conservation had to be a priority for the entire republic, and requested him to draft a general decree on conservation. Within a day, a draft had been made, seen by Lenin, and returned via the Secretary of Vesenkha, Dr. V. D. Bonch-Bruevich. Lenin also suggested that the Executive Committee of Narkompros should give the final approval. He did so, according to an eye-witness, because the Commissariat was not involved with the exploitation of natural resources, and could examine ecological problems without a built in bias. [14]

But strong resistance surfaced from Narkomzem, in an early instance of what was only partly intra-bureaucratic conflict, but partly, more ominously, a conflict between a holistic view of the ecology, and of the role of science, and a narrower, utilitarian attitude. Only in 1921 was the draft turned into law. But the proposal to set up a zapovednik in Astrakhan was accepted immediately. By 1920, another one was set up in the Urals. This was the first protected territory anywhere to be created by a government exclusively in the interests of the scientific study of nature. This symbolised early Soviet awareness that practical and immediate economic gains should not be allowed to dictate environmental policy. This was wholly in line with Marx's views. Writing about the Paris Commune, he had commented:

"The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it". [15]

Meanwhile, F. F. Shillinger, a game specialist, campaigned hard for a law to restrict hunting, so that moose and wild goats could be preserved. In 1920, his efforts also bore fruit, in a law On Hunting, drafted by Narkomzem. With this, however, was institutionalised a bifurcation of Soviet conservation for the next decade and a little beyond.

Between 1920 and 1922, a Department under Narkompros, the State Committee for the Protection of Monuments of Nature became the dominant institution for the conservation affairs.

Things changed with the end of the Civil War and the coming of the New Economic Policy. A forced policy of top-down state control had not been the original intention of the Bolsheviks, though once this was practised, and once a bureaucratic control grew up, many people clearly never gave up a hankering for a return to this. But the NEP meant a considerable restoration of the market, private

property, and trading. Fiscal constraints now became much more evident. Between 1921 and 1923, budget cuts hit various social sectors. Working class responses included strikes, to which the growing party bureaucracy sought to respond in late 1923 by demanding that party members should inform about strikers. With this kind of situation, it was not surprising that budget cuts almost led to the elimination of the State Committee, as well as the Main Administration for Scientific Institutions, or Glavnauka.

Between 1923 and 1927, several zapovedniki were nonetheless set up. The State Planning Board, or Gosplan, issued its first set of control figures for the economy. This was followed by the first serious discussions about moving to a planned economy. It was perceived by many people, that non-sustainable growth was bad for the economy as well. By 1927, the moose, the sea otter, the European bison, the European red deer, the wolverine, wild cat, and other fauna were either seriously threatened or even extinct (the bison was recreated from specimens in zoos). But approaches differed. By 1928, both the Commissariat of Trade and the Commissariat of Agriculture were viewing the salvation of hunting in the form of a technological fix. They wanted to save animals in order to hunt them in an orderly manner. To do so, they advocated ranch breeding of commercial varieties, and the acclimatization of new species to supplement the indigenous, exhausted ones. In 1928, S.A. Sidorov, Curator of the aquarium at the Moscow Zoo, published a detailed account of the disappearance of species.

It would be totally erroneous to think, though, that only governmental agencies were at work. A number of societies or associations came up. They concluded the All-Russian society for Conservation (VOOP), the Central Bureau for the Study of Local Lore (TsBK) and others. The TsBK was in fact a mass organisation, with 2270 branches in the late 1920s, and nearly 60,000 members. [16] Many of the activists of TsBK were also important figures in official conservationist agencies.

In the 1920s, the idea that building a communist society meant the creation of a society of associated producers was not yet dead. So it was not yet a straightforward state-directed, bureaucratic operation. Many local attempts at conservation developed. The All Russian Society for Conservation had a central organ, the Okhrana Prirody, which combined theoretical work and research reports with a wide range of more popular essays.

In 1925, the government, then partly directed by Alexei Rykov and Nikolai Bukharin, created a new committee for nature protection, the Gostkomitet. It had certain weaknesses. Placed under Glavnauka, it was thus in the third rung of the hierarchy (a Glav was a main committee or Administration under a Commissariat), and as such it could not approach the Council of Peoples' commissars, but had to move through the Narkompros. But being under Narkompros, it had the support of Lunacharskii. Its leading body had a majority from Glavnauka, in other words it was dominated by scientists, and it had considerable funding.

In 1925-28, research in the zapovedniki were important. From 1923, ecologically representative cases were being selected. Two sets of zapovedniki existed – those selected by Narkompros and those selected by Narkomzem. Overall they covered about 1.5 million hectares of land. By 1929 they had expanded to nearly 4 million hectares.

Apart from these, there were other types of work being done regarding the ecology. In this paper, it will not be possible to discuss issues of public health and urban environment. But important strides were taken there as well. Let me make two crucial points in passing, precisely because I will not be discussing the issues at length. Anti-communist historiography simplifies the picture, and talks only about the exploitation of the peasants and the burdens on the workers. I do not dispute either.

However, it is worth noting that urban Russia in its Stalinist industrialisation phase did not have the slums associated with Britain in the 19th century, or India, or much of Latin America, in the twentieth

eth. And it is also worth noting that public health was improved significantly. It is a hoax, to compare the early Soviet Union with developed capitalism. Trotsky, hardly a friend of Stalin and Stalinism, had argued that Russia in 1917 stood halfway between the developed countries and the semi-colonial and colonial world, and had suggested in his *History of the Russian Revolution* that but for the October Revolution Russia would have slipped closer, after World War I, to semi-colonial status. From that position, the soviet industrialisation, with all its flaws, and its bureaucratic bosses who rode on the backs of workers and peasants, did create a much improved urban environment. To ignore the consequences of bureaucratic planning, of Chernobyl, of what critics have called ecocide, would be to whitewash Stalinism. But to ignore the positive developments is also unacceptable.

Leaving that aside, though, other issues in ecology should also be briefly mentioned. V.I. Vernadsky achieved international renown both for his analysis of the biosphere, and as the founder of the science of geochemistry. In 1926 he published *The Biosphere*. He has been called the first person in history to come to grips with the real implications of the fact that the Earth is a self-contained sphere.

N. I. Vavilov, President of the Lenin Agricultural Academy, determined that there were a number of centres of plant diversity in the underdeveloped countries. Unlike the romantic conservationists, Vavilov called for a dialectical stance. The centres of plant diversity were, for him, the products of human culture. For decades now, Western agribusiness has recognised this, and has been returning to these genetic reservoirs, leading to a struggle for control.

The Zapovedniki in the late NEP Era

Russian agronomists had been treating the forest as a community for a considerable period. But their focus had been on plants, with the assumption that the fauna had a lesser role to play. In the 1920s, this perspective changed, and Soviet ecologists came to appreciate much more the role of fauna in

structuring the historical development of such communities in nature. This did not mean there was a total agreement. There were scholars who attempted faulty analogies between human societies and what they called plant societies. Others avoided this line of thinking. Important questions were asked and answers were sought, such as, how far these communities were closed systems, whether there were spaces for new entrants, whether they could be grouped into higher taxonomic units, etc.

The growing interest in such issues was reflected in the growth of the study of ecology in an institutionalized structure. Ecology courses began to be offered, in places as diverse as Tashkent, Moscow, Leningrad, and Kharkov. G.A. Kozhevnikov argued that building game farms was a very inadequate response to the threat to nature posed by industrial society. In *Okhrana Prirody*, he wrote an article, stressing that research in the zapovedniki should look at revealing the laws of the evolution of the organic world. In other words, at a time when the concepts were still in their early stages, he was moving towards the possibility of a synthesis of ecology, genetics, and evolutionary theory. And he warned categorically that one should not expect quick results.

He did try to explain that a stress on basic science research did not imply ignoring material needs. He was not a romantic, and his writings sought to present common grounds between materialist scientists and Marxists. [17] By the close of the 1920s, the zapovedniki were being used for the study of ecological communities. A crucial development took place in Askania-Nova in the Ukrainian steppes.

Askania originated as a huge land grant from Tsar Nicholas I to the duke of Anhalt-Cothen in 1828. Its last private owner was Fal'ts-Fein. At that stage it had sheep breeding, a zoo, an acclimatization park, and a part where the steppe was fenced off from human encroachment. But located close to Crimea, it faced terrible devastations during the Civil War. It was after the final Red victory that Dmitri Manuilskii, Commissar for Agriculture in the

Ukraine, took over charge of the reserve. A Ukrainian decree of 1921 gave Askania a wide range of responsibilities.

Tension developed in the early stages between the economic imperatives indicated, and the scientific research orientation of a community of scientists. The proposal to turn Askania into a simple Sovkhoz (state farm) was contested openly by Kozhevnikov and other scientists. While this was blocked, especially after the Ukrainian commissariat for Education played a role similar to the Russian Narkompros, the tension did not go away, because the production sector retained a large amount of land, and tried to increase profits in a big way.

Between 1924 and 1928, the battle went on. In 1928, M. F. Ivanov proposed a reorganisation that would increase the power and the extent of land under control of the Production Sector. In part, Ivanov did what would become popular in later years – he attacked the scientists (though he himself was a Professor) as elite people and appealed to the "people". The other scientists hit back through a vigorous campaign. They showed that Ivanov was painting a false picture of the ecologists as people who wanted to turn the whole of Askania into a zapovednik. The most prominent role was played by Stanchinskii. [18] The Ukrainian Sovnarkom provided considerable support to the Scientific Sector, as well as putting it directly on the Ukrainian central budget.

Stanchinskii wanted to use Askania to develop materialist genetics. He was also interested in studying an eco-system as a whole, tracing the production of the primary biological producers of a given area through all their biotic pathways. [19] V. I. Vernadsky had outlined the chemical cycling and energy flows, or the transformation between matter and energy, carried out by living and non-living matter in complex exchanges. Taking off from that, Stanchinskii wanted to construct the dynamics of an ecosystem and relate it to mathematically expressed regularities. In contemporary terms, he was developing ecological energetics.

Invoking the Second Law of Thermodynamics, he argued that as one climbed up the rung on a ladder in which the living entities are placed, there would be less energy available. This was why there could be relatively few of the large predators. In order to study the entire problem, he set out to determine mathematically the energetic role of each species. He hoped that a successful study would enable humans to perform their economic activities in harmony with the ecosystem. This was to usher in a research programme that was unique for its time, not just in the USSR, but anywhere in the world. By contrast, reserves created by the Narkomzem of the RSFSR did very limited research, looking at the reserves as a space for the replenishment of decreasing stock.

From the All Russian Conservation Congress to the All Union Conservation Congress (1929-1933)

The All Russian Conservation Congress itself deserves a full paper. So here, one can only sketch the bare bones. 124 delegates with voting rights were present, with 64 coming from the provinces and the rest, i.e., just under half, from Moscow and Leningrad. The delegates were in the main people with higher education, and were in their majority non-party. It is significant that the field of ecology was sufficiently moved from core political conflicts, so that while bureaucratic strangulation was ending debates in many other fields, this Congress saw free debates. [20]

Some of the delegates, like M. P. Potemkin, Deputy President of Gostkomitet, warned that the Five Year Plan had set targets that threatened the ecology seriously. Seals, sea otters, whales, were being threatened, said Potemkin. A Congress resolution talked about the progressive decline of game and called for a game census, a game biology institute, and greater powers to Gostkomitet [21] Another debate was over logging and the clearing up of the steppes. It was revealed that the forest of an entire province was being "planned" into abolition. But despite their stiff opposition, the ecologists were also compelled to shift the grounds and the dis-

course through which they articulated their concerns. Now they could no longer speak only of the benefits of pure scientific research. In the debate over Askania-Nova, Stanchinskii stressed that while the zapovedniki were scientific institutions, the rationale for them was economic.

Within a short while, the situation changed dramatically. As the targets of the Plan were raised and a crash course collectivization began, the ecologists faced an uncertain future. Okhrana prirody in 1930 had an article that cautioned about the ecological dangers of rapid and full-scale collectivization. Another article argued that increasing mechanization of agriculture following collectivization would lead to standardized and homogenized landscape, and warned that unless protective measures were taken promptly, there would be great destruction of life of various kind.

The early 1930s were not a good period for such critical voices and viewpoints. This was the period when the so-called cultural revolution was being launched. In the life sciences, there were a considerable number of attacks. Among scientists and philosophers of Marxist inclination, debates had been going on for a considerable period. Two major wings had formed – the Mechanists and the Deborinists. [22]. The Deborinists were winning by the late 1920s. But a much cruder form of "Marxist"-scientist layer began forming from this point. Two figures who would play a devastating role in all aspects of Soviet biology were Trofim Denisovich Lysenko and Isai Izrailovich Prezent.

Most notorious for the attacks on genetics [23]] , Prezent and Lysenko had also attacked the ecologists. It is due to the general lack of awareness about the significance of ecology that this has been discussed much less than the attacks on people like Vavilov.

Present was a graduate of a three year programme of the Faculty of Social Sciences who went on to specialize in the philosophy of the life sciences. Initially he had been a Deborinist, and had attacked neo-Lamarckianism. He had even received an ini-

tial backing from Vavilov, which however ended as Vavilov found him unsuitable for productive work. Prezent left the All-Union Institute of Plant Breeding, led by Vavilov, and attempted to create his own power base. By 1931, he had founded and was leading the kafedra [sub-department] of the Dialectics of Nature and Evolutionary Science at the Leningrad State University. Also, by 1930, he had become aware that Stalin was about to take on the Deborinists and had jumped away from them.

In order to ideologically control scientists, measures were taken from top, and these were supplemented by drumming up a spurious "proletarian" anti-scientist ("anti bourgeois scientist") campaign.

All plans for scientific work and educational programs were required to be presented to the Association of Natural Science of the Communist Academy. The previous organizer of the worker's militia in Germany, E. Kol'man, became the Association's Director in 1931. Kol'man was even ready to rework Newton's Laws, and Boyle's Law from the perspective of diamat. He asserted that biology in the USSR was swarming with saboteurs; geneticists were supporting eugenic measures, zoologists and botanists were resisting the creation of giant Soviet farms, ichthyologists were unnecessarily lowering the capacity of ponds and rivers. [24]

At one level, a close study of names involved in the conflicts show that the fight for positions, and for gaining support for one's position, led a number of "bourgeois" scientists to also throw in their lot with the campaigners for diamat. In other words, the struggle for position, for privilege, were parts of an ideological (in the sense that Marx condemned ideology) construction of a spurious Marxist biology. But Prezent brought in a degree of single-mindedness that won him greater backing than most others. For he was the campaigner, who, later in alliance with Lysenko as well, took up the position that readiness to blindly follow Stalin's politics, and to alter one's views accordingly, had become the single criterion of truth in biology.

The rise of Stalin had been sealed politically by the late 1920s. But as it had been argued – including by

Trotsky in exile – there was a potential for opposition till the early 1930s. The publication of the Ryutin document shows that it had a good bit of support even at the leadership level. [25] Between 1932 and 1937-38, all oppositional voices were smashed and vast numbers perished. [26] Other Bolshevik leaders of the first generation had different views on Marxist philosophy and its relationship with science. But Trotsky and Bukharin, two of the intellectual leaders, had both supported the autonomy of distinct levels or spheres of knowledge. The rise of Diamat saw an end to that. And the rise of Stalin's absolute power meant that strategists like Prezent were going to get the better of scholars like Vavilov and Stanchinskii (both would fall victims).

As the Five-Year Plan proceeded, over-optimistic demands for upward revision of targets increased. In the newly created Western Oblast, which included Smolensk province, for example, the target of turning the oblast into one vast granary meant disastrous deforestation. The collapse of the world capitalist economy, rather than the dawn of sense among Soviet planners, saved some of the forests, as the demand for timber went down. Yet this was also the time when ecologists were producing some of their major works. Weiner mentions that in 1931, Daniil Nikolaevich Kashkarov published his *Environment and Community* [27].

In 1933, the first All-Union Conservation Congress was held. By this time, the situation had changed much, compared to the All-Russian Congress a few years earlier. Of the 92 voting delegates to the congress, only just over one third had higher education, compared to three quarters for the 1929 Congress. Nearly two-fifths were party members this time. The major debate in this congress was over the fate of the zapovedniki. P. Smidovich, the Old Bolshevik who had long been associated with the ecologists, gave a guarded speech defending basic research. But a huge attack was launched by those who demanded that the needs of applied approach must dictate the work of the zapovedniki. A massive struggle had in fact opened up over the fate

of Askania-Nova, outside the Conference. Stanchinskii, the moving spirit of Askania-Nova, was accused of many sins, one of which was the mathematisation of biology. But the core struggle was over whether Askania should be converted into a stockbreeding station or retained as an ecological research place.

Yakovlev, the USSR Commissar for Agriculture, had declared that it was now possible to solve problems in a short time. This meant that the "bourgeois" approach of scholars like Stanchinskii, were passé. Present argued that results on a mass scale alone validated the truth of a scientific theory. As the notorious "Lysenko affair" shows, this approach meant that gross inaccuracies or downright falsifications were resorted to, in order to get official seals for scientifically invalid ideas. [28]

One of the issues in conflict was, for Prezent, ecological research meant large scale acclimatization of exotic life forms. Stanchinskii used sophisticated dialectical explanations to argue that what was desired was a search for optimal conditions, not a huge growth that would lead to exotics becoming pests. This was clearly not what the authorities wanted to hear. By this date the campaign was one that did not seek at all to convince the ecologists, but to convince the party-state authorities that the ecologists were bourgeois scientists obstructing the growth of socialism and true socialist science. In 1934, Stanchinskii was arrested. I have seen only one study of the archives after they were opened to scholars, so the precise role of Lysenko and Prezent are still a little uncertain. [29]

However, Sergei Medvedev, colleague of Stanchinskii who was also arrested, wrote to Semenov-tian-shanskii about the role of Prezent. [30] Stanchinskii's confession under torture included the comments: "the theoretical problems of ecology and biocenology that I posited were completely removed from economic exigencies ...". He said that his wrecking activities included fencing off 5400 hectares of the steppe. [31]

Why did Prezent and Lysenko adopt their strategy? At this remove it is difficult to provide a full explanation. I have argued however that they represented a social layer seeking to capture positions. It seems that neither of them had much knowledge of mathematics. So they could not police ecology as long as it was mathematically modelled. This included other works, such as Alpatov's work on the role of densities in the regulation of animal population. This might also explain one aspect of their attack on genetics.

In conclusion

The career of Stanchinskii, however, exemplifies not only the problems with Stalinism but also the positive developments in the early Soviet Union. The high status given to science, and to ecology within science, particularly when formulated in terms of energetic, put Soviet ecology in the 1920s and all the way till 1932-3 miles and years ahead of its counterparts anywhere else. Indeed, his career would not have been possible without the opportunities provided by the expansion of education and

the opening of so many science research institutions. When not reduced to a set of dogmatic utterances, Marxism, in fact, challenged scientists into questioning issues and doing creative thinking. One need not argue that even in the 1920s it was all "protective colouring" in order to survive, unless one has an axe to grind.

The difference that Stalinism brought is best represented by the fawning passage of Maxim Gorky, an opponent of the October Revolution who managed to reconcile himself with the Stalinist regime:

"Stalin holds a pencil. Before him lies a map of the region. Deserted shores. Remote villages. Virgin soil, covered with boulders. Primeaval forests. Too much forest as a matter of fact; it covers the best soil. And swamps. The swamps are always crawling about, making life dull and slovenly. Tillage must be increased. The swamps must be drained. ... The Karelian Republic wants to enter the stage of classless society as a republic of factories and mills. And the Karelian Republic will enter classless society by changing its own nature." [32]