

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV480 January 2015

DEBT

Thomas Piketty and public debt

UKRAINE

The oligarchic rebellion in the Donbas

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Namibia's emerging urban-
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SPANISH STATE

"Build Podemos, defending our ideas adapted to the reality of experience and our activists"

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

This was not obvious: what would come out of such a combination, the friends of Pablo Iglesias, independents and ourselves? The decision was not easy to take.

You were able to take it, on the basis of your experience but also because you are supported by one of the qualities of our international current, a certain degree of sensitivity to the real movement. Sensitivity, which has been borne by a revolutionary Marxist, non-sectarian, tradition that has been bequeathed to us by our older comrades, like comrade Daniel Pereyra, veteran Trotskyist, present at this rostrum and other comrades to whom you have paid tribute, like Miguel Romero. The young generations have also learned from other experiences, with their strong and weak points, in the construction of broad anti-capitalist parties.

Your experience, with that of Greece, is very important, because it imprints as positive a dynamic as possible to the political situation in your country, whereas the situation remains very difficult for the class struggle in the rest of Europe:

- The crisis of the capitalist system, which exploded in 2007-2008, has exacerbated the deep underlying trends of counter-neoliberal reforms which have gone on for more than 35 years without discontinuities. While here and there a Keynesian turn was predicted in response to the crisis, there were on the contrary more neoliberal capitalist attacks.

- This long period of neoliberal counter-reforms combined with capitalist globalization and the collapse of the USSR and the Soviet bloc have created, with the policies of the bureaucratic reformist leaderships, the conditions for a historic decline of the traditional workers' movement. The social democ-

atic and post-Stalinist parties have been frontally damaged, but the revolutionary left has not escaped this overall crisis.

- In this context, there is a thrust, in almost the whole of Europe, from the right, the ultra-right and the extreme right.

- Then, yes there is some social resistance to the policies of austerity, but these struggles have not reversed the course of these policies and especially they have not created a political translation which would have been embodied in a growth of organizations or currents of the social and workers' movement.

There has been no political correspondence except in two countries: Greece with Syriza and Podemos in the Spanish state. This is what makes the generalization of the Greek and Spanish examples difficult, without taking anything away from their tactical and strategic importance in the fight against austerity policies in Europe.

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We cannot understand Podemos without the 15-M, the crisis of the post-Franco transition and the collapse of the PSOE. You cannot understand Syriza without the 30 days of national strikes experienced by the Greek people and the fall of the Pasok. Once again, we cannot generalize these examples, but they indicate the potential for reorganization of the popular movement.

In your discussion, the characterisation of Podemos as "reformist" has been advanced. It should be clarified. Of course, there are reformist ideas in Podemos, borne in particular by its leadership: a tendency to the moderation of anti-crisis demands; a conception of the use of the state imported from

the Chavista experience, that cannot work in a major developed capitalist country precisely because the state is in the service of the caste or more exactly of the dominant classes ; a conception of the people which is substituted for classes and which, by its extensive nature, may lead to the conciliation of classes; finally, the "personalist" conceptions of leadership of the movement defended by Pablo Iglesias.

But this is not the reformism of the bureaucratic apparatus of social democracy, the post-Stalinist parties or of the trade union leadership. This reformism is not crystallized in the bureaucratic apparatus of the labour movement or by integration in the state apparatus. Things can change, but at this stage - a year after the creation of Podemos - it is important to grasp the specificity of this reformism.

This has two consequences:

- The first is that in these conditions, the dominant classes, the summits of the state apparatus cannot have confidence in Podemos and its leadership to control the situation;
- And the second is precisely that, despite all the systems of organization, the "Podemos" wave which has engulfed the country also prevents a tight control of the movement. Remember that Podemos has its roots in the 15-M, a libertarian social movement.

In this situation, not everything is written: there are uncertainties, possible bifurcations, open scenarios.

In this framework, the major axis of your politics corresponds to the needs of the anti-capitalist and revolutionary struggle.

First, grasp well the current moment. Things are not settled. In Greece or Spain, the social democratic parties are considerably weakened, but things are not settled. The right remains strong and there will be all sorts of manoeuvres to prevent a victory of Podemos, from direct confrontation to all possible combinations of PSOE-PP national unity or pseudo-technocratic governments. First we must

do everything to beat the right and the PSOE and ensure the victory of Podemos.

It is also necessary to deploy a radical democratic politics and give it a social content: anti-austerity demands like the dynamic in Greece for the rejection of the memoranda of the troika, the cancellation of the illegitimate debt, the implementation of a program that begins to meet the social needs of the population.

It is not about defending the entire socialist program but choosing a few key demands which have a transitional dynamic starting from basic needs but posing the problem of a redistribution of wealth and a different organization of the economy, breaking with productivism, for example. This transitional approach should be realized practically by the defence of social rights: the increase of minimum wages and the defence of employment and public services. And this, to be consolidated, must lead to incursions into capitalist ownership, in particular the nationalization/socialization of the banks.

The same goes on the political and institutional level, we must advance the need for constituent processes breaking with the regime and ensuring the self-determination of the peoples of the Spanish state, especially in Catalonia. Here there is a divergence with the leadership of Podemos.

This must be done, step by step – not in an incantatory or ultimatum manner. This must be done by respecting the experience, the level of mobilization and awareness of the popular classes. We must invent the words to talk of the struggle against austerity and the need to break with capitalism. Pablo Iglesias gave as a model of political communication the watchwords of the Bolsheviks: "Peace, land, freedom". He is right, but it must be added for the sake of accuracy that these simple slogans had as their objective the mobilization of the peoples of Russia to overthrow the Tsarist state.

Finally, one of the strong points of Syriza and Podemos is to ask a question of government and power. Up to now, Syriza has employed the formula

of a "government of lefts". Today the temptations are emerging, among the leadership of Syriza, to defend the proposal of a government of national unity. The left of Syriza is opposed to such a government. It sums up the formula of a "government of lefts" by giving it the content of a "Syriza-KKE-Antarsya" government applying an anti-austerity programme. If Syriza won, it will quickly be at the crossroads, it will have to choose between fidelity to the fight against austerity or concessions in the face of pressure from the troika.

Podemos wants to win and form a "Podemos government". The question of content and program remains open. In these conditions, we must move advance the first elements of response for a "left government", an anti-austerity government, which begins to apply anti-capitalist measures and registers a break with the regime. If there is a "Podemos" government, we will support all the positive measures and we will criticize those which do not correspond to the needs of the people, placing mobilization and social self-organization at the centre: "el poder popular".

Many delegates have said "Somos Podemos", and it is actually correct. We are militants of this movement that we have built since the beginning. Today you transform Izquierda anticapitalista: from a party to a movement. These are the rules adopted by Podemos which impose it.

But to "make an anti-capitalist movement" does not mean a dissolution or dilution. You have defended

for several decades a certain tradition, I am sure that you will continue. I am sure that you will continue to defend your ideas. "Making a movement" does not mean doing less politics; on the contrary, it is more politics, more exchange of experiences, more initiatives of debates to interact with activists of Podemos and the popular movement.

The state of mind that you have shown in this congress is to build Podemos defending our ideas adapted to the reality of experience, of its militants. Finally, and this is on the basis of our history and other experiences of construction, there is a point to which you are going to face; it is the relationship between the construction of Podemos and Izquierda anticapitalista as a popular movement, as well as the conquest of electoral positions.

To advance our ideas, we must, of course, defend them before the people, and contest elections, at all levels, from the commune to the assemblies, but the elected representatives must use the institutions for the development of class struggle and, in your own construction, the tasks of intervention and popular implantation must remain our priorities.

To conclude, your experience like that of Greece is decisive: it is here where the chains of austerity can be broken. Please be aware that we will do everything to ensure your struggle enjoys international solidarity.

FRANCE

Racism: an outpouring of Islamophobia

JULIEN SALINGUE ·

An Islamophobia that was already present

We could almost have forgotten, in fact, that on the morning of January 7, a few hours before the attack against *Charlie Hebdo*, the "special guest" on the morning programme of France Inter was Michel Houellebecq, author of a "novel of anticipation" in which a Muslim party comes to power in France in 2022: women sent back to the home, polygamy, the flight of the narrator's girlfriend, who is Jewish, to Israel, to avoid persecution, etc. No cliché is lacking to describe an "Islamized" French society, a victim of the "great replacement" fantasized by part of the far right and by the ideologue Renaud Camus.

We could almost have forgotten that a few weeks earlier, it was not Houellebecq's book that was "front page news" in the press and in television and radio broadcasts, but one by another unsavoury character, Eric Zemmour, who has long made Islamophobia one of his principal trademarks and the "Islamization of France" one of his main battle cries.

Zemmour has the right to think whatever he wants, and Houellebecq has the right to write paranoid and stigmatizing novels. The problem is the echo their works receive and the way they are treated by the media, in other words, the normalization, the rendering banal of ideas, which though they are directly inspired by the Islamophobic far right, acquire the status of legitimate debate in society. All of this in a France that is gangrened by Islamophobia in action, with, according to the annual report of the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), 691 Islamophobic acts in 2013

(cases of discrimination, attacks against places of worship, assaults against persons etc.), which represents an increase of 47 per cent compared to 2012.

They are Muslims, so they must be a bit guilty...

The attack against *Charlie Hebdo* has therefore not contributed to awakening a slumbering Islamophobia: it has amplified a phenomenon that was already well in evidence, and which affects all spheres of society. Hours after the attack, unpleasant political-media music was heard: since the killers acted in the name of Islam, Muslims should condemn them and "dissociate themselves from solidarity" with them, individually and collectively. However, this injunction to refuse to be in solidarity with them is not only outrageous, but it is also particularly perverse: it is scandalous because it de facto amalgamates millions of believers with a few assassins; it is perverse because it casts collective suspicion on those millions of believers and implies that those who do not declare that they are not in solidarity with the assassins... must be in solidarity with them.

There are multiple examples of these injunctions to dissociate from solidarity, but the most exemplary of them is probably that of Ivan Rioufol, a leader writer for *Figaro*, who on RTL, the day after the attack, demanded that the activist and author Rokhaya Diallo declare loud and clear that she dissociated herself from any solidarity with the assassins of *Charlie Hebdo*.

Has anyone ever asked Protestants to "dissociate themselves from solidarity" with the Ku Klux Klan and its white supremacist ideas, which are theorized around a certain reading of Genesis? At the time of the massacre perpetrated in Norway on July 22, 2011 by Anders Breivik, who claimed to be act-

ing to preserve Christianity in the face of multiculturalism, did anyone ask priests and believers to account for themselves? Obviously, and fortunately, no. But Muslims in the France in 2015 are always "a bit" guilty.

More and more Islamophobic acts

It is no surprise, then, that in such a context and with such amalgams, there have been more and more examples of Islamophobia in action. In the five days after the attack against Charlie Hebdo, there were sixty Islamophobic acts recorded: shots fired at a prayer room in Port-la-Nouvelle and on mosques in Saint-Juéry, Vendôme, Soissons; an attack with training grenades on a mosque in Le Mans; graffiti on mosques in Poitiers ("death to Arabs"), Bischwiller ("Ich bin Charlie"), Bayonne ("charliberty", "murderers," "dirty Arabs"),

Louviers (swastikas); a boar's head and entrails found hanging on the door of a prayer room in Corte; and many cases of verbal and physical abuse, which are for the moment impossible to count.

This is the moment that Nicolas Sarkozy chose to publish on his Twitter account on January 12 this singular appeal for calm: "the questions of immigration and Islam are clearly posed. They should be asked calmly and by involving everyone"... And the embarrassed reactions of Socialist leaders who were asked about this statement give cause for concern.

In other words, the fight against racist and Islamophobic amalgams and the violence that accompanies them is just beginning.

This article was first published in L'Anticapitaliste, weekly paper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France, No 272, January 15, 2015

| MOZAMBIQUE:

A dictatorship of no alternatives, or an alternative to the dictators?

BOAVENTURA MONJANE ·

But none of this appeared to be reason enough for the Electoral Commission and Constitutional Council to nullify the elections and call for re-run, or even to investigate with the intention of improving the electoral process. These two institutions are accused of serving only to keep the ruling party in power by validating the flawed electoral outcomes. The same political party has ruled the country since its independence in 1975.

One Frelimo leader, Alberto Chipande, recently stated publicly that "Frelimo plans to rule for the next 50 years". In other words, no matter what the will of the people, Mozambicans will have to forget about change in power for at least another half a century.

We have recently witnessed an increase in popular discontent, mainly in urban areas. This led some analysts to predict Frelimo's fall from the throne of power. However, this has not happened. Frelimo and its political dictatorship prevail.

The newly elected president, Filipe Nyusi takes over a country in a dire economic and sociopolitical situation. The economy is growing fast, as evidenced by rising GDP and increased flows of foreign direct investment into Mozambique. This is juxtaposed, however, against increasing poverty amongst the population – a stone in Nyusi's shoe that could hobble his presidency.

On the political front, the Mozambique Government and National Resistance of Mozambique (Renamo) are negotiating the integration of the latter's armed guerrillas into the national army and police. This integration has recently

been stalled by the fallout between Frelimo and Renamo, which led to several months of armed conflict in different parts of the country.

In Sofala province, the Renamo rebels' attacks have caused nervousness and uncertainty among international investors in the nation's coal, gas and other mineral sectors. Although many of Renamo's demands in the negotiations have now been met, it doesn't look like this political impasse will easily be broken. An unprecedented awakening within the social movements has been the result.

Filipe Nyusi will lead a country that has a stronger civil society that has been critical about the development model and Mozambique political situation, and at times has mobilised the public to protest against the government. The emergence of new restless social movements in rural and urban areas is highly likely.

Political consciousness has greatly increased among the urban population, as has that of watchdog groups in many sectors of the society. So the new president will have to deal with a more confrontational civil society that will question his actions as well as his political and economical choices – indeed, that will challenge his presidency as a whole.

It will be interesting to see how he will respond. Will he regard this as a normal phenomenon in a country consolidating its democracy and sense of citizenship, or as a challenge to his tenure that must be squashed? Nyusi's predecessor, Armando Guebuza, preferred to undermine popular discontent and label those who questioned his choices as prophets of doom.

Nyusi will have to deal with serious allegations on the part of civil society and some intellectuals, who decry the re-emergence of neocolonialism in the country in the form of investment by multinational corporations and foreign governments. Such investment has dispossessed and displaced poor and vulnerable communities in areas such as Central Tete province, as was the case with Brazilian giant Vale, with Rio Tinto, and with other companies.

It should be noted that this phenomenon emerged gradually during the post-civil war government of Joaquim Chissano, but it worsened after Armando Guebuza came to power in 2005. Guebuza is seen as one of the strongest men in the neoliberal wing of Frelimo, which seems to be growing and overshadowing the party's more conservative wing.

The new president seems to be a competent disciple of Guebuza, who in turn appears to trust Nyusi and supported his presidential candidacy.

Satisfy voters or obey the boss?

In fact some analysts consider Nyusi to be a pawn of outgoing president Guebuza, who is also the current president of Frelimo. They think that he will obey the 'boss', lacking sufficient power to chart his own course. Anne Fruhauf, an analyst at Teneo Intelligence once said that "Nyusi's election would strengthen Guebuza's ability to influence policy until at least 2017".

Others have been more cautious and called for people to reserve judgment over Nyusi's leadership, arguing that he presents an opportunity for new ideas, inspired by the youth, because he does not belong to Guebuza's generation. Unfortunately, the young Nyusi may not have enough power to reverse the rot of corruption and dictatorial tendencies within Frelimo.

Optimists may have been mesmerised by his campaign speeches, in which he made promises and emphasized ideals and ethics. Many of Nyusi's campaign messages identified with the poor and weak sectors of the society, promising inclusive governance. But it would not be surprising if, once

in office, he defends 'pragmatism' and the supremacy of markets – just like his predecessors.

Political vacuum

Compared with neighbours like South Africa, Mozambique has a weak political opposition. Despite the fact that Afonso Dlakhamba's party, Renamo, has repositioned itself as the main opposition party – a force not to be taken for granted – there is a clear political vacuum in terms of multi-party democracy. The recent emergence of the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), considered the third political opposition in terms of electorate support base, is seen by some as offering an alternative in Mozambique politics.

It is necessary to analyse the meaning of political alternatives here, and an analogy from the field of media may shed light. Having a new TV or radio channel, or a new newspaper, does not mean one has alternative media. In order to represent an 'alternative', a new channel has to differ from the mainstream in many dimensions: content, aesthetic, modes of production, modes of distribution and audience relations. Most importantly, it should challenge existing power and represent marginalised groups. 'Alternative' should not mean merely additional choices of fixed, mutually exclusive options, but adding political dynamism, bringing vibrancy to the political arena. This opens space to further democracy and opportunity to build equality, socially and economically.

Mozambique lacks a significant political opposition that could deliver this dynamism – that defends and stands for an alternate development model or political system, inclined to the left. Opposition parties seem merely to say they will be less corrupt than the ruling party. During electoral campaign, even Frelimo candidates used some leftist language to canvass support among the electorate. This is not new because political elites are used to talking left but walking right. No one is promising to stop the looting of the national wealth. Formation of new political parties will not fill the political vacu-

um that exists. For genuine alternatives, we must look to social movements.

Social movements' resistance to fill the vacuum

Although formal political opposition parties are essential, a country like Mozambique needs strong social movements, since these are the only forces that can carry out real social mobilisation (or demobilisation) to control and challenge the regime and political parties monopoly of representation. If well organised and articulated, peasants' movements, unions, unemployed movements and the urban and rural poor will press for more popular participation in decision-making and a more positive application of democratic rights.

In recent years there have been several manifestations of resistance to and rejection of land grabbing, as well as the applied 'development' model by civil society organisations in some major cities and popular uprising in some rural areas. For example, the Mozambique Union of Farmers (União Nacional de Camponeses, UNAC) is leading a national campaign to halt ProSavana, an agribusiness mega project led by Japan and Brazil for agricultural development in Northern Mozambique. UNAC sees ProSavana as an inefficient development model. Such manifestations, if well articulated between movements, will make meaningful democratic impacts and will contribute to filling in the clearly existing political vacuum in the nation of Samora Machel.

GREECE

The results of the Greek elections

ANTARSYA ·

1. Today's election result is a heavy defeat for the reactionary government forces ND and PASOK. By condemning these forces along with all the forces who took part in the attack (KIDISO, DIMAR, LAOS) and voting for SYRIZA the people expressed its' indignation against the brutality of the attack, the overcoming of fear and the decision that those who have brought us to this point leave, and Greece turns page.

2. The third position of the criminal gang of Golden Dawn is an extremely negative result which shows that against fascist ideas and practices, a constant front is required – not only so that the Nazis' are condemned for life, but also so that their support from the police and the state is rooted out. A battle is required to eradicate fascist and racist poison from neighborhoods, schools and workplaces.

3. The result of the political collaboration of ANTARSYA-MARS is a positive one. It reflects the influence of the other road, of rupture with the debt, the euro, the EU and the forces of capital which of higher significance than recorded by elections. It captured the protest and warning towards the right turn of SYRIZA. The political collaboration gave additional momentum to the election results and boosts the prospect of continuing and deepening the project. Overall, the result gives us

the strength to continue to intervene more decisively in the future.

4. In the near future, SYRIZA will test from government positions the policy which seeks a "relief" for the people within the context of the Eurozone and the EU treaties. ANTARSYA insists that without ceasing debt repayment, without a rupture with the EU and the euro, without nationalizing banks and large businesses under workers' control, the hope of the labor movement and the people will not be vindicated. Without waiting and without any grace period, ANTARSYA will contribute to the labor and popular counter-attack and will fight so that measures in the interests of the people are imposed, so that the memoranda are negated, so that the struggles are linked with the program of the anti-capitalist overthrow in the context of a left, labor and popular opposition.

5. The central committee of ANTARSYA salutes the comrades and friends of ANTARSYA-MARS who fought the battle with self denial. It will assess the outcome and experience in a collective and comradely way and will plan the next steps while insisting on the path of frontal cooperation of the forces which seek the left of rupture and overthrow. It will intervene with even greater determination in this new period of heightened social and political struggles which lies ahead.

Athens, 26.1.2015

GREECE

The tasks for the left after SYRIZA's victory

DEA ·

1. The defeat of the coalition government of Antonis Samaras and Evangelos Venizelos in the January 25 elections is a historic political victory of the forces of social resistance.

The working class and the popular masses in Greece have struggled constantly since the outbreak of the crisis and the introduction of the Memorandums, challenging the agreements made by the Greek class with the Troika and international lenders, which have imposed a brutal austerity policy. This election victory is the result of the general strikes, mass demonstrations, the "movement of the squares" and decisive sectoral and local struggles that have continued, despite the decline of the great wave of resistance between 2010 and 2012.

During this time, the people who participated in these grassroots struggles expressed a set of demands, hopes and expectations that remains alive today. At the center of them is the demand for the overturning and reversal of austerity, and despite the smears of the mainstream media, they have insisted on placing their hopes on the left to accomplish this. This is the basis of the election victory of SYRIZA, which grew larger than many expected, as well as the vote for the Greek Communist Party.

2. The massive shift to the left, while manifested in the results from January 25, gives SYRIZA more political momentum than is revealed by its 149 seats in parliament—which is just short of the 151 seats needed for an outright parliamentary majority.

Despite the scandalous support of local and international conservative forces, the New Democracy party of Antonis Samaras sank to 27.8 percent of the vote, marking a new low point for its

influence. New Democracy emerged from the electoral battle deeply wounded, both politically and strategically. The differences between right-wing populism, with its emphasis on racism and nationalism, and the "social radicalism" of traditional center-right, will inevitably emerge again inside New Democracy. For now, it is unknown whether there is a united future for conservative party in the area it has dominated on the right.

3. The decision of the leadership of SYRIZA to form a coalition government with the Independent Greeks [known by its initials ANEL, it is a populist right-wing party that holds nationalist positions, but is also against the Memorandums] led by Panos Kammenos, underestimates this dynamic.

Forming a coalition wasn't a necessary response to the outcome of the elections, as a way of winning a confidence vote in parliament—not so long as the commitments at Thessaloniki [where Alexis Tsipras unveiled a "reconstruction" plan that he said would be the first steps of a new government of the left once it took office] and the program of the founding conference of SYRIZA are taken as a guide.

The decision of the SYRIZA conference, which was confirmed in its founding declaration, repeated the longstanding rejection of searching for political alliances with the center-left. We believe that applies—much more so!—to alliances with the center-right.

Crossing this "red line" to form a coalition government with ANEL contradicts the mood of a large part of SYRIZA's membership. It was also act as a tether that will transfer pressure from the system as a whole onto the government of the left.

Under these conditions, the coalition agreement with ANEL jeopardizes the political project for a

government of the left with a transitional policy and strategy.

4. For members and supporters of SYRIZA, for the whole left, for activists in the social movements, new circumstances have arisen.

The implementation of the commitments made at Thessaloniki will be the first stop for the new government. Restoring the minimum wage to its pre-crisis level; returning to the additional pension payments for the poor that were abolished under the Memorandum; re-establishing collective labor agreements; and lastly, restoring the exemption on income taxes up to the minimum level of 12,000 euros and abolishing the United Estate Property Tax [an unfair tax on any property, even if it is empty, that was implemented as a temporary measure under Samaras and later made permanent] and the special tax on heating oil—all this should be the first strong political message to stop the downhill slide caused by austerity.

Returning to the starting point with these essential measures should open the way for the overthrow of austerity, once and for all—to overturn all of the Memorandum laws and measures! At the same time, restoring the jobs of the workers at ERT [the public radio and television station closed down by the government in the spring of 2013], the cleaners at the Ministry of Finance [who have also waged a long struggle after they were fired when their jobs were subcontracted] and others will send an equally important message, both to working people on our side, and to the other side.

5. In these new circumstances, the role of SYRIZA as a political party is irreplaceable. The functioning of its organizational bodies and membership, with collective participation and democracy throughout the party, is not an optional extra, but a pre-condition for the final victory of SYRIZA, and the final victory of the whole of the left and of our people.

Internationalist Workers Left
January 27, 2015.

GREECE

Echoes of the end of the campaign

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS ·

However, on the one hand this comfortable advance could be reduced in the last moments, on the other hand it perhaps underestimates the final score of the Nazis of Chryssi Avgi, people hesitating to state they intend to vote for a criminal organization. Moreover, even with 36%, Syriza would lack 1 or 2 members of parliament necessary for an absolute majority, without having to negotiate with another parliamentary force.

Nevertheless, less than 2 days before the election, the trends are confirmed.

The Samaras line defeated

Except for a really bad surprise or last minute provocation, the internal troika's policy has been, we hope severely, defeated. Because Pasok, allied with Samaras, is in free fall: it is credited with 4.5%. Worse, its leader, the ultra neo-liberal Vanizelos, vice Prime Minister, is today, unashamedly and without joking, proposing to cooperate with Syriza. In this unfunny comic series, the Pasok former leader and Prime Minister George Papandreou has also done well: resigning from the party created by his father, he has just created his own group, the Movement of Democratic Socialists (KODISO), attracting many historical cadres of the PASOK. Credited with less than 3% - the minimum score to have 1 MP, he nevertheless considers himself the Bonaparte of the moment: he has just relaunched his proposal for a referendum on the memoranda, a gadget first launched in 2011 when, called on by Syriza and the KKE to organize parliamentary elections for having totally betrayed its 2009 promises, he thought up this way out, which was immediately rejected by all the Greek left. Comrades in France, influenced by 2005 referen-

dum on the European constitutional treaty, at that time considered it mistaken that the left rejected this proposal. Papandreou is today giving the instructions for use of his proposal which leave is no doubt: this referendum must of course be agreed between the Greek government and its international creditors! The worst or the stupidest point is that Papandreou calls on the right and Samaras to give him an answer on this referendum which he is asking for just after the elections, affirming that he will be tomorrow the pivot of the political line which the new government will have to follow...

On the right: Samaras, as well as his policy choice of plunging the greek people into poverty (and want to continue, if he remains in power), Samaras seems harmed by his campaign on an extreme rightwing line. Obviously, the "red fear" effect is not enough, in spite of the incredible campaign of campaign broadcasts highlighting the catastrophe that will occur from Sunday evening Syriza wins. Voultepsi, the spokesperson, indicates he is afraid that his children will not have milk for their breakfast Monday morning, and the former fascist activist, Voridis, Minister of Health, states that it is out of the question to leave Greece in the hands of Syriza. A lot of bluster, which apparently does not even convince many right-wing voters, many of whom are also affected by the crisis and not very receptive to the economic recovery "success story". This choice of a campaign addressed in particular to the far-right (nazi) voters perhaps aims to re-compose the Greek right wing an extreme right pole (Samaras and "former" recycled fascists like Voridis and Georgiadis) alongside those whom the former-advisor of Samaras, Baltakos, calls "the healthy part of Chryssi Avgi", for the time being, it is producing a fracture, with a historical part of New Democracy taking its distance rather firmly,

while rewriting the history of their reactionary party by describing it as "centre right". A defeat of Samaras will certainly lead to a severe internal battle!

Concerning the far right, it is better not to forget the Nazis of Chryssi Avgi (Golden Dawn). Although this organization, officially described as criminal, was able to campaign, it was relatively discreet, but there were still violent attacks and their bully boys had a campaign stall in front of their central headquarters, staffed by the tough guys. The score of the Nazis will be of course an important element: although the chiefs are in prison, none the reasons of their growth have disappeared, and we can fear a score higher than the estimate, with the possibility that they are the third party.... We must also pay attention to the figures in the polling stations in districts where there is a concentration of police housing, they voted in mass for these Nazis. This time, there are several soldiers among the candidates. It is remarkable that during this Thursday meeting, the only thing Tsipras said on the police was the means necessary to achieve their mission, without even mentioning the importance of "democratizing" the police, as the reformist parties used to say...

On the left, before and after the elections

On the left, the international media only mention Syriza, a classic electoralist bent of the middle-class press! Certainly, within its framework Syriza is waging a good campaign, quite similar to Papandreou's Pasok campaigns: rather general left speeches to popular public gathering many young people but also, it was striking on Thursday in Athens, many former voters of Pasok, who had not come to the meetings in the previous elections. Nevertheless, these meetings show two limits: behind the left rhetoric, the absence of precise commitments on key questions and which tomorrow will require determined mobilizations. Thus, the European Union - because today it is moderating its aggressiveness towards Greece? - was not mentioned on Thursday as responsible for the party

misery and illegal measures imposed on the country, and against whose policy we must fight tomorrow through European mobilizations and not by experts' negotiations ...

Other limits notable: the Syriza meetings are big, but nothing compared to the giant Pasok meetings when it was all-powerful, and in particular less numerous than the KKE central meeting in Athens on Thursday, which was twice as big. A problem for today, and even more for tomorrow? Because the KKE leadership offers only one thing to this massive militant force: sectarianism, strengthening as the days Syriza and the rightwing are the same thing, and thus what is needed is a "popular alliance", central slogan that is never clarified other than to reinforce the KKE! In the poll quoted, the KKE would win 5,5% of the votes, whereas its goal is to become the third party. There again, the result of the vote is important: too low a score would strengthen the criticisms against the line of growing isolation that has been continuing for some years.

What the KKE counts on is widely-shared feeling on the left that Syriza is worse than Pasok of the 1980s (the 2000s are not even mentioned!), a judgement evoked this week in an article by Amélie Poinssot on Mediapart (radical French news site). But as the anticapitalist coalition Antarsya is also speaking to these workers and young people the KKE solves the difficulty by putting Antarsya on the same plan as Syriza!

This the difficulty for the Antarsya campaign: how to really get rid of the austerity policies – this is not the really the line of the Syriza leadership – while fighting in the unity – against the sectarianism of the KKE! It is very probable that the score of Antarsya in these elections – some still believe in a high score... – will be surely rather low, but the campaign is making it possible to reveal it as a national force with several thousands of rooted activists involved in the struggles. This is important for the future which, no matter what happens, will require a strengthening of the anticapitalist left, whether it is today in or outside Syriza.

Athens,

23 January 2015

UKRAINE

The oligarchic rebellion in the Donbas

ZBIGNIEW MARCIN KOWALEWSKI ·

At the same time, the Maidan considered that it was the leaders of the opposition who had capitulated. In the darkness, over the heads of a huge and very angry crowd, through this sea of flames from candles, floated the coffins of those who had been killed.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klychko and Oleh Tiahnybok gave an account of the negotiations and defended the agreement. The Maidan responded with a hostile uproar. Tiahnybok spoke, trying to control the state of mind of the masses. The commander of one of the self-defence companies of the Maidan, Volodymyr Parasiuk, aged 27, pushed his way through the crowd, went up onto the stage, grabs the microphone and makes a short and very emotional speech that, from the first sentences, became part of history: "We are not members of any organization, we are just the people of Ukraine. (...) We, the simple people, say to our politicians who are there behind me: no Yanukovych - none! - will be president for the rest of the year. He must clear off before 10 a.m. tomorrow." The Maidan thundered its applause, affirming its enthusiastic support. "Our leaders shook hands with this murderer. Shame!" "Shame," answered the crowd. "If by tomorrow 10 a.m. you do not present a declaration saying that Yanukovych must resign, we will go on the attack, weapons in hand! I swear!" [1] The agreement signed a few hours before had just ceased to exist. Learning what had happened in his armed forces and on the Maidan, Yanukovych fled Kiev by helicopter before midnight. His regime had collapsed.

It is impossible to hold back genuine popular revolutions. They surprise themselves. That is both their very great strength and their astonishing weakness. Lawrence of Arabia - who knew a bit

about what revolutions are - wrote that their participants "are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible" [2]. Revolutions do not take into account the balance of forces. The Maidan, by deciding to finally break the colonial relationship that had bound Ukraine to Russia for three centuries, and to this end turning towards the European Union, measured its forces according to its aspirations. However Russian imperialism, very much weakened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has already been reborn [3]. The restoration of its dominance over Ukraine is of primary strategic importance for Russia. Hence the immediate counter-attack.

The empire counter-attacks

Russia was able to seize the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol – the Russian Guantanamo – by taking advantage of the very great military weakness of Ukraine. In 1994 the United States and Britain, jointly with Russia, convinced what was then the world's third nuclear power to abandon its nuclear weapons in exchange for a paper - worthless as it turned out, twenty years later - the Budapest Memorandum [4]. Later, following the efforts of Senator Barack Obama, backed by Congress and by President George W. Bush, Ukraine allowed the United States to destroy a large part of its conventional weapons [5]. Thus Russia was able to proceed with the annexation almost without firing a shot. Fearing a military conflict with Russia, the Western political and media elites legitimized the annexation: almost nobody questioned the announcement that 83 per cent of the electorate participated in the annexation referendum. The suggestion was clear: even if there were falsifications, we know that the Russian-speaking population is a majority in Crimea and we know what it chose. The world media were silent

about the radically different data provided by the leaders of the Crimean Tatars. They did not make known the report of Yevgeny Bobrov, published by the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights of the Russian Federation. Bobrov revealed that "in Crimea, according to various sources, 50 to 60 per cent of voters voted in favour of union with Russia, while the turnout was between 30 and 50 per cent; the inhabitants of Crimea voted not so much in favour of union with Russia, but to put an end - using their words - 'to corrupt illegality and the rule of protected Donetsk thieves'", protégés of the regime which had just been overthrown, in other words, of the oligarchy of Donbas [6]. The oligarchy is the popular term in Ukraine for local monopoly capital.

The Russian Colonel Igor Girkin, who would later be "Minister of Defence of the Donetsk People's Republic", known as Strelkov, took part in the annexation of Crimea. He said: "It was clear that there was no question of limiting ourselves to Crimea. Crimea as part of Novorossiia (New Russia) is a colossal conquest, a brilliant jewel in the crown of the Russian Empire. But Crimea alone, separated by isthmuses of a hostile state - is not the same thing. When the Ukrainian government was collapsing before our eyes, delegates from the oblasts of Novorossiia were constantly coming to Crimea, wanting to repeat at home what had taken place in Crimea." [7] Novorossiia is the old colonial name of South-East Ukraine. With the rebirth of Russian imperialism we observe the return of imperial titles - New Russia and Little Russia.

Bastion of monopoly capital

After hundreds of years of colonial rule, Ukraine is the most regionally unbalanced European country. The Donbas, adjacent to Russia, a big centre of heavy industry - the coal and steel region - is the main bastion of monopoly capital. From the point of view of the concentration of capital it far exceeds other regions. Two researchers who analyzed the restoration of capitalism in the Donbas, Vlad Mykhnenko and Adam Swain, have long warned

that the dominant perceptions of the region "from both the liberal and the Marxist tradition, are at least in part the product of a colonial Western-centric view" [8]. The point is that "through the prism of nationality, ideology and geopolitics, the country is divided into an 'east', supposedly dominated by an anti-market nomenklatura influenced by the legacies of anti-Western Soviet ideology and the Russian Orthodox Church, and a 'west', supposedly the crucible of Ukrainian national identity and dominated by pro-reform, pro-Western and anti-establishment politics" [9].

However, comparative research on two old industrial regions, structurally similar, in Eastern Europe, indicates that capitalism has a more neoliberal character in the Donbas than in Upper Silesia (southern Poland), whereas Upper Silesia is a region which is part of the European Union. Mykhnenko demonstrates that "Upper Silesia's [relatively, of course - zmk] generous social protection sector and high levels of public spending on health care and other social services have resulted in the region's steadily improving human development indicators. In turn, the dramatic decline in a number of crucial human survival and development indicators, which has been experienced by the post-communist Donbas, was caused by ever decreasing public expenditure on health and additional social services, and, generally, by the relatively low role of the state in the welfare system" [10]

Predatory monopoly capital, largely formed in a very short time in the Donbas with political, criminal and other extra-economic means of accumulation, unified in the late 1990s, blocking access to the region to the other competitor capitals, and seized regional political power through the Party of Regions. In exchange for the support given to President Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005) it obtained for the Donbas, that is to say for itself, large economic autonomy and great privileges. This is the only Ukrainian region that has benefited from such privileges. "This is only possible because of the co-operation amongst the local elite to defend their extra-profits (...) that in turn create the material pre-

conditions for the elite groups to gradually penetrate the state administration. Whilst the region is de facto economically autonomous, there is no pressure for increased political autonomy but rather a concentration on business expansion beyond the region's borders." [11].

This is how it was in the early years of the 21st century. One of the best Western specialists in the history of the Donbas, Hiroaki Kuromiya, even said that the Donbas is capable of jumping ahead of other regions "to embrace a capitalist and democratic Europe" [12], in other words getting on with the realization of neoliberal reforms in the whole country.

Taking power centrally

In 2004 the expansion of Donbas monopoly capital led to its first attempt to seize power centrally: the falsification of the elections to ensure the presidency of Ukraine to its political representative, the candidate of the Party of Regions, Yanukovich. The outbreak of the "Orange Revolution" prevented it, for a short time. Employing sophisticated research methods, Mykhnenko determined that "a region's class composition was the single most important factor behind [Viktor] Yushchenko's electoral success in 2004", because "the Orange victory was achieved by the majority of votes cast in the *least* bourgeois areas of the country". Yanukovich, on the contrary, won the support of voters especially "where the urban capitalist class had been the most developed" [13]. Nine years later, in the different regions, popular support for the "Revolution of Dignity" on the Maidan was generally similar to that of the "Orange Revolution". At the end of January 2014 this support was very strong in the west (80 per cent), considerable in the centre of the country (51 per cent), low in the south (20 per cent) and very low in the east (8 per cent, ten times less than in the west). To the contrary, support for the regime of Yanukovich was strong in the East (52 per cent), low in the South (32 per cent), very low in the centre of the country (11 per cent) and in-

significant in the West (3 per cent, seventeen times less than in the East) [14].

The fact that the support for the revolution that overthrew the domination of Donbas monopoly capital was strongest where the bourgeoisie is weakest, has not so far paved the road to power for any political force with a programme representing a radical alternative to neoliberal capitalism. On the contrary, the "Revolution of Dignity" has paved the road to power for other neoliberal political forces, representing capitals that are less concentrated and much more divided politically. Reflections on why this happened will be sterile if their starting point is not the decisive element: the fact that revolutions do not produce anti-capitalist political forces. They can only put such forces at their head, which is possible only when they exist and when they materialize not in the imagination of activists, but in the reality of social movements.

The Russification of the Donbas

"From the 1940s until the first half of the 1980s the apparent internationalization of society masked the planned policy of Russification, which progressively formed the imaginary view of the Donbas as a 'Russian-speaking region'." [15] In independent Ukraine this policy was pursued by the regional oligarchic authorities. In the course of the years 1970-1989-2001, the percentage of Ukrainians considering the Ukrainian language as their mother tongue declined in the Donetsk oblast from 79 per cent to 59.6 per cent and then 41.2 per cent, and in the Luhansk oblast from 87.5 per cent to 66.4 per cent and then 50.4 per cent. Today, in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk, Ukrainians make up less than half of the inhabitants and Ukrainian-speaking residents are only 11.1 per cent in the first and 13.7 per cent in the second city. On the contrary, in the countryside the Ukrainians are a dominant majority – 73 per cent in both oblasts - and a big majority of them use Ukrainian. At present in the two oblasts Russians make up almost 40 per cent of the population [16].

"In the linguistic structure of the urban milieu we observe the maintenance through inertia of the influence of the ethno-linguistic processes of the Soviet period, marked not only by mass migration of Russians but also by their transformation into a dominant minority, while the Ukrainians became a mass ethnicity (subaltern majority)". [17] But it is not just a question of inertia. In the same way as it happened in the Soviet Union, where large urban centres were the principal terrain of the Russian colonial policy aimed at the Russification of the periphery, after the fall of the USSR the oligarchic power has pursued an active policy of the enlarged reproduction of a vision of the Donbas as a Russified region tending towards Russia.

In the geopolitics of domination of Russian imperialism in Ukraine and all along the western extent of the "Russian World" – conceived in the monarchist-orthodox manner and that of the Black Hundreds and White Guards – the Donbas is extremely important. A few years ago the Ukrainian historian Yuri Nikolaets was very clear and very farsighted on this subject. He wrote: "In the present conditions, the Donbas, as a border area between Ukraine and Russia, has become in fact one of the variants in the expansion of the Russian Federation as dominant country. This country actively plays the card of 'Donbas identity' with the aim of settling some of its political, economic and social problems by expanding its sphere of influence on Ukrainian territory. The 'language issue' linked with the expansion of the Russian language and the imaginary vision of the 'eternally Russian Donbas' thus becomes one of the means of destabilizing Ukraine. It seems however that in the economic sphere the Russian side is more interested in controlling the steel industry than in the extraction of fossil fuels. The point is that the mining industry requires significant subsidies, and even during the existence of the USSR, the profitability of coal mining in the Donbas was questioned. The control of steel-works, on the contrary, is a source of profit and of extension of the zone of influence on Ukrainian territory. For this reason what is most probable is that the

Russian population of the region will once again become hostage to the interests of the political leadership of the Russian Federation, when due to the price of Russian gas the competitiveness of Ukrainian industrial enterprises will be reduced and the standard of living of the population will decline. So, using populist slogans such as the 'brotherhood of Slavic nations,' 'support to the Russian population' in Ukraine and 'development of the spheres of use of the Russian language' in order to oppose the Ukrainization of Donbas, the social stability of the Ukrainian state will be put in question and a conflict between the eastern and western Ukrainian populations will be provoked." [18]

The oligarchic "contra"

The "Donbas contra" – such a term is particularly appropriate to the oligarchic rebellion in the Donbas because it strongly reminds us of the armed counter-revolutionary movement sponsored by the United States in Nicaragua after the overthrow of the Somoza regime. The barons of the Party of Regions and the industrial magnates already began to mobilize this "contra" during Maidan, to prevent its extension to the Donbas and to support the repressive apparatus with militias – the infamous "titushki" – sent to Kiev. A propaganda campaign on the deadly danger coming from the "Nazis, fascists and Banderaites" of the Maidan, about whom terrifying stories were spread, was unleashed, supported by the television channels of the Russian regime, hegemonic in this region. The Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), quite influential there, did not hesitate to copy the Nazi discourse on the Jewish ghettos, speaking of the Maidan – "white on the outside, black on the inside" – by comparing it to the black ghettos of the United States, described as being inhabited by idle parasites.

Let us quote this vile propaganda: "Huge piles of garbage, all kinds of infections and diseases previously unknown to medicine, is a feature of life on these reservations. Their inhabitants do not work anywhere and only receive money because they

wander aimlessly in the streets. They motivate their refusal to work by the fact that they are no longer slaves. Over there, in America, there are graffiti of Martin Luther King. Here at home, the portraits of Tymoshenko and Bandera. Here and there, they are dressed in what kindly souls have given them. Here, as on the other side of the ocean, this mess has the charming name of 'democracy.' But in this case we no longer have democracy. At least in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco the police sometimes make raids on such places and simply kill a few rabid Negroes. (...) Even the dark-skinned vendors in Kiev secondhand shops seem a bit more civilized than our 'light-skinned brothers' from the western regions of the country, who have gathered on the Maidan. 'White' on the outside, but 'black' on the inside." [19] There is nothing surprising in this explosion of racism - the CPU is a colonial party.

After the fall of the Yanukovych regime, that is to say after the loss of state power by the political and economic élite of Donbas, this élite panicked. The monopoly capital of Donbas decided to retreat to its stronghold in order to preserve its power at least there: to impose the autonomy of the region, this time political, to accept the support of Russian imperialism and if necessary, with its military support, organize secession. We know what was the role of Rinat Akhmetov, Donetsk industrial magnate and most powerful oligarch in Ukraine: "The Donetsk People's Republic was his project," admitted bluntly *Russkaya Vesna*, the website of the separatists [20]. One of the leaders of the rebellion, Pavel Gubarev, blithely recounted to the Russian media the role played in this by the Party of Regions alongside Akhmetov: "In every city the leaders of the so-called voluntary people's militia began to appear. And the party of power, our eastern oligarchs (...) started working with activists of the militia. It turned out that two thirds of these activists were already paid by Akhmetov. A small group of people remained faithful to the idea, but they still took the money. Everybody took the money!" [21]

"I pulled the trigger of war"

In the Luhansk oblast the rebellion was inspired by Aleksandr Efremov, the right hand man of Yanukovych in the Party of Regions and a man whose interests are as wide as they are shady. When in 1998-2005 he was at the head of the oblast, he organized corporate bankruptcies on a massive scale and a profound economic and social collapse [22].

It was Valery Bolotov - his former chauffeur and bodyguard, responsible for controlling the "kopanki", the illicit mines of the poor, from which he levied tribute for his boss - who became the leader of the rebellion in Luhansk and was at the beginning "Prime Minister of the Luhansk People's Republic." The "contra" and the Russian special services, which began to be active, needed more combative elements than the bureaucrats of the Party of Regions and the CPU, so the separatist movement was rapidly taken in hand by the networks of the Russian nationalist far right, long-established in the Donbas. They were soon supported by many far-right elements from Russia.

On April 6, at the head of several thousand people brought in by bus, the separatists stormed the office of the Security Service of Ukraine in Luhansk, where they seized 1,300 Kalashnikovs, assembled there for some unknown reason. It was not, however, the turning point of the first phase of the rebellion, because "in practice, it was our detachment that launched the flywheel of the war, which continues," says Strelkov, who had then entered Ukraine at the head of a detachment of 52 people and installed himself in Sloviansk. This monarchist, a supporter of the restoration of the Orthodox Russian Empire, a dog of war, typical of colonial and peripheral wars, who fought in Transnistria, in Bosnia alongside the Serb nationalists, in Chechnya and who is on the list of war criminals prepared by the Russian association Memorial, said of himself: "I pulled the trigger of war" in the Donbas [23]. A few weeks after his arrival in Sloviansk he publicly complained in a dramatic declaration that there

was no popular uprising or mass separatist movement and that the people of the Donbas did not want to enlist in the rebel ranks [24].

As "Minister of Defence" Strelkov did not succeed in forming even the nucleus of a command or general staff of the rebellion, which remained divided between various commanders and armed groups acting on their own account. Despite the support of Russia, the rebellion was able to last only thanks to the extraordinary weakness of the Ukrainian army - which, as a fighting force and not just a bureaucratic institution, was formed in practice only during the war - and because of the lack of experience of the National Guard and volunteer battalions, but mainly because of the incredible incompetence, inertia and corruption of the military apparatuses. The accounts from the battlefield, telling of attempts to stop wounded soldiers bleeding with toilet paper, are only the tip of the iceberg of reports of soldiers who are untrained, hungry, wearing sneakers, without bullet-proof vests, dressings or medical aid, holding the front thanks to the material assistance brought by dedicated volunteers belonging to independent associations. The Ministry of Defence and the General Staff are constantly criticized for the shady deals they make by selling equipment and military equipment, which is lacking on the front, or by making purchases at excessive prices, which allow generals to fill their pockets. These institutions lie constantly about the state of the equipment, about supplies, about the situation of the troops on the front lines and about the number of victims. They lie in saying that the evacuation of hundreds of wounded has been organized, that reinforcements have arrived, that troops have broken out of encirclement, that anti-tank weapons have been delivered, that food, vests, and warm clothing have been provided...

Programme of national defence

Despite this, the Ukrainian armed forces gradually began to win victories. At the beginning of July, Strelkov managed to escape with his detachment of several thousand from the encirclement of

Sloviansk, at the last moment and almost miraculously, despite the order of Moscow to in no case abandon the town. He managed to get to Donetsk, the defence of which the separatist troops had not planned. "If we had stayed at Sloviansk, then Donetsk would have fallen in one or at most two weeks. Due to the fact that we came out, we were able to hold Donetsk for 40 days - until the arrival of the 'leave-takers', in spite of the fact that the situation was desperate in the last days." [25] The "leave-takers" are the Russian troops. They are so called because the Russian authorities claim that they are soldiers who are taking advantage of their leave to go to war in the Donbass, rather than going to the beach. About 35,000 to 40 000 of such "leave-takers", who wage war in regular military units, have already passed through the Donbas.

The Russian aggression in August 2014 saved the separatists, but in exchange Moscow posed a condition, which they obediently fulfilled: Strelkov had to make himself scarce. The role of the dogs of war, warlords and adventurers was coming to an end, especially since they could become heroes of the "Russian World" and dangerous for the Kremlin. Military power, and following on, political power in the Donbas was gradually taken over by the apparatuses of the Russian state.

The former colonial possession is conducting alone an unexpected and overwhelming war against the great power. The desperate calls for Western military aid have not provided much help. If Ukraine can count on help, it is probably only from the societies which have experienced in the past the domination of Russian imperialism and which feel in danger again. The problem, however, is that it is not very likely that Ukraine will manage to defend itself, since its fate is in the hands of a government representing the interests of the bourgeoisie and carrying out radical neoliberal reforms.

The search for support or rescue from the major Western imperialist powers is the repetition of the error, already made by Tadeusz Kosciuszko when he addressed to the Western governments a sterile proclamation saying that "Poles want to free them-

selves from the yoke of Russia and call for help against an empire that, if it once succeeds in gaining the advantage, will unbalance the whole of Europe." There was however in Europe at that time no kind of balance, such as he was calling for [26]. Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817) took part in the American War of Independence and organized the armed uprising in 1794 against Russian occupation during the Second Partition of Poland. He is considered as a national hero in Poland, in Belarus and in Lithuania.]].

Only a programme of national defence that is compatible with the most vital interests of the majority of Ukrainian society can be effective. Because of its

class character, the present government cannot produce it. The starting point of such a programme was indicated by Maurycy Mochnacki: "it is necessary to count more on the movement of the masses, on the action of an entire people than on the regular army" [27]. Maurycy Mochnacki (1803-1834), a political activist and journalist, who was also a pianist and one of the theoreticians of Polish Romanticism, led the revolutionary current during the Polish insurrection of 1830-1831 against Russian rule.]].

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DEBT

Joseph Stiglitz shows that a suspension of debt repayments can be beneficial for a country and its people

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Joseph Stiglitz, 2001 laureate of the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, chair of President Bill Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors from 1995 to 1997, chief economist and vice-president of the World Bank from 1997 to 2000, gives strong arguments to those who seek a suspension of public debt repayment. In a collective book published by OUP in 2010, [1] he claims that Russia in 1998 and Argentina in the 2000s are proof that a unilateral suspension of debt repayment can be beneficial for countries that make this decision: "Both theory and evidence suggest that the threat of a cut-off of credit has probably been exaggerated." (p.48).

When a country succeeds in enforcing debt relief on its creditors and uses funds that were formerly meant for repayment in order to finance an expansionist tax policy, this yields positive results: "Under this scenario the number of the firms that are forced into bankruptcy is lowered, both because of the lower interest rates [2] and because of the improved overall economic performance of the economy that follows. As the economy strengthens, government tax revenues are increased – again improving the fiscal position of the government. [...] All this means that the government's fiscal position is stronger going forward, making it more (not less) likely that creditors will be willing to again provide finance." (p.48) He adds: "Empirically, there is little evidence in support of the position that a default leads to an extended period of exclusion from the market. Russia returned to the market within two

years of its default which was admittedly a 'messy one' involving no prior consultation with creditors [...] Thus, in practice, the threat of credit being cut off appears not to be effective." (p.49)

Joseph Stiglitz considers that those who believe that one of the central functions of the IMF is to impose the highest possible price on countries that wish to default are wrong. "The fact that Argentina did so well after its default, even without an IMF program, (or perhaps because it did not have an IMF program) may lead to a change in these beliefs." (p.49)

Joseph Stiglitz also clearly challenges the part played by bankers and other creditors who granted massive loans without checking the solvability of borrowing countries or, worse, who granted their loans while knowing full well that there was a high defaulting risk. He adds that since creditors demand high rates from some countries to compensate for risk it is only right that they should accept losses due to debt cancellation. Those creditors should have used the high interests they received as a provision against possible losses. He also exposes 'raider' loans all too lightly granted by bankers to indebted countries (p.55).

In short, Stiglitz argues that creditors should take responsibility for the risks they run (p.61). Towards the end of his contribution he claims that countries that choose to default or renegotiate debt relief will have to enforce a temporary control on currency exchange and /or taxes to prevent a capital drain (p.60). He is in favour of the doctrine of odious debt and claims that such debt must be cancelled (p.61). [3]

In an article published in *Journal of Development Economics* [4] under the title 'The Elusive Costs of Sovereign Defaults,' Eduardo Levy Yeyati and Ugo Panizza, two economists who worked for the Inter-American Development Bank, set out the findings of their thorough enquiry into defaulting in some

forty countries. One of their main conclusions is that 'Default episodes mark the beginning of the economic recovery.' It couldn't be better put.

CADTM

Translated by CADTM

GREECE

A historic victory and many questions

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS ·

This is one of the lesson yesterday's poll: yes, it is possible that, groggy from the austerity policies of the last 5 years, the population can turn from Socialist Parties to the left, this is excellent news for France, the flight to the right or worse is not pre-ordained!

However, on this first post-electoral morning, we can already note some important results of these elections.

The policy of the troika has been defeated but not smashed

Admittedly PASOK has crumbled and the recent split by Giorgos Papandreou won only 2,5%, taking votes from Venizelos the leader but also Syriza (in Heraklion, it won 5.06%). The right, no matter what far right former Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras, says has also been rejected: whereas it wagered everything on class polarization, it has dropped from 1.825 million, 29.66% in June 2012 to 1.717 million and 27.81% in 2015. Internal criticisms were flying yesterday evening against a of hardly cold campaign, and only the recycled fascists in New Democracy were pleased yesterday with a gap with Syriza of "only" 8.5% of the votes! At the end of December, such a gap was completely unexpected: the most probable was a very narrow difference, and one can already say that this big gap between Syriza and the right is the product of 3 factors: a very bad rightwing campaign, with small rallies; signs of opening by the European authorities (see Dranghi's decision), the result of both protests against their anti-left interference but also of the reassuring contacts with representatives of Syriza; but especially a growing popular feeling which it was necessary to get rid of the memoranda and that meant a Syriza vote.

However, after 5 years of memoranda, the situation has not been completely clarified, far from it: other clearly rightwing scores should be added to those of the right and PASOK. First, of course, those of the Nazis: although they have lost a little (441,000 votes in May 2012, 426,000 in June 2012, 388,000 in 2015, going from 18 to 17 MPs), they are the third party, after an extremely discreet campaign with half of their chiefs in prison and the label of a criminal organization. The mobilization against the Nazis must develop from now on!

At the same time various rightwing groupings remain, sometimes calling themselves of the "centre", in any case they are clearly anti-left. These go from the far right LAOS (1%) and various groups like POTAMI (the River, latest gadget created and supported by the media: 6%!) or Union of the Centrists (1,8%) or Teleia (1.7%)... A typical case is that of ANEL (Independent Greeks) of the former rightwing MP Kammenos : this party, which has won 4.75% (7.5% in June 2012), is ready to support Syriza or to even take part in the government to get rid of the memoranda, but while warning that its reactionary nationalism and its reactionary positions (savage defense of the Orthodox church) will be its guiding principles...

On the left: first estimates

Of course, one can only salute the score of Syriza, which has known how transform popular anger into electoral victory, with impressive scores: in the number of votes, it has risen from from 315,000 in 2009, 1.655 million in June 2012 to 2.244 million in 2015, with increases according locally varying from 7 to more than 20%. It is clear that a large part of the Pasok electorate has switched to Syriza, and that is a very good thing! However, apart from the dead ends in the programme of a party largely

dominated by the rightwing leadership of the former Synaspismos, the electoral evening showed worrying limits, that only workers' mobilization will be able to overcome: and the first is precisely the very high abstention, the second highest since 1974: 29% in 2009, 34.9% in May 2012, 37.5% in June 2012, 36.1% in 2015. This score is a sign both of the impact of the crisis on confidence in political solutions and the fact that Syriza did not manage to convince a whole section of the popular layers in underprivileged areas like Evros.

At the same time, Syriza's results in working suburbs are encouraging: 37.8% in the suburbs of Athens (31.4% in June 2012), 42 (36.3%) in that of Piraeus... Yesterday evening, the atmosphere reflected this situation : a festive atmosphere in the centre of Athens, around the Syriza headquarters, but without the crowds of the evenings of victory over the right in the 1980s to 2000s. And more symbolic: Tsipras in his speech, yesterday did not mention two or three significant struggles for which socially just solutions are expected as fast as possible: the Ministry of Labour cleaners, the inhabitants of Skouries, who have been fighting for months against the opening of a goldmine, and the reopening of radio TV ERT, reduced to a blank screen by Samaras and co. In this latter case a representative of Syriza certainly went yesterday evening to meet the workers who have fought by maintaining ERT-open, but it was especially a message to say that there would not be a rally there this Sunday evening although many activists were preparing for it! However, we should be clear: in a sit-

uation where the left is a minority (total approximately of 47% of the votes), only mobilizations can improve the situation of young people and workers, and doing everything to ensure that they are unitive!

And precisely, for the KKE (Greek CP), yesterday evening nothing seemed to have changed: with a score of 5.5%, its leadership is almost triumphant, insisting on its gains compared to June 2012 (4.5%). But by doing this, it forgets that the goal was to be the 3rd party (it is 5th), and that in May 2012, its score was 8.5%... Its first declarations are not in the direction of unity in struggle.

Antarsya comes out rather well from a difficult electoral test in a context where many of its sympathizers were voting Syriza, without illusion: it has gone from 20,500 votes in June 2012 to 39,400 (0.65%). But of course, it is far from the threshold of 3% necessary to get someone elected , and also from the 75,400 votes of May 2012. Its first declaration calls for mobilization to take back everything that was stolen , while insisting on the role that the militant forces of the left must play.

In this complex situation, a combination of immense joy at achieving victory for a left "No" to austerity but and many worries over what happens next, it is clear there is not a second to lose: fight together in Greece and Europe, to defeat the policy of the troikas of capital!

Athens,

26 January, 2015

GREECE

"Note from afar" on Greek elections

STATHIS KOUELAKIS ·

1. The signs I'm getting from friends and comrades, in both Athens and the rest of Greece – corroborated by 'local' surveys (for the regions and major cities) – are all pointing the same way. It looks like there's a wave of support heading Syriza's way this Sunday. In the working-class districts of Athens the Right faces an utter rout. Meanwhile, outside the capital whole chunks of the right-wing electorate are now breaking for Syriza, following former PASOK voters. There is a calm atmosphere in the country, but at the same time real expectation is mounting. The conditions are ripe for a dynamic to build behind Syriza.

2. From a political point of view the Greek bourgeoisie and its political representatives are stunned and voiceless. All their hopes of heading off Syriza rely on Europe's leaders – and ruling classes. For their part, the line seems clear enough: it is the politics of the 'iron cage', seeking to shut down a Syriza government as quickly as possible. The spearhead of this effort is the attempt to force Syriza to request an extension of the current 'assistance programme', which runs out on 28 February. Such an extension would allow continued financing, and thus for the debt to be repaid, but also implies continuing with the current policy and the country being subject to Troika discipline – perhaps under mildly reworked terms.

3. That's the context for the ECB decisions on 'quantitative easing' that was announced yesterday. The inclusion of Greece in the public debt-buying programme requires that it accept an 'assistance programme' (the bonds to the Greek debt are considered as 'junk' and don't fulfil the conditions of a standard buyback), and it will not happen before

July, when Greece will be 'reviewed' to check its results. This means that until then, Greece will have to continue repaying its debt, including the 7,5 billions of repayment due in July and August. As the existing budgetary surpluses are clearly insufficient and the country doesn't have access to international markets, this in turn is practically conditioned to an extension of the current 'assistance programme'. Fundamentally, the same goes for the ECB giving its authorisation for Greek banks to access liquidity through the ELA mechanism. It has to be renewed every 15 days and requires the continuation of the 'assistance programme' (as we see, now you're not meant to say 'Memorandum', but 'assistance programme'). But the substance remains the same: the 'iron cage' of debt peonage and austerity politics has to remain untouched.

4. Syriza's intentions faced with these difficulties (which in their broad terms were wholly predictable) are unclear. The main thrust of its election campaign has been to 'reassure' the moderate and undecided voters on which it's been focusing. Syriza has spread the image of a 'Europe that's changing', indeed at high speed as suggested by one of the campaign tv adverts, and which is prepared to accede to its demands. In recent days statements coming from Syriza leaders – particularly its main economists (Dragasakis, Tsakalotos) but also Tsipras's 'right-hand man' Nikos Pappas, who is head of his personal staff – suggest that Syriza would agree to requesting a 'technical' extension of the current 'assistance programme' in order to 'allow time to negotiate'. They make no mention of the conditions that would be placed on this so-called 'technical' extension, however.

5. So here we have a tangle of contradictions, which in their different ways define Syriza's trajectory and the Greek situation as a whole. Already between the

two elections in May and June 2012, pretty much the same Syriza figures (above all Dragasakis) distanced themselves from the party line and rejected the idea of 'unilaterally' cancelling the Memorandum. At that time Dragasakis made some fatuous distinctions between a 'political' rejection of the Memorandum and a 'juridical' one, this latter amounting to 'unilateral actions' which he repudiated. Such statements were very costly for Syriza at the time, in that they gave the impression that the party had kept its plans intentionally vague and thus suggested that it would capitulate on the decisive questions. But ultimately in 2012 his wasn't the line that prevailed. What about now? That's perhaps THE essential question.

6. While being perfectly aware of its contradictions, we should not have the slightest hesitation in laying our hopes on not simply a Syriza victory, but a Syriza landslide.

For three reasons:

– Such a victory would give it a parliamentary majority and prevent any possibility of an alliance with buffer formations, which are the system's pawns in trying to force a Syriza government to make concessions.

– Such a landslide would give confidence back to the most conscious layers of society and would allow for popular mobilisations to get going again. That, of course, is the key variable. Ultimately that will be the barrier against the temptation to retreat or give in.

– Finally, such a landslide would have a very significant international impact. On the governments, and on the whole social and political Left that's rightly placing its hopes in Syriza and which wants to support Syriza in its struggles.

We can never say it enough – what's at stake on Sunday is enormous, it's of truly historic proportions. It would be the first decisive break with neoliberalism in Europe. And an extraordinary opportunity for the 'Left of the Left' to shake off the curse of its worst defeats – the battles that it lost without a fight.

So we are left with only one option: dare to fight, dare to win!

London, 23 January 2015

Verso Books blog

INDIA

Mufti seriously risks losing the plot in Kashmir

PRAFUL BIDWAI ·

The negotiations may turn out to be prolonged, not merely because there are sharp differences between the two on thorny issues, including Article 370, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, and dialogue and porous borders with Pakistan — but also because the BJP is reportedly reluctant to seal a J&K alliance before the Delhi elections, probable in February.

Whatever course the talks take, it's plain that the PDP's options are far narrower than the BJP's, and that it will face greater opposition from within the Valley over any compromise it makes than will the BJP from within Jammu. That's partly because the PDP won a majority of the Valley's 46 seats by presenting itself as a strongly secular anti-BJP-RSS force, which would protect the region's people against Hindutva fanatics. The BJP swept Jammu's Hindu-majority areas on a somewhat weaker obverse of this — but still stoking anti-Muslim and anti-Valley chauvinist sentiments.

There's something to be said for reconciliation between the two regions, but the BJP isn't remotely the kind of force that will promote this on equitable terms. The central issue in J&K is not so much inter-regional integration as the alienation of the Valley's people from the Indian State. The BJP has long been in irrational denial of this and wants to force their integration into India.

Neither party would enhance its credibility by allying with the other. But the BJP has infinitely less to lose than the PDP. Its national strength isn't dependent on holding power in J&K or creating/having a base in the Valley (or for that matter, even Jammu). But the PDP's very survival depends on support from within the Valley. And that will be grievously undermined if it allies with the BJP,

which an overwhelming majority of Kashmiris see as incurably Hindu-communal, anti-autonomy, and implacably hostile to them.

That's why it would be suicidal for the PDP to ally with the BJP even if the latter shrewdly concedes all its demands, including those on Article 370 and AFSPA, makes Mufti a full-term Chief Minister, and offers J&K a generous central financial package, including special rehabilitation assistance for the flood-affected Valley.

My recent telephone conversations suggest that a wide spectrum of Kashmiri leaders, from the CPM's Yousuf Tarigami to the hardline-separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, would consider such "capitulation" much worse than Governor's Rule, indeed more condemnable than Sheikh Abdullah's 1974 "surrender" to Indira Gandhi. The Valley will erupt again, and the Indian State will unleash unprecedented repression.

By embracing the BJP, Mufti risks becoming a weaker version of Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, powerless against Israel's occupation, yet helplessly dependent on it. The PDP will soon be routed. But it will have helped Modi strut about the world stage for having co-opted J&K's Muslims in an "inclusive", "secular" arrangement, and whitewashed his own record in Gujarat and beyond. What a coup that would be for the RSS-BJP!

The Bharatiya Janata Party's national leadership has officially confirmed that it's in talks with the People's Democratic Party to form a coalition government in Jammu and Kashmir. This proposal is endorsed by a surprisingly large number of self-avowed well-wishers of the Kashmiri people, as well as cynical "realists" who believe that such a coalition of extremes, between India's unitarian-nationalists and the Kashmir Valley's "soft-sepa-

ratists", is J&K's best chance of having a stable government which paves the way for its greater integration into India. The parties' respective core-bases, Jammu and the Valley, they argue, "complement" each other. Arithmetically too, the two —

with respectively 25 and 28 seats — would command a solid majority in the 87-seat Assembly.

8 January 2015

DNA

FRANCE

Charlie Hebdo – And now what? The events, their impact and the issues at play.

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

While it is too early to ascertain all the consequences of the events of recent days, we should nonetheless take stock of what has happened. We have experienced something historic. First and foremost because of the strength and size of the demonstrations that took place on the weekend of January 10th and January 11th. Never before have more than five million people simultaneously taken to the streets across the country.

Whatever the confusion in the minds of participants, their reaction and behaviour showed that the demonstrations were a tremendous expression of fraternal feeling. Participants chatted amongst themselves and helped one another move along amidst the crush of the masses of people who had gathered. Some scenes on the short-lived afternoons of the 10th and 11th brought back memories of the demonstrations of 1995 or even 1968, with solidarity as the dominant theme.

With almost five million people in attendance, workers accounted for a large share of the ranks of marchers, with many young people as well. The demonstrations had a popular character and took place in city centres, but also in many suburban areas as well. While not specifically "social and trade-union movement" or "social struggle" in nature, they showed that society as such was mobilized. While such an assessment is open to debate, it appears the gatherings brought together "the people of the Left". Within this fraternal outpouring against barbarism and terror and for democratic freedoms and free expression, we should also note the presence of placards and symbols against all forms of racism –anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim

racism. In a similar vein, the repeated chants of "We are all Charlie" should not be misinterpreted. In taking up this slogan, the millions of people in attendance were not expressing their support for the magazine's editorial line. A large majority of those chanting "We are all Charlie" were more or less familiar with the magazine but didn't actually read it.

"We are all Charlie" burst out as a cry of human solidarity against the murders. It captured a range of opinions. The idea of a "working-class Charlie" was even put forward – in order to link solidarity with the murdered journalists with the need to mobilize in defense of social rights. The formulation is open to debate, but the idea is a correct one in that it seeks to inject social and democratic content into the anger and sadness.

This is the groundswell from French society that has been expressed since January 7th and anti-capitalists should be part of it, engaging in dialogue with the millions of people who have been involved. These were not reactionary demonstrations. The dominant themes were not support for cross-party national unity or the law-and-order and anti-democratic measures announced by the government. Society went into action, spontaneously, and with a great deal of confusion, but in a progressive direction all the same. This is the starting point for our thinking and it's in this framework that we must assess the problems that now confront us.

Problem number one: cross-party national unity. We were right to decry initiatives aimed at creating cross-party national unity, whether with (leader of the right-wing UMP and former president) Nicolas Sarkozy or (leader of the far-Right FN) Marine Le Pen. It was even more justified to de-

nounce the "international satraps" who joined French President François Hollande in his operation in favour of French imperialism and the various imperialist coalitions. It is a huge scandal that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Gabonese President Ali Bongo, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and other freedom-killers were invited to the march. No joint appeals should be issued with Hollande, the Socialists or the UMP; no marching together with them at the head of the demonstration; no common organization for such initiatives; and no "presidential" roundtables to cap it all off. From this angle, it should be noted that (former Left Front presidential candidate and leader of the Left Party) Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the Left Front (Front de Gauche) initially provided cover for the Hollande operation, but backed away on the afternoon of the 10th when the whole matter was becoming altogether too compromising. As for us, we were right to voice these criticisms, but we should have given more sustained priority to solidarity with the millions of demonstrators. After all, people were not fooled. They took to the streets, but not to support political operations and manœuvres. What they take away from the marches will not be the presence of a cordoned-off handful of blood-stained world leaders, but rather the involvement of millions of ordinary women and men.

Problem number two: the mobilization of Arab-Muslim youth. Tens of thousands of Franco-Algerian, Franco-Moroccan and Franco-Tunisian people were present in the marches, with a large number of flags from the countries of the Maghreb, among others. But the majority of them were not. Charlie Hebdo's editorial "line" kept a number of them away, as did the feeling that the authorities have a double standard when it comes to punishing hate speech (with the anti-Semitic Black comedian Dieudonné M'bala M'bala sentenced and racist author and commentator Éric Zemmour not). The low level of mobilization in Marseille is an indicator of the uneven character of the marches. There is a real danger of a major split within working-class opin-

ion, and one of our priority tasks has to be to fight to ward off this threatened split. The first way to do this is by fighting against austerity policies and their impact on the poorest and most disadvantaged living in suburban areas. We also have to fight for equal rights, most notably for foreigners' right to vote in elections. Revolutionaries have to lead the fight against Islamophobia, and all racist acts must be denounced. We have to defend the right of Muslims to practise their religion, and we have to defend mosques when they are attacked. The workers and democratic movement must stand by their side. This starts with tangible demonstrations of solidarity, through support to children in the schools, for example. The Arab-Muslim population must be defended against any type of aggression when it is attacked simply for being Arab or Muslim.

This anti-racism also applies to the fight against anti-Semitism. More than ever, and however difficult it may be, we have to stress the difference between the Zionist policies of the state of Israel and the Jewish population. We must defend the Jewish population against any type of aggression, when it is attacked simply for being Jewish.

Third problem: the government's attempt to use the events to beef up its "anti-terror" legal arsenal with draconian laws along the lines of the Patriot Act pushed through by the U.S. government after 9-11. The stakes here are very high. Terrorism can't be defeated with attacks on fundamental freedoms. Working-class and democratic organizations must come out firmly against any government measures of this sort. This means refusing to participate directly or indirectly in the upcoming meetings on the "security pact" put forward by the Socialists.

Fourth problem: avoiding a "clash of barbarisms", between imperialist barbarism and that of organizations like the Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. Imperialist barbarism and its dictatorial supporters in situ oppress millions of people daily around the world. This is the fertile ground on which fundamentalist and terrorist organizations prosper. They feed off of international interven-

tions – such as the ones led by the USA and other Western powers in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Iraq; or alongside regional powers such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Often, the growth of these fundamentalist organizations was initially funded and encouraged by Washington or by states such as Pakistan. Now, however, they are pursuing their own policy and their own strategy of confrontation.

We must never forget one basic truth: the terrorist violence of these fundamentalist movements is directed first and foremost against people in Muslim countries. They attack all freedoms and all fundamental rights. They play a major counter-revolutionary role – against the progressive aspirations of the "Arab springtime", for example. They mete out levels of terror reminiscent of fascist movements in the 1930s. They are enemies of humankind. Our comrades in Pakistan characterize some of them as religious fascisms, a label which is certainly open to debate. But these forces must be fought, at a time when they are carrying out an increasing number of barbaric acts from Paris to northern Nigeria. We must fight them in each of our countries, but also through international solidarity – by fighting against imperialist wars; by supporting progressive movements resisting the fundamentalist offensive against Kobanî, against Aleppo and in Pakistan; and by defending victims of their intolerance wherever they may be.

Fifth problem: our weakness and the overall weakening of the working-class movement in its historic bastions, especially in Europe. Capitalist globalization has plunged our societies into an endless downward spiral of social crises. Casual forms of work are spreading and taking on extreme forms. Neither the "left of the Left" nor the trade unions are in a position to provide a radical response to the

radical attacks of globalized capital. In such conditions, fundamentalism (of all religions) and the new far-Right (xenophobic and racist) is laying claim to the ideological ground of radicalism. We need a broad international anti-fascist and anti-fundamentalist resistance front, but also an activist Left capable of providing a radical alternative to capitalism. To achieve this, such a Left has to be rooted among those sectors hit hardest by job insecurity. This is not the case today, and this is one of our Achilles' heels.

On top of all these problems, there are specific things about the political situation in France that have to be kept in mind. Will President Hollande – in Bonapartist fashion – manage to use this crisis to raise himself more or less above the fray of party politics and his own Socialist Party to come out on top in the 2017 presidential elections? In keeping with his cross-party national-unity operation, will he manage to pursue his austerity agenda, thereby worsening the socio-economic condition of millions of working people? Will he manage to contain the Right and far-Right, who have been marginalized by the events of recent days?

The dynamic of social mobilization that we have seen over the past few days also points to another possibility. The indignation and democratic aspirations on display could take on a social character – through struggles and mobilizations for the right to dignity, against social injustice, against all forms of oppression, and for equal rights. These battles can be waged together to overcome the division that gives so much strength to those who rule over us.

Anti-capitalists must do everything in their power to deepen the democratic resurgence that we have just witnessed.

*Article written for **Viento Sur** (Spanish State).
Translated by ESSF.*

Terror, cartoons and Islamophobia

SOCIALIST RESISTANCE ·

Four people were murdered in a Paris supermarket by Amedy Coulibaly because they were Jewish. Said and Cherif Kouachi slaughtered twelve more because they were offended by cartoons hostile to Islam and Muslims published in Charlie Hebdo. These attacks based on hatred of people because of their religion and the views they expressed put the killers squarely on the side of reactionary prejudice and anti-democratic authoritarianism. Al Qaeda have praised the Kouachi brothers and Coulibaly for their attempts to silence dissenting views and freedom of religious practice with bullets. These are rights that socialists defend, not least because in the history of our own movement, murder and violence have been used to suppress opinions and a clear commitment to freedom of expression is an essential democratic demand. These concepts may be alien to the Paris murderers, but they are ones that are crucial for us.

The killers were employing one of the oldest methods in the catalogue of marginal terrorist groups, a strategy of tension. Their calculation, along with that of the London bus bombers, was that by carrying out their atrocities in the name of their religion it would provoke a massive reaction by the French and British states which would drive large numbers of people towards radical jihadism. It's an idea the Italian Red Brigades or the German Red Army Faction would have understood. You compensate for the lack of mass support by getting the state to clamp down on people who are sympathetic to some of your central ideas but don't like your methods. The difference is that while the European ter-

rorists claimed to be acting for the working class vanguard, the jihadists have pretensions to represent observant Muslims globally, or at least those who might be interested in the most misogynistic, intolerant, absolutist version of the religion. Socialists reject both the ideology and the methods.

We can safely predict that just as the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction failed to overthrow capitalism, the co-thinkers of the Paris terrorists will not create a caliphate in Europe or, we hope, anywhere else. They are making the same mistake as everyone else who has thought that social change is possible with a few determined individuals and some weapons. Real social transformation can only be brought about by the involvement of huge masses of people, not by ragbag bunches of losers with AK47s. This is all the more true if the gunmen are offering a world which most of the rest of society finds a barbaric anachronism.

A reactionary unity

The emerging Pegida movement in Germany, Farage and Le Pen have been politically strengthened by these attacks. They will refer to them endlessly in the coming months citing them as proof that their racist, Islamophobic rantings have been vindicated. Coulibaly and the Kouachis were counting on this. They wanted politics in Europe to be divided along racial and religious lines just as much as anyone on the far right. They will have calculated that there would be an increase in racist attacks on mosques and Muslims. It is now the primary responsibility of every socialist, trade unionist and anti-capitalist to be an active opponent of racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. We have to politically and, where necessary, physically defend Muslims and Muslim businesses and religious buildings from attack. We must also say that the

threats against Jews, their places of worship and businesses are equally unacceptable.

Coulibaly and the Kouachis may have been trying to make a little bit of history, but they were not doing it in circumstances they had created. The French state has a long history of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim racism. It sent thousands of Jews to Nazi death camps, even though the Nazis hadn't asked them to. They drowned Algeria in blood to try to deny it independence and in 1961 Paris police murdered up to 200 Algerians. Since then north African immigrants have been dumped in massive estates where unemployment, deprivation and police harassment are daily realities. As the French Anti-Capitalist Party comments, all the major political parties share responsibility for this:

"This murderous violence comes from somewhere. It's created in the heart of the social and moral violence which is very familiar to large numbers of the young people who live on the working class estates. It's the violence of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and the violence of unemployment and exploitation. This barbarous violence is the monstrous child of the social war that the right and the left are waging in the service of finance. On top of this there are the wars they have started against Iraq, in Afghanistan, Libya, Africa and Syria. There is also the decades long war against the Palestinian people. These are wars, the only purpose of which is to maintain the dominance of the multi-nationals and their right to plunder while empowering the most reactionary fundamentalists."

Cheap laughs

As if to emphasise the point, the French state chose to head up the march protesting against the attacks with a rogues' gallery of the governments responsible for war, austerity, the slaughter of Palestinians and journalists and the suppression of free speech. By contrast, the millions who were forced to march a safe distance behind them were expressing a range of sentiments which included sympathy for the victims, a rejection of violence and a rejection

of racism. It did not seem that the Front national was in tune with the popular mood.

It is self-evident that the cartoons relating to Islam have given offence to many Muslims. They certainly make unsettling viewing for those of us who see Islamophobia as one of the major political themes of the far right. Our view is that a magazine which presents itself as broadly progressive should not have published content which keyed into that political discourse. Charlie Hebdo's defenders will point to the fact that it devoted much more space to attacking the bourgeois parties and Catholicism. This may be true, but there seems to have been a tendency to go for cheap laughs at the expense of a group which is already the subject of constant ideological attack in France and this was a serious political mistake despite the strong anti-racist credentials of many of the magazine's contributors.

Nevertheless we absolutely reject the right of any ideological current to shut down opposing views with violence just as we absolutely condemn Netanyahu for ordering the murders of Palestinian journalists or Obama for using the threat of prison to silence journalists. Socialists must insist that reactionary ideological arguments are defeated and rejected by persuasion, struggle and mass action. As Chris Harman wrote some years ago:

"But socialists cannot give support to the Islamists either. That would be to call for the swapping of one form of oppression for another, to react to the violence of the state by abandoning the defence of ethnic and religious minorities, women and gays, to collude in scapegoating that makes it possible for capitalist exploitation to continue unchecked providing it takes "Islamic" forms. It would be to abandon the goal of independent socialist politics, based on workers in struggle organising all the oppressed and exploited behind them, for a tail-ending of a petty bourgeois utopianism which cannot even succeed in its own terms."

Radical socialists all across Europe have stood firm against European and United States imperialism every time they have raised the flag of war. We have

participated in countless mobilisations against racism and Islamophobia. We will continue to resist our states as they restrict more and more civil liberties. We are also the implacable political enemies of murderers who kill innocent people because of the accident of birth that is religion or how

they express their views. Our role is to build mass, anti-capitalist, anti-war parties that will represent all those who reject the hellish type of world the ruling class is building for us.

15 January 2015

ECONOMY

EU follows the German example

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The paper *En finir avec la compétitivité* (Putting an end to competition), published jointly by ATTAC and the Copernic Foundation, sets out the measures taken and the attacks on social and economic rights: "The Hartz Acts (named after Volkswagen's Human Resources Director who was also Schröder's advisor) were passed between 2003-2005. Hartz I obliges the unemployed to accept any job that is proposed to them, even if the pay is less than unemployment benefits. Hartz II created the mini-job at less than €400 a month (exonerated from social contributions). Hartz III limits the right to unemployment benefits for ageing workers to one year and makes access more difficult. Hartz IV merged long-term unemployment benefits with other social aid, and installed an aggregate maximum amount of €345 a month. To this were added successive retirement and healthcare reforms—the capitalization of pension schemes (Riester-Pensions), increased contributions and later retirement ages (reaching 67 by 2017)". The authors of the paper mention in particular that: "together these reforms have contributed to an impressive rise in social inequalities. This point is often forgotten in the 'German model', as may be demonstrated by some precise figures. Germany has become a divided country: a parliamentary draft report on wealth and poverty [1] has recently established that the poorest half of the population possess only 1% of the assets, compared to 53% for the richest. Between 2003 and 2010, the purchasing power of

the average salary decreased by 5.6%, but the effect was very unequally spread, with the lowest-paid 40% seeing a fall of 12% while the highest-paid 40% lost only 4%. [2] Official statistics show that the proportion of low salaries increased from 18.6% in 2006 to 21% in 2010. It should be emphasized that West Germany was worst hit."

"According to the same study, the number of employees rose by 1.2 million between 1999 and 2008, reflecting an increase of 1.9 million casual jobs corresponding to a loss of half a million full-time permanent jobs. A quarter of today's wage-earners occupy unstable jobs and this proportion is 40% for women, as it is in the US. "The majority of precarious jobs (70%) are considered women's jobs. [3] The proportion of unemployment benefit claimants dropped from 80% in 1995 to 35% in 2008 and all those unemployed for over a year have been transferred to welfare".

As noted by Arnaud Lechevalier, this trend lies within the general framework of a context of erosion of the collective bargaining agreements protecting employees: the percentage of employees covered decreased from 76% to 62% in ten years, and by 2008 these agreements only applied in 40% of German firms. In addition, the unions have had to make many exemptions to sector-based and/or company-wide collective bargaining agreements. [4]

A possible explanation of German leaders' current attitude towards the Eurozone crisis might lie in the lessons they learned from the absorption of East Germany at the beginning of the 1990s—in particular that significant wage disparities between employees can be exploited to the advantage of em-

ployers. The massive East German privatizations, the attacks on the job security of ex-GDR workers, along with the increase of German public debt due to the costs of this absorption (used as the pretext for austerity programmes), have enabled the employers to erode the situation of East as well as West German workers. German workers have been strictly divided between those in the big industrial sectors where many advantages have been maintained and other, more precarious, sectors including small to medium-size businesses.

The German example for the EU

German corporations have chosen to increase their production in the EU countries where wages are lowest [5]. Partly finished goods are then reintroduced into Germany, without paying import/export taxes, for assembly and re-exportation, mainly to other European countries. This reduces production costs, puts the German workers into competition with their foreign comrades and increases company profits. In addition, these assembled and re-exported goods appear, of course, in Germany's export figures, whereas they are to a great extent produced from imported goods.

Corporations in the other strong European countries are doing the same, but proportionally speaking the German economy profits most from the low wages and precarious working conditions of the Eurozone workforce (including within Germany's national boundaries) and the EU. In 2007, 83% of German exports went to other EU countries: €145 billion to Eurozone countries, €79 billion to non-Eurozone EU countries, and €45 billion to the rest of the world. [6]

IG Metall, one of the big German industrial trade unions, has published a text in defence of the Eurozone which helps explain why unitary action against the employers has been abandoned. It provides an interesting advocacy of German economic interests and the single currency. In this document, entitled *Ten Reasons for the Euro and the Currency Union*, published on 19 August 2011, we read: « *The German economy depends more than*

any other on its exports. Our foreign clients are the source of millions of jobs in Germany. The biggest market for German products is Europe. [...]. The single currency has played a huge role in the competitiveness of German products. If indebted countries are excluded from the single currency, they will devalue their own currencies to improve their competitiveness. This would then place considerable pressure on the remaining Eurozone, which would be composed exclusively of those countries of the European Union with the strongest economies, to revalue the euro. A return to the Deutsche Mark would entail a revaluation of at least 40%. [7] What a pitiful admission for a trade union to make! Where is international solidarity between workers against Capital? The solidarity is now between German bosses and German workers to make German goods more competitive in order to win market shares.

For today's German leaders and employers, the Eurozone crisis and the brutal attacks against the Greek people and the other peripheral populations are opportunities to push the offensive further and to reproduce, on a European scale, the success of the German offensive.

Not to be outdone, the leaders of the other strong European countries and the CEOs of their major corporations are making the most of the common European political, commercial and economic zone. The northern European economies and transnational companies are exploiting the strife in the Eurozone's southern economies to improve their profitability and to gain competitive advantage over their North American and Chinese competitors. Their objective at this point, as mentioned above, is not to revive growth and reduce differences between the EU's stronger and weaker economies. Southern capital-holders and the governments themselves approve of these policies, looking to seize long-coveted privatized sectors at give-away prices, with the help of the Troika.

In Germany today, following the long period of wage reduction and erosion of labour laws, the bosses and the Christian-Democrat (CDU-CSU) – Social-liberal (SPD) coalition government, who have undoubtedly made their mark as much in the EU as in Germany itself, have had to make one slight concession: the creation of a minimum wage. As from 1 January 2015, Germany will introduce a minimum hourly wage of €8.5/h before deductions, or just over €1 400/month for a full time job. There will be exceptions to the measure. [8]

This minimum wage will benefit 4 million workers who prior to the application date had been receiving lower pay, thus highlighting how large sectors of workers have suffered worsening conditions over the last twenty years. Officially, 1.4 million workers are paid less than €5 per hour and about 2.5 million earn between €5 and €8.5. [9] This minimum rate is about the same as that practised in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. By the time the minimum wage is fully applied, on 1 January 2017, it is estimated that about 6 million workers will benefit.

Europe is the new battleground for wage cuts

According to Michel Husson, real labour costs per unit were compressed by 10% in Germany between 2004 and 2008. [10] In the rest of Europe these costs also decreased, but to a lesser extent. Since the 2008-2009 crisis, the Eurozone has been severely affected by a clear drop in real wages in the most exposed countries. As Patrick Artus, a researcher for the bank Natixis, points out, "[W]e notice a significant reduction in real income in the Eurozone countries having the most difficulties (Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain)". [11] Artus claims that European leaders are imposing a deliberate pay-reduction policy and adds that this has neither boosted investment in the countries just mentioned nor helped their exportations to become more competitive. The favourable effects of pay reductions, "are not showing in competitiveness, foreign trade, or business investments", he writes. He adds that lower wages have two clear effects: on the one hand they have raised profits; on the other

hand, they have reduced consumer demand, which in turn has contracted the economy. [12]

Artus's report confirms that the goal of the European leaders is neither to revive economic activity, nor to improve the situation of the peripheral countries as compared with the countries of the Centre. The pay reductions aim to weaken workers' resistance in the countries concerned, while increasing profits and progressively destroying what is left of the welfare states built up over the three and a half decades following the Second World War and before the neoliberal turn-around of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the *Global Wage Report 2012-2013* published by the International Labour Organization in December 2012, the authors revealed that "in developed economies, the crisis led to a 'double dip' in wages: real average wages fell in 2008 and again in 2011, and the current outlook suggests that in many of these countries wages are growing marginally, if at all, in 2012". [13] This is the only part of the world, along with the Middle East, where wages have fallen since 2008. In China, the rest of Asia, and Latin America, wages have increased. In Eastern Europe they have recovered to a certain extent after plummeting in the 1990s. This report confirms that Capital's offensive against Labour has been displaced towards the developed countries.

The *Global Wage Report 2014-2015* [14] points out that between 1999 and 2013, German industrial productivity grew more than real wage increases. Capital has progressed and the German employers have made the most of it. The same report confirms the nefarious effects in several European Union countries of the crisis that began in 2007-2008: in 2013, real average wages were lower than in 2007 in Greece, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

François Hollande and Matteo Renzi, shameful disciples of the German example

The mainstream media claim that the "socialists" François Hollande and Matteo Renzi want to change the direction of the European Commission and the European Union, but are prevented by the

German leaders who stand steadfast on ultra-liberal orthodoxy. The reality is that they are looking to apply the same measures seen in Germany in their own countries. Since Autumn 2014, Mario Renzi is challenging Italian workers with easier sackings and ever looser work contracts. François Hollande is giving the rich more tax breaks. He has appointed Emmanuel Macron, ex-banker at Rothschild, as Minister of the Economy and behind the scenes seeks advice from Peter Hartz, former human resources executive at Volkswagen who, in complicity with the "socialist" Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, directed the big attacks of 2003-2005, against German labour laws. François Hollande promised, in his presidential election campaign, to oppose the TAFTA and he could do so if he really wanted to. Once elected, he immediately broke his promise and lined up alongside Angela Merkel and the European Commission. Pierre Moscovici, European commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs and previous French Finance Minister under President Hollande, joined the German leaders, in December 2014, in their support for the right wing candidate to the Greek Presidency.

Other socialist leaders, such as José Luis Zapatero in Spain [15], José Sócrates [16] in Portugal, Elio Di Rupo [17] in Belgium, George Papandreou in Greece or Gordon Brown in the UK, when they were at the head of their governments, all applied neoliberal policies. Although European rules give governments a veto, none attempted to put spokes into the wheels of the European Commission's austerity measures and antisocial policies that they so much decried to their electors. There really is a fundamental unity between so-called socialist governments and conservative forces in waging the offensive against the social victories gained after WWII. German policies of the 1990s and 2000s have become, for many other European leaders, the example to copy and follow, as far as possible, in their own countries.

It is urgent to change this situation, through popular movements and through the polls. The injunctions of the European Commission must be disobeyed and the social measures that have been mismanaged or abolished, reinstated. The banks must be socialised, repayments of illegal or illegitimate debt must be stopped, socially useful jobs have to be created to permit local transitions.

DEBT

Africa: plummeting commodity prices might lead to a new debt crisis

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Debt Euphoria

This turns out to be quite a unique international situation: with a lot of liquid assets at hand and very low interest rates in their region, Northern financial investors are looking for attractive returns. Senegal, Zambia and Rwanda promise a return of 6-8% against their securities. Therefore, they are attracting financial companies willing to invest their cash temporarily, even at high risks. In 2014 the countries of sub-Saharan Africa managed to sell their public debt securities for \$ 7 billion in international financial markets [2]. That's a record.

The governments of sub-Saharan countries are euphoric and they are trying to convince their people that good days are just around the corner while, in reality, the situation could take a dramatic turn. These governments are quite heavily indebted, and when the situation deteriorates they will ask their people to foot the bill.

A major portion of the taxes is used to service the debt rather than improve the citizens' living conditions

In any case, it should be noted that today, a major portion of the taxes collected by the government from the people (through VAT and income taxes) is used to service the debt rather than improve the citizens' living conditions. In most countries, public expenditure to pay off the governments' debts is more than the budget allocations for health and education, which is a scandal.

Moreover, the debt securities sold by the governments on the international financial markets have certain contractual clauses which could become quite explosive in the future. For example, the number of accelerated payment clauses in the con-

tracts is growing by the day. What does that mean? If a country gets into financial trouble, holders of debt securities may claim an early refund from the authorities. That can only aggravate the country's situation. Besides, all the contracts see to it that in case of dispute, the competent legal authority to settle disputes is located in countries such as the US or the UK and not in the indebted country.

A maximum number of people and organizations must feel the urgency of this state of affairs, so that they resist and force the authorities to publicly disclose the contents of the contracts.

The debt situation deteriorates

Among the sub-Saharan countries that have floated the largest number of debt securities on the international markets, oil-exporting countries (starting with Nigeria) are faced with an almost 50% drop in oil-prices. Now, over 70% of government revenues come from selling oil. This curtails their ability to repay now or in the future. Therefore, lenders (private banks from the North, investment funds, the richest 1% in Africa, etc.) are getting nervous and have started to sell off their holdings in the secondary or over-the-counter debt market. Since they are selling the securities, those who are buying them at a discounted price are doing so with a handsome profit in mind. With the scarcity of lenders, the governments of these countries have to repay their new loans at higher rates now.

Let us take Nigeria's case. Its revenue decreased sharply in 2014 due to the drop in oil-prices between June and December. In 2014, the value of the local currency Naira was devalued by 15% against the US dollar. The foreign exchange reserves of the Central Bank of Nigeria have also dropped significantly [3]. In December 2014, the

Central Bank issued public debt securities maturing 10 years later with 16% returns [4]. It is not difficult to imagine what this means: a portion of Nigeria's income, which will grow by leaps and bounds, must be devoted to service debts against a backdrop of plunging revenues. As a result austerity measures will get worse.

Angola, another oil-exporting country, is in a similar predicament. Confronted with a budget deficit for the first time since 2009, their government has just announced a significant reduction in the subsidies on fuel prices enjoyed by the population. This will increase the cost of public transport, provisions, etc.

Not only oil-prices dropped in 2014, the prices of silver and copper also fell by 16% and 18% respectively. Cotton prices suffered a heavy drop of 28% over the year [5]. Rubber prices also plunged [6] and iron-ore prices fell by 51%.

To sum up, many of the Sub-Saharan African countries are patting their own back today for their economic performance, but they are least concerned about working towards a sound improvement of their citizens' living conditions. This somehow recalls the previous major debt crisis which broke out in 1982.

The crisis of 1982

The outbreak of the 1982 crisis resulted from the combined effect of two factors: lower prices charged by the peripheral countries for their exports to the global market, and the enormous rise in the interest rates [7]. Revenues were plummeting but more payments had to be made overnight. Indebted countries declared that it was getting hard for them to pay. Major private banks immediately refused to grant new loans and demanded overdue payments. The IMF and the major industrialized capitalist countries granted new loans so that private banks could get their money back and a series of bankruptcies was prevented.

Since then, the IMF has been imposing structural adjustment plans with the World Bank's support. The IMF and the Northern governments are threatening to stop further loans to any indebted country that refuses the adjustments. Therefore, those who have been advising the peripheral countries since 1982 to suspend debt payments and create a front of indebted countries were absolutely right. Had the Southern countries established this front, they would have been able to dictate terms to their dismayed creditors.

By choosing to pay under the IMF's humiliating conditions, indebted countries transferred to the North's financial capital a sum that amounts to several Marshall Plans. [8] Adjustment policies result in key elements of national sovereignty being gradually abandoned. This means that the concerned countries are more and more dependent on the most industrialized countries and their corporations. None of the countries implementing structural adjustment has been able to achieve high growth rates in a steady fashion. Social inequalities have increased everywhere, even in "adjusted" countries.

The IMF adjustment programs have three objectives:

- 1) Ensuring debt-repayment.
- 2) Establishing structural reforms leading to a liberal economy, a gateway for the international markets and a check on the State's involvement.
- 3) Allowing the indebted countries to have gradual access to private loans via the financial markets, but ensuring that they remain indebted.

Let us not wait for another outbreak

A citizens' debt-audit must not be kept at bay till another crisis triggers off. We must start asking urgent critical questions: what happened to the money that landed in the form of various loans? What conditions were laid down when those loans were granted to the governments? How much interest has been paid and at what rate? How much of the

principal has been repaid? How could the debt grow massively without the people actually realizing what was happening? How were the loans channeled? What portion was diverted, by whom and how? Who borrowed and in whose name? Who are the creditors and what was the role of each of them? What are the mechanisms behind the various transactions of the State? Who decided to apply for the loans and in what capacity? How could private debts become public, who are the intermediaries and organizations responsible? Who benefited from the bogus projects run with borrowed money? What crimes have been committed with this money? Did the lenders know what would be done with the money? Why not start criminal, civil or administrative proceedings?

Only a small portion of the loans has contributed to the "development" of the countries involved. Overall, an evaluation of the achievements of the Sub-Saharan African countries and the amounts they paid, like other parts of the world, brings us to a remarkable conclusion: only a small portion of the loans has contributed to the "development" of the countries involved. Much of the borrowed money bolstered networks of corruption (in both the global South and the North) through commissions and kickbacks and enriched oligarchs whose flamboyant lifestyle is at odds with the surrounding poverty and misery. This also made the richest 1% even wealthier, who in turn invested their ill-gotten

money in tax havens, mostly in Europe. These loans have also financed white elephants, much-hyped but useless and overpriced projects. Apparently this took place via public guarantees granted to major private companies through devices set up by export credit agencies in creditor countries.

People bore the brunt, and still pay a heavy price while enduring the negative effects of this odious debt contracted by submissive states that do not protect, educate and care for their people, but deprive them instead of water, electricity, and other basic commodities.

It is for the sake of these people that the CADTM, and all other associations ready to co-operate, want to make way for citizens' battles so that we can have a clear picture of the situation: open accounting books for the debt, in other words carry out citizens' debt audits to identify the illegitimate, illegal and / or odious part that the people must refuse to pay. It is also necessary to identify the perpetrators of fraudulent acts that led to the debt and / or unjust personal enrichment. The culprits must be prosecuted.

Alongside a debt audit, an alternative development model that gives priority to humanity and nature should also be implemented.

Translated by Suchandra De Sarkar in collaboration with Christine Pagnouille

CADTM

GREECE

"The people is placing its hopes on the vote for Syriza, but the relationship of forces has not changed"

Since the parliamentary elections are taking place in less than three weeks, last weekend several meetings took place, including the local general assemblies of Antarsya and the Central Committee of Syriza, followed by a national conference. Originally planned to last two days, this national conference concluded on Saturday evening, which caused protests. Beyond various announcements, including a series of technocratic measures on the reform of the state (without any mention of workers' control!), and while the very complex period opens many questions, the leadership of Syriza has preferred give the image of a party that speaks with one voice. To discuss this period and the perspectives, we interviewed Antonis Davanellos, a member of the leadership of DEA, one of the revolutionary components of the Left Platform of Syriza.

What are the key decisions of this weekend?

The principal decision of the Central Committee and then the conference of Syriza is that the campaign will be based on the Thessaloniki programme, on questions relating to democratic gains and freedoms, as well as funding for the programme. The policy of Syriza is officially the following: a promise to abolish the memoranda and reactionary measures, refusal to apply for new loans or a new memorandum, a battle on the question of debt on a European level, linking the issue of the Greek debt to that of Italy, France, Portugal ... The only question on which there can be negotiations with the EU and the lenders is that of the debt; the

removal of the memoranda and reactionary measures are subject to the decisions of a left government.

This line is clearly that of a confrontation with the domestic and international system, and I think that the leadership of Syriza will be subject to pressure to retreat and move towards a compromise with the European Union. But it is important to see that this has not happened: this weekend showed once again that Syriza as a party is a reality that no one can underestimate!

Confrontations with the left wing took place on the fact that for it, it is impossible to accept former social democrats on our lists, even if they have broken with PASOK: the core of our alliances must be with the KKE (Greek Communist Party) and Antarsya.

Can you recall for us the key points of the Thessaloniki programme?

These are commitments taken publicly by Tsipras in September: to bring back wages and pensions to their level before the crisis; a return to collective bargaining agreements as they existed; a return to a minimum level of taxable income of 12,000 euros; abolition of the insupportable tax on heating oil. For the poorest popular layers, anti-crisis emergency measures such as free water and electricity, as well as a freeze on debt.

These measures are situated from the point of view of the leadership of Syriza in a conception of the relaunching of the economy that some people might call Keynesian; but I consider that their importance in the eyes of Greek society is this political message: austerity can be reversed. It is such a mes-

sage, I think, that a victory for Syriza could send to the whole of Europe.

What are the debates in the Left Platform?

It puts forward three main points: first, that the political project of Syriza must be supported by a class movement from below. Next, the necessary radicalization of the programme of Syriza, insisting on the cancellation of most of the debt, the nationalization of the banks and going back on privatizations. Finally, that the only political alliances are to be sought on the left: the objective is a common front of Syriza, the KKE and Antarsya, hence the slogan of the Platform: for a left government, and not one of "national salvation", or worse "national unity"...

Moreover, there have recently appeared in Syriza other radical forces coming from the majority and focusing on the questions of democracy and the functioning of the party.

We can read (in the newspaper *Epochi* linked to the majority of Syriza) that the only arm of the Right is our internal divisions, and that Syriza must speak with one voice. What should we say in relation to this call to silence the oppositions on the left?

It is clear that in the present political battle, some degree of discipline is required. At the same time, we have won in Syriza the guarantee of the right of tendency, the possibility of political oppositions that on issues of primary importance must be capable of being firm.

In my opinion, it is no coincidence that over the past period, questions of discipline within Syriza correspond to a shift to the right, with declarations by cadres or members of parliament publicly arguing for the need for a compromise with the bourgeoisie, especially European. On the contrary, the platform supports the collective decision-making and functioning of the party from the bottom up. We have confidence in the rank-and-file and it can

be considered that the political struggle for the orientation of Syriza is not definitively settled.

Reading the documents of DEA or R-Project, it seems that the mass movement is enthusiastic for Syriza and its possible coming to power. Do you really think that this is the case?

To tell the truth, the mass movement has declined in the last period, at least at the central level. Nevertheless, there are important battles in different sectors and regions. What this expresses in my opinion is that the people is provisionally placing its hopes on the vote for Syriza, but the relationship of forces has not changed: the first period of a left government will be crucial, with major struggles, strong demands and hopes that will have to be satisfied.

Thus, the character of the government of the left is an open question: it will be decided by the policies of Syriza but principally by the resistance and the struggles of the workers.

What role do you attribute to solidarity in Europe?

The fight to end austerity can begin in Greece, but it will not be carried through to the end if there are no mobilizations of the major forces of the workers' movement throughout Europe. All our hope is that the political victory in Greece will be followed by a domino effect of change in Europe!

We therefore ask for the solidarity of our European comrades, who must not allow the great powers to strangle the government of the left and the workers' movement in Greece. But that can be the beginning of a global battle against barbaric austerity throughout the continent, and we know from history that this war can certainly start in a small country, but that it will be won definitively in the streets of Rome, Madrid and Paris. This is the time to act: this is the best thing that Syriza and the Greek left can expect!

GREECE

What if SYRIZA took the EU at its word and audited Greek debt?

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

This campaign against the supposed dangers of SYRIZA is aimed at intimidating Greek voters into renouncing their right to change. It is also intended, in the event of a SYRIZA victory, to cause part of European public opinion to reject the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left in order to avoid Podemos winning the autumn 2015 Spanish elections in its wake. Other surprises could be in store from countries such as Cyprus, Portugal and Slovenia if their citizens considered that it would be worth trying to replace disastrous ultra-conservative policies by left-wing measures. European leaders and the large private corporations that support them are aware that the majority of the Eurozone population has a negative opinion of the policies that have been implemented in recent years, and would be ready to vote for change. A SYRIZA victory would represent a major threat to the mainstream parties, whether conservative or "socialist", fearing that the contamination could spread to Spain.

The debt that Greece is expected to pay is equivalent to 175% of annual national wealth, and is an intolerable burden for the Greek people.

What would happen if a SYRIZA government decided to apply, to the letter, Article 7 of a regulation adopted by the European Union in May 2013 "on the strengthening of economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States in the euro area experiencing or threatened with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability", concerning countries subject to a structural adjustment plan,

including in particular Greece, Portugal and Cyprus.

Paragraph 9 of Article 7 maintains that States subject to structural adjustment should carry out a complete order of public debt in order to explain why indebtedness increased so sharply and to identify any irregularities. Here is the text in full: "A Member State subject to a macroeconomic adjustment programme shall carry out a comprehensive audit of its public finances in order, *inter alia*, to assess the reasons that led to the building up of excessive levels of debt as well as to track any possible irregularity". [1]

The Greek government, under Antonis Samaras refrained from applying this regulation so as to hide from the Greek population, the real reasons for the increase in debt, and the irregularities linked to it. In November 2012, the Greek parliament, dominated by a right wing majority, rejected a SYRIZA motion for the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate the debt, by 167 to 119 with zero abstentions.

It is clear that should SYRIZA win the elections, the government that would then be set up could well decide to apply the letter of European law and create a parliamentary debt audit commission (with citizen participation) to analyse the process that led Greece into excessive indebtedness, to track probable irregularities, and to identify the illegitimate, illegal, odious ... parts of the debt.

Citizen participation is fundamental to a rigorous and independent audit process. Article 8 of the above-mentioned regulation recommends that: "A Member State shall seek the views of social partners as well as relevant civil society organisations when preparing its draft macroeconomic adjust-

ment programmes, with a view to contributing to building consensus over its content." One more reason for active citizen collaboration in the audit process.

Here are some key points that could be revealed by carrying out an audit.

Greek debt, which was at 113% of GDP in 2009 before the onset of the Greek crisis and the intervention by the Troika, which now holds 4/5 of total debt, reached 175% of GDP in 2014. We therefore see that the Troika intervention was followed by a very considerable increase in Greek debt.

Between 2010 and 2012, the loans that the Troika granted to Greece were very largely used to repay its most important creditors at that time, mainly the private banks of the principal European economies, starting with the French and German banks. [2] In 2009, some 80% of Greek public debt was held by the private banks of seven EU countries. Fifty percent was held by French and German banks alone.

An audit of Greek debt will show that European private banks greatly increased their loans to Greece between the end of 2005 and 2009 (rising by more than €60 billion, from €80 billion to €140 billion) without taking into account Greece's real repayment capacities. The banks acted recklessly, reassured in their conviction that the European au-

thorities would come to their aid if there was a problem.

As previously mentioned, an audit will show that the so-called bail-out of Greece set up by the European institutions with assistance from the IMF, has in fact enabled the banks of some European countries with a decisive influence on European institutions to continue collecting debt repayments while at the same time transferring the risk to the Member States through the Troika. It is not Greece that has been saved, but a handful of big private banks mainly based in the strongest countries of the EU.

Private European banks were thus replaced by the Troika as Greece's main creditor as from late 2010.

The audit will analyse the legality and legitimacy of the bail-out process. Is it in conformity with European treaties (especially Article 125, which prohibits EU countries from taking on the financial engagements of another EU country)? Did it comply with normal EU decision making procedure? Did the public lenders in 2010 (the 14 EU countries that granted Greece €53 billion of loans, the IMF, the ECB, the European Commission etc.) respect the principal of the free will of the borrower, Greece, or did they profit

CADTM

ARAB SPRING

"We're facing an important crossroads"

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

Gilbert Achcar, don't the successive failures and defeats in countries that have witnessed uprisings over the last four years make you reconsider the concept of "the long-term revolutionary process" that you outlined in your book, *The People Demand*?

There have certainly been failures and setbacks, but "defeats"—in the sense of doing away with the revolutionary process for good—seems to me inaccurate. Since 2011 I have been saying that what began back then was a long-term revolutionary process that would play out over many years, decades even, and pass through a number of phases. In many countries the process is currently going through a phase of retracting after its initial spread, faced as it is with an assault on all fronts by the counter-revolution in its various forms.

This brings us to the issue of leadership. The great revolutionary wave, which first broke in Tunisia in 2010 and left no Arab country untouched, was produced by measurable results—objective social and economic realities and a highly combustible political situation. But the course of these revolutions is determined by the interaction of these objective circumstances with the condition and actions of the potential leaders of revolutionary change.

This is the main weak point: we face revolutionary circumstances but without organized revolutionary forces that pursue a revolutionary strategy capable of advancing the process of revolutionary change. This applies to all Arab countries. If we look at Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, we find that progressive forces have not performed the required role, which is to form a revolutionary front independent of what I term the "two poles" of the counter-revolution.

What exactly do you mean by two poles of the counter revolution?

There is one counter-revolution, represented by the old regime, and another represented by the reactionary forces opposed to the old regime, and which trade in religious ideology. The issue with the progressive leadership in our countries is that they have effaced their progressive identity by allying with one counter-revolutionary pole against the other, or otherwise by hopping from an alliance with one to an alliance with the other, instead of forging a third way, equally removed from both.

Is there any hope of overcoming the consequences and returning to the revolutionary path?

Hope rests on us realizing that the revolutionary process is long-term and that it might take decades. When we talk about the French, English or Chinese revolutions, we are talking about processes that ran on for decades, from the first explosion to the point at which these societies reached a new state of sustainable stability.

Our revolutionary process is bound to continue as long as objective circumstances continue to generate crises and explosions and in the absence of any solution to the underlying problem, which is the blockage of economic development and the resulting high levels of unemployment, against the backdrop of a social system linked to a rentier patrimonial state.

Nor do revolutionary processes develop in a straight line: the course is crooked. There will be phases of ebb and flow in the interaction between the revolution and counter-revolution. To ignore this is to fall prey to short-sightedness, like the euphoria of the 2011 "Arab Spring," which was built on a fantasy that "peaceful" uprisings could lead to

the rapid spread of democracy and the improvement of social conditions. It involved turning a blind eye to the seriousness of the obstacles that our societies are facing, obstacles that we must pay a high price for removing. There is no avoiding it: we are due further revolutionary explosions in our countries in the medium-term, if not the short-term.

So will it be possible to overcome these consequences in the future?

In some countries in our region, progressive forces have sufficient political weight to entertain the possibility of leading the revolutionary process. This is the case in Tunisia, where the labour movement is objectively capable of leading society. In Egypt, though, there is no single organized force with comparable power, but there is a tremendous revolutionary energy, particularly among young people, that could be brought together through a coalition of revolutionary progressive forces. This energy manifested itself in the vote for Hamdeen Sabahy in the first round of the 2012 presidential elections: five million people rejected the old regime as represented by Shafiq and his reactionary rival, Morsi.

However the problem here is the lack of a suitable strategy. In Egypt, Hamdeen Sabahy has unfortunately pursued a twisty—if not mazy—political path. He has gone from an alliance with the Brotherhood in the 2011 parliamentary elections to an alliance with the old regime on June 30 / July 3 2013, heaping praise on Field Marshal El Sisi. Hamdeen paid a high price for it, since he disappointed the youth movement and all those who were eager to enact progressive revolutionary change by establishing a third pole, as well as losing almost of the credibility he'd accumulated at the height of his popularity in 2012 when he distanced himself from both Shafiq and Morsi.

Lacking a suitable strategy we are threatened by degeneration across the board. When a leadership capable of advancing revolutionary change falls away, the threat of a vicious reactionary backlash is doubled. So long as we remained trapped in the bi-

nary polarization of the old regime and reactionary forces that trade on religion, the likelihood of a descent into what in an earlier book I termed "the clash of barbarisms" grows ever stronger.

Leaving absolute optimism and pessimism aside, we need to be aware that we are facing a historical and highly important crossroads in the development of the long-term revolutionary process, which should make us determined to build leadership and formulate strategies appropriate for change if we wish to avoid imminent catastrophe.

Is it the lack of a progressive leadership that has allowed IS and other jihadist movements to offer themselves as an alternative leadership in Syria?

The case of Syria provides the starkest expression of the historical problem we face. In the early months of 2011 the Syrian uprising was concerned with the same social, economic and political problems that led to uprisings across the region. The uprising was being led first and foremost by the youth, who used social media to coordinate and organize the movement. They formed "local coordination committees" based on a political program that was democratic, not sectarian, and clearly voiced the great progressive aspiration of the 2011 uprising.

More than in Egypt, the problem in Syria lay in the absence of an organized progressive vanguard capable of leading the revolutionary process in the long-term. The coordination committees did not attempt to form an organized leadership on the ground, other than online, and what happened was that, in their absence, certain political forces appointed themselves as leaders from abroad, a deeply flawed alliance that included certain progressives under the overall control of the Muslim Brotherhood. The coordination committees made a serious mistake when they recognized this leadership, which was in thrall to Turkey, Qatar and the US. They combined this with completely failing to acknowledge the impossibility of repeating in Syria the Egyptian scenario of January 25 to February 11,

i.e.: the impossibility of bringing down Bashar Al Assad in the way Hosni Mubarak had been brought down before him.

In a "royal republic" like Syria, where the armed forces fall under the control of the ruling family's private guard, there is no way of toppling the head of the regime without bringing down the whole regime, including the "deep state". So, the uprising never had a chance of achieving victory "peacefully", but its transformation into an armed conflict took place in a piecemeal, disorganized fashion, the initiative of officers and soldiers who deserted from the army in protest at its oppression of the public.

As things stand, the lack of a progressive leadership, with progressives throwing themselves into the arms of the Brotherhood and Qatar, left the way open for forces with a more radical hostility to the regime to come to the fore, even though this hostility has a reactionary, religious, sectarian inspiration. Simultaneously, the Al Assad regime has done everything in its power to strengthen these religious forces at the expense of the democrats, in order to be able to accuse the opposition as a whole of religious extremism, to demonize it, and to forestall the danger of Western countries lending it their support. This is how the Syrian opposition got sucked into a degenerative dialectics of religious extremism that led to the founding of ISIS.

The rise of IS and its military expansion have taken place with staggering speed, suggesting that it might collapse equally quickly. In the medium and long-term there is still hope that an alliance might take shape that is capable of representing the progressive revolutionary energy that has burned so brightly since 2011, and even to return it to its rightful place in the future, once the war is over. This, however, will depend on those who want to create revolutionary change having the ability to create an alternative pole equally removed from the criminal regime and the fanatical gangs.

Do you think that the current regimes are being reckless in their defence of the old or-

der and their failure to offer the smallest concessions to keep the masses happy?

The Syrian example is quite clear: This regime, like all Arab regimes, will not leave the stage voluntarily, and anyone who imagines it will is dreaming. These regimes are built on the ruling class's exploitation of public resources to such a degree that it necessitates dictatorship. These rulers will defend their privileges to their last soldier. The starting point for any strategy must therefore be that these regimes—as long as they retain control over the armed services and agencies—will work to safeguard their interests at any cost, whether through civil war as in Syria, or by tightening the grip of dictatorship, as in Egypt.

This means that radical revolutionary change can never be achieved without paralysing the repressive capabilities of the current socio-political regime. This will either take place through victory over it in a drawn-out civil war (as happened in Libya), which as we see from Syria can have a heavy price, or otherwise by the revolutionary forces winning over the majority of the armed forces to the side of the revolution. Armies are composed of a minority of elites totally dedicated to the regime and a majority of ordinary citizens. The disaster of the Syrian revolutionaries was that they were unable to divide the Syrian army on a large enough scale: indeed, they did not even attempt to do so during the early stages of the uprising.

This brings us back to a basic condition for profound change: leadership. It is impossible to influence soldiers and the armed agencies of state without a political leadership capable of winning "the hearts and minds" of the common men who serve in the armed forces and convincing them to support the popular revolution.

The chief obstacle to the Arab uprising is the lack of such a leadership, or the lack of a strategic vision when they do exist. What is needed is organized forces that follow a strategy to construct a third, revolutionary pole, equally removed from the old

regime and religious radicalism, the two poles of
the counter-revolution.

9 January 2015

correspondents.org/eg

SYRIA

"Our lack of weapons puts us in a position of weakness"

The FLP was officially created a few months ago. Is it the logical culmination of the approach of activists who had for a long time participated in armed actions as part of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) or other groups, or in the "armed turn" of activists of the Current of the Revolutionary Left (CRL)? Is it a measure of protection of the CRL or the expression of a conviction that this regime will only be defeated by arms?

The creation of the FLP is the natural result of the transformation of the peaceful struggle into armed combat and is a reaction to the brutality of the ruling oligarchy. This has led large sections of the population to take up arms to defend themselves and their communities. Large areas of the country, having got rid of the presence of the oligarchy, have become "liberated", but the attacks of the armed forces of the government have made the armed struggle the dominant aspect of combat in these areas. It is difficult to act and be present there without taking part in it. In fact, although the announcement of the formation of the FLP came late – with regard to the constitution of popular and democratic armed brigades in the first place, then that of others, reactionary and extremist "takfiris", which have no connection with the revolution and its goals - it has responded to the objective developments imposed by the revolutionary process: the savage violence of the oligarchy against the masses, the arming of broad sectors of the masses, the threatening rise in the strength of reactionary and counter-revolutionary armed forces. The first nuclei of the FLP were the work of comrades who were already well engaged in the armed struggle, in democratic factions. Through their experience and

their roots, they shared the need of the masses to make revolutionary action evolve towards the establishment of a genuine revolutionary group, expressing the revolutionary goals of freedom, equality and social justice and fighting for their achievement within the mass struggle and not from outside it. The FLP are closer to the concept of the "United Front". This has brought about a qualitative transformation of the activity of a small number of comrades whose action was previously limited to civil activity. But this form of mass struggle did not, however, represent an overall shift of the policy of our organization, the CRL, towards armed struggle. It simply means that we do not reject any form of mass struggle if it serves the above-mentioned aims of the popular revolution and represents a step towards its triumph. This allows us to expand our influence by a concrete and realistic analysis of objective and subjective conditions.

What is your level of collaboration with the FSA and other local battalions?

There is cooperation and coordination, but in a limited way, on the one hand because of divergent views and objectives, or disparities between positions due to the geographic location where comrades are fighting and the nature of other organizations. On the other hand, these organizations do not generally accept anyone else. There are, however, also links and good coordination with several "democratic" groups of the FSA and of local brigades where we find support and shelter. But we have not up to now been able to achieve a qualitative leap in this cooperation, because of the weakness of our resources and our support. The absence of support that would enable us to deploy and to confront the forces of the regime and the extremist reactionary groups in the necessary way largely

hinders our activity and limits our cooperation with these "democratic" groups of the FSA or of local brigades.

Let us not forget that our activity has not met with any echo in the media, but rather the code of silence, and that the international media are only interested in the "Islamic State" (IS) and its peers, and – by a slanderous shortcut – in the mutation of our original popular revolution into a simple "sectarian war" or "war against IS". Let us not forget that we are working underground, which hardly allows us to report our actions.

The FLP have been faced with repression and also death...

The fighting comrades of the FLP face danger every day. A few months ago, while the comrades were going to lend a hand to a group of the FSA, there was a clash with elements of the Al Nosra Front, which is reactionary and extremist. Two comrades died for the cause, and a third was wounded. On the other side, members of the Al Nosra Front were killed and others wounded. The strengthening of the popular resistance and the unity of the armed struggle, regardless of race or religious denomination, is at the heart of our priorities and was the main reason for the formation of the FLP. The departure of comrades to Kobané fits into this framework. The confrontation conducted against both the extremist organizations and the regime is the condition of the triumph of the popular revolution and it is the only way to build a free and democratic Syria. We are confronted simultaneously with these two forces, which are enemies of the popular revolution and the interests of the masses.

Before taking the decision to strengthen the resistance in Kobané, had the FLP not already confronted the counter-revolutionary groups, or did they concentrate all their efforts against the regime?

The departure of comrades for Kobané to contribute to the confrontation with the fascist IS follows an independent decision of the FLP. It is part of our belief that the liberation of the masses, re-

gardless of their nationality, requires the unity of their common struggle against their common enemies. As the CRL, we have links with the Kurdish parties and popular currents which are present there.

Did you attempt to reach Kobané at the call of other forces or in coordination with them, or independently? What was the obstacle to this participation?

The action of the combatant comrades who have gone to Kobané is conducted in coordination with the forces and the popular leadership present in Kobané. Of course, we face a lot of obstacles to moving around and deploying. To travel to the "liberated" areas is dangerous because these areas change control, going from the hegemony of the FSA to that of the forces of the regime or the fascists of the IS, Al Nosra or their allies. However, the principal obstacle is that of our own resources. The lack of support and funding prevents us from recruiting new fighters, because we are unable to provide them with weapons, whereas those who wish to join us are numerous. Our deficiency in weapons puts us in a position of weakness in many of our battles. To take an example, the comrades who went to Kobané because they wanted to participate in the fight against the danger of the IS had only light individual weapons.

The CRL is a young group. What about the FLP, its social and feminine components?

It is true that the CRL is a young organization, one which has the same age as the revolution. However, in exceptional circumstances of difficulty and cruelty, and in a relatively short space of time, we have been able to transform a small group into a genuine revolutionary organization. And we have gone from a few dozen activists in the first two years of our existence to what we are today, more than double that, while other left groups have broken up or disappeared. We are not satisfied with maintaining ourselves and keeping going; we are constantly developing and we are structuring our activity in all sectors of the struggle. We take a great interest in

the rank-and-file coordinating committees and the original local councils that remain, despite the reduction in their numbers, because they are the forms of self-organization and self-management created by the masses in their revolution. The FLP were created by our comrades and by fighters who have adopted the programme of the popular revolution while being in the field of the popular armed struggle. They come from various social layers: workers, poor peasants, students, civil servants and unemployed ... The FLP are mainly composed of young men and women, in the image of Syrian society. Their goal is to continue the armed struggle and to extend it, and they are open to anyone who adopts the programme of the popular revolution against tyranny, exploitation and imperialist hegemony. We are fighting in dramatic conditions, despite our limited resources and lack of support, because we are genuine revolutionaries and we want to achieve freedom and justice. We face difficulties and dangers on a daily basis. It is a struggle to ensure the daily needs of the comrade combatants. Despite all this, they remain determined, motivated by the love of freedom, humanity, justice and equality and by the aspiration to a life of dignity and justice. The FLP are at present limited, for many reasons - including the absence of a secure base for some time - to young comrades and to the participation of women comrades as those responsible for information, whereas women are well represented in the ranks of the CRL, particularly in its leading bodies.

What is your analysis of the present relationship of forces between the revolution and the counter-revolution, on the political and military levels?

Recently, there has been a clear advance of the counter-revolutionary forces at the expense of the popular revolution. But it is only one moment of the revolution, which is in no way definitively fixed. It is capable of changing every day, and it evolves according to the zone, to the support received by all the parties, to the fluctuating relationship of forces on the terrain. The forces of the counter-revolution

have got their hands on the oil and gas wells in order to ensure funding and liquid cash, not to mention the support received from reactionary Arab forces and personalities for the purpose of putting an end to the genuine revolutionary forces and having the revolution aborted in order to convert it into a religious or regional conflict in the long term. On the political and popular level, despite the tragedies experienced by the Syrian people, this people is still committed to the objectives of the revolution: putting an end to the regime and to its detachments, the extremist jihadi fascist organizations. This requires genuine solidarity and support from all the revolutionary and democratic forces in the world.

Do you need a concrete expression of international solidarity? In what form?

The class struggle is not local but global. The victory of the insurgent masses in our country will overturn the relationship of forces in favour of the forces of emancipation on a world scale. International solidarity is not only a duty for all anticapitalists, but a necessity, as Che Guevara said. It is not enough to observe with sympathy our ferocious struggle for the victory of the popular revolution against the criminal regime and the savage forces of the counter-revolution, which receive support at the regional level. So that the revolutionary left can open the way in a more effective fashion, we have a desperate need of concrete solidarity and of the support of democratic forces and our revolutionary comrades around the world. This is what we need to see our project grow and to revitalize popular resistance and expand our activity throughout Syria. This requires a clear programme, ongoing support and coordination with all our comrades around the world in order to achieve our goals. However, for the moment we have not only received moral support for our revolution, which we appreciate at its true value, but which is not enough with regard to the violent struggle that we are waging against several enemies. We, the FLP, as the fighting sector of the CRL, are acting in difficult conditions. Every minute sees a threat to the

lives of our comrades. We have unquestionably need of real political, logistic and financial international help and solidarity. We call on comrades and friends to form committees in solidarity with our struggle and with that the masses of our

country, for freedom, equality and social justice, for a better world.

*Translated from Arabic to French by Luiza Roscane for **Inprecor**, translation to English from French by **International Viewpoint**.*

IRAQ

"Islamic State", the lethal state

LUIZA TOSCANI ·

Many regimes closed their eyes to the activities of Islamic State, because of short-term considerations. At the beginning of the revolution, the Syrian regime knowingly released imprisoned Syrian jihadists and it refrained until recently from combating Islamic State, seeing it as a conjunctural counter-revolutionary ally. Daesh benefited from the facilities granted by Turkey in order to weaken the Kurdish forces. The army of Islamic State has certainly been financed by private donors from Gulf countries. It has financed itself through control of oil wells, grain silos in Syria, Iraqi bank funds, antiquities in Syria and Iraq, rights of passage at its check points, ransoms and the sale of women. It also levies taxes on the traffic of oil and its derivatives (notably resold to the Syrian regime) or tobacco (Syria). It has taken over the old Iraqi tax structure and even plans new "taxes" targeted at Christians. No matter what happens, Islamic State's income assures from the outset a certain independence from the populations subjected to it.

Islamic State is today a state based on a war economy, a centralized rentier state, seeking short-term profit, having "nationalized" the income from its plunder and redistributed wealth in order not to alienate the poor of the occupied areas that it has not decided to eliminate: free electricity and a 50% cut in rents in Mosul for the poor, distribution of food during Ramadan in Syria. It is assisted in this management by the alliance woven with former Baathist cadres.

Islamic State controls an area rich in resources and inhabited by around nine million people. These areas are more a vast spider's web than a homogeneous territory. However, in August it was in full control of Mosul, Sinjar, Raqqa and Tikrit. It will not venture into areas that are not conquered (Shiites). As for the minorities, it persecutes them (Christians) or exterminates them (Yezids, Shia Turkoman, Sunnis refusing to give it allegiance and so on).

The small number of military personnel with regard to the size of the conquered territories leads it to execute men and sell women or exile them, rather than imprisoning them. It does not have too much infrastructure in the areas newly conquered.

A hierarchical army which relies on "flying" units, a minority of which is made up of inexperienced foreigners, all this reinforces the hierarchical aspect and decreases the risk of insubordination, not to mention the use of child soldiers. Women are assigned to other tasks such as the recruitment of women to marry the military leaders, finding and preparing captives for sale and so on.

Islamic State now has control of military equipment taken from the Syrian army. It has also gained control of a quarter of the stock of the Iraqi army (Humvees, missiles and other heavy weaponry) often of US manufacture and abandoned by the bloated Iraqi army in Mosul. In weapons and in men, it is superior to the forces of the Kurdistan region.

Islamic State provides a livelihood its combatants, mostly down at heel youth, or mercenaries from all over the world. The porosity of its recruitment suggests a strong infiltration.

The Emirate has become a Caliphate, a monarchy by divine right. The self-proclaimed caliph is a spir-

itual and temporal leader. The discourse of its spokesperson, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, reveals its ultra-reactionary character: "Muslims, reject democracy, secularism, nationalism and other litter of the West, return to your religion". It has global ambitions and summons all jihadi groups to give allegiance.

Material factors alone do not explain the crimes of Islamic State. If they have not yet generalized courts, the prisons or cemeteries and do not have time to kill civilians before burying them, they have the time to rape women, decapitate the dead after shooting them, display their heads, put children in these macabre scenes, film them broadcast them on the internet. This reflects as much if not more a logic of terror than a purely economic one, the effects of the first compensating for the shortcomings of the second.

The Charter governing life in Mosul is a series of bans and not a social project. Non-compliance is

punishable by "execution, crucifixion, amputation of the arms and legs or exile". The banks are re-opening in Mosul only for individuals that are not part of the old state apparatus and are not members of a minority.

Officially dropped by the Gulf States, Islamic State is recognized by Boko Haram. It is a competitor to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, that of the Caucasus or Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Islamic State is implanted only in Iraq and Syria. Demonstrations of support have been held on several occasions in Jordan recently (Maan, Al Zarqa, Yajouz).

In essence bourgeois and parasitic, ultra-reactionary in its ideology and counter-revolutionary in practice, Islamic State is in the final, but also in the first analysis "a band of armed men", in the definition of the state proposed by Lenin and Engels.

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY

Rasmea Odeh's Long Struggle

DAVID FINKEL ·

Observers and supporters of the 67-year-old Palestinian community leader were stunned immediately after a federal jury in Detroit returned a guilty verdict on November 10, following two hours of deliberation, when Federal District Judge Gershwin Drain ordered her jailed until a sentencing hearing that's scheduled for March 10, 2015.

Odeh was handcuffed and shipped to the St. Clair County Jail in Port Huron, Michigan, 400 miles from her community in Chicago where she serves as associate director of the Arab American Action Network and director of the Arab Women's Committee. [1]

In a poorly heated county jail that's hardly suited for lengthy incarceration, Odeh was held in solitary confinement for 12 days and her health began to suffer due to high blood pressure and other conditions. The Rasmea Defense Committee launched an emergency letter-writing and phone-in campaign for the restoration of her bond.

On December 8, the judge reversed his previous ruling that Odeh has "no meaningful ties" in Chicago — flying in the face of her deep community involvements and her relatives living there — and recognized her eligibility for release on bond.

Prosecutor Jonathan Tukel immediately appealed, demanding a hearing and raising a series of political questions on the source of the money raised for Odeh's bond, but withdrew the objection after a December 10 deposition [2].

A difficult, bitter and expensive battle lies ahead for Odeh and the defense campaign. The prosecution is demanding a minimum 21-month prison sentence — she could be sentenced to as much as 10 years —

and stripping her naturalized U.S. citizenship, followed by deportation. She was convicted for failing to disclose, in her 2004 application for naturalization (and her initial application for legal permanent U.S. residency, filed in Jordan in 1994), her arrest and imprisonment in Israel 35 years earlier.

Rasmea Odeh was born in 1947 in the Palestinian town of Litfa outside Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were expelled by Israeli forces in the 1948 war. Living in the West Bank which came under Israeli occupation in 1967, she was arrested in a roundup following the 1969 bombing of an Israeli supermarket, sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court and served ten years before she was released in an Israeli exchange of prisoners with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Her indictment on immigration fraud charges followed FBI raids in 2010 on two dozen political activists in Chicago and Minneapolis, which have resulted in no charges but apparently led the Justice Department to undertake a three-year investigation of Rasmea Odeh leading to her arrest in October, 2013.

In her trial Odeh was not allowed to testify about torture under Israeli interrogation, nor was the defense allowed to present expert testimony that she suffers from post-traumatic stress that affects her memory. [3]

The arrest and trial of Rasmea Odeh has every appearance of a blatantly selective political prosecution. In the circumstances where virtually no defense case was allowed, the conviction was practically a foregone conclusion. The judge, after stating in pre-trial hearings that her claims of Israeli torture are "credible," turned around and excluded them from her trial. And despite detailed expert testimony from University of Illinois-Chicago pro-

fessor Nadine Naber on Odeh's decade-long uniquely successful work among mainly Arab immigrant women in Chicago, he somehow saw fit to rule she had "no ties" to hold her there.

Her release on bond shows that publicity and pressure makes a difference, but a long uphill struggle

remains. Follow the case at www.uspcn.org as the defense team develops strategies for the sentencing and appeals process.

ATC

What's behind Detroit happy talk?

DIANNE FEELEY ·

What's Behind Detroit Happy Talk?

— Dianne Feeley

If one statistic could sum up the problem, the median Detroit family income is \$19,800 while the national average stands at \$60,700. How can such inequality exist? How can the city's maternal death rate be so high? During 2008-11 it stood at 58.7 per 100,000 babies — higher than Libya, Uruguay or Vietnam, and three times greater than the U.S. average.

We know the answer: Detroit is 83% African American, with more than 40% in poverty and an official unemployment rate double that of the state. Detroit is a city redlined by racism. Kevyn Orr, appointed by governor Rick Snyder, remarked to the Wall Street Journal shortly after he became the Emergency Manager, Detroit had been "dumb, lazy, happy and rich" — that is, we are the cause of our problems.

With the city bankruptcy saving \$7.8 billion by reducing retiree pensions and health care benefits, it's easy to see that for those workers — not all of whom live in the city — it was a disaster. Over their lifetimes, uniformed pensioners (police and fire), who receive no Social Security or Medicare, take an 18% cut; all other retirees, who lost their cost-of-living increases, suffer a 13% cut.

The city dumped \$4.3 billion in retirement health care benefits by establishing VEBA trusts that will pay a miserable \$125 a month to general system retirees to purchase individual health insurance through the Obamacare exchange. Uniformed retirees will get a whopping \$400.

In one last turn of the screw, the city demanded that retirees who contributed to city's annuity savings account between 2003 and 2013 return any interest overpayment. This "clawback" may amount to \$190-239 million. For those who cannot return

the full amount, money will be deducted from future pension checks, with a state mandated 18% interest tacked onto the bill.

While emergency manager Orr claimed Detroit's debt and liabilities totaled \$18 billion, previous figures had put the figure closer to \$13 billion. Figures were inflated by including water and sewer bonds that had their own sources of revenue. One might also question the notion that future liabilities should be considered in the bankruptcy plan. (If a person purchases a house with a 30-year mortgage, it would be crazy to calculate the total owed against one's yearly wage and talk about one's enormous debt.)

A summary of the bankruptcy settlement speaks of cutting \$7 billion of retiree benefits and \$3 billion in restructuring deals with Wall Street creditors. But if those creditors received about 13 cents on the dollar, their deals were never thoroughly investigated. Additionally they receive choice property along the Detroit River, and longterm deals on collecting fees from the international tunnel crossing and various city-owned parking garages.

Clearly the burden of debt elimination was placed on the backs of retirees who thought they had a secure future. The Michigan Constitution protects pension benefits — until Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes ruled federal bankruptcy supersedes state guarantees.

Over the years various media reported that UBS, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase lent the city approximately \$3.7 billion in bonds to cover deficits and pension shortfalls from 2005 onward at high interest rates, handling expenses and insurance fees. They encouraged the city to bet on derivatives, also demanding that penalties be written into agreements if certain triggers occurred — such as a lower bond rating — and the city's liabilities

rose to \$15 billion (including shortchanging pension funds by at least \$770 million over 22 years).

We do know that in 2005, when mayor Kwame Kilpatrick borrowed \$1.4 billion from UBS to cover a pension payment, \$46.4 million was allotted for fees. The next year UBS sold \$948.5 million in city bonds, with Detroit charged \$61.8 million on the transaction. For his work, Wall Street rewarded Kilpatrick with the 2005 Bond Buyer's Deal of the Year.

By 2012 the derivative deal left the city \$439 million in the hole (later falling to \$350 million). By the end of the year, however, mayor David Bing found that because of low ratings and high deficits, the city was unable to borrow. He turned to the Michigan Finance Authority, which arranged a \$129.5 million bond issue underwritten by Bank of America. This cost \$1.6 million in fees, with part of the bond repaying an earlier \$80 million loan.

On December 10, 2014 Judge Steven Rhodes finalized the bankruptcy exit he'd approved a month earlier. It included paying \$85 million on the derivative deal as well as the transfer of city property to various creditors. The law firms that managed the bankruptcy will receive \$150 million. Detroiters are told it's a new day.

Euphoria about how Detroit is coming back focuses on the gentrification that has taken place in the downtown and midtown areas, while neighborhoods face another wave of tax foreclosures in 2015 — a figure 34% higher than the previous year. Of

the 230,000 Detroit residential properties, 62,000 are to be auctioned off, including 37,000 that are occupied. With a general rule of 2.74 occupants per household, this means the possible displacement of 100,000 people in a city of 688,000.

Market values of Detroit homes have dropped significantly, yet no reassessment has been carried out. Instead of a moratorium until assessments have been carried out and taxes adjusted, the city announces that taxes owed over the past three years on these properties total \$326.4 million, with \$100 million of that in unpaid water bills and interest fees. The city is counting on taking in a big chunk of that money.

But the tax bills are too high and people too poor to pay. Without a jobs program, and having just reduced retiree benefits, residents own their homes yet are cash poor.

With the resumption of water shutoffs by the end of October 2014 more than 13,000 households were without water — approximately 30,000 people. Yet mayor Mike Duggan chose to ignore the recommendation of UN representatives that there be an accessible affordability plan.

Meanwhile downtown apartment rentals are going through the roof, forcing out seniors and people with disabilities.

You think water and housing are human rights? For the banks, that's a good laugh.

ATC

GREECE

The situation in the run up to the elections

PANOS PETROU ·

SoZ: There was a general strike in Greece on November 27 which was massively supported. But apart from this we in Germany have heard very little news about social struggles in Greece during the last months. Could you give us an impression about the present situation concerning social struggles and protest movements in Greece?

PP: The protest movement is at a low level, at least compared with the massive, militant resistance we have witnessed in 2010-12. The lack of concrete material victories during that time, and the exhaustion after months in the streets and in strike actions, led to a rise of electoralism. People hope to achieve through the ballot (with the vote for SYRIZA) what they couldn't achieve with their struggles. This was not inevitable, and theories that tend to blame the workers for being passive are wrong. The leaderships of the political Left and the trade-unions have some serious responsibilities for the current situation.

But we are not witnessing a defeat of the resistance movement. Local, smaller, bitter struggles persist. The workers of [the public radio station] ERT, the heroic cleaning ladies that are on the streets for months, laid-off public sector workers (like school guards who marched on their feet from Thessaloniki to Athens) who will keep mobilizing until they are re-instated are some important examples. We should also mention the successful campaign of "civil disobedience" by public sector workers, who refused to take part in the "evaluation program" (which would serve as a justification for new layoffs).

More recently, the solidarity movement for the Syrian refugees who were on hunger strike, camped

in Syntagma Square and the solidarity movement for the young anarchist Nikos Romanos who was on hunger strike (demanding the "education leaves" from prison that the state refused to provide him), proved that the governments' attempt to build a conservative, right-wing, "law and order" hegemony has failed.

These last two struggles also served as an example of determination and active solidarity, which are values and attitudes that are needed for the workers' struggles too. All these struggles are important because they keep this "electoralism" in a left-wing direction. Meaning that it is not a vote out of despair, but a "popular mandate" to reverse austerity.

SoZ: How strong is the support for "Golden Dawn" at the moment.? Are they seriously weakened or are they still a force which enjoys strong support in the population?

PP: Golden Dawn is facing problems. The persecution of its leadership (and nazis always function in a rigid "top-down" organization), the withdrawal of the scandalous protection they enjoyed from the state until the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, and the massive antifascist mobilizations that followed the murder have led to a situation where the neonazis are not only unable to continue their murderous activities, but also unable to take any kind of political initiatives in general. Their demonstrations to support the persecuted leadership gather only a few hundred people, the "hard-core". Their previous electoral rise has halted, and maybe it is declining, we cannot know for sure (they are polling from 4 to 7%).

But they still enjoy the persistent (after everything that happened) support of a serious part of the population. So they remain a threat for the (near) future, if the ruling class decides to use them again.

The trials can serve as the "bargaining table" for the future of Golden Dawn (for example: conviction of some members, acquittal of others, and the emergence of a "purified" Golden Dawn or parts of Golden Dawn participating in a recomposition of the far-right, a project that is already promoted by certain far-right politicians like Takis Baltakos, the "right-hand" of Samaras who was proved to have serious contacts with the neonazi leadership).

That is why we insist that antifascist mobilization must continue, both during the trials, and in general during all the coming period.

SoZ: The election of the new president is scheduled for December. According to our information it is not probable that Dimas, the candidate of Samaras and Venizelos, will get the necessary votes. We have the impression that in Greece there is already an election campaign going on. What are the most important issues in the controversy between the government of the right and SYRIZA?

PP: The main choice is between austerity and its reversal, either continuing to implement the policies that the creditors and the local ruling class demands or making a stand against them. And this is the left-wing argument in this electoral campaign.

Of course the government, its international allies and the mass media are trying to shift the debate in a different direction. The government is supposed to represent stability while SYRIZA is accused as a force that will lead to chaos.

The ruling class (and consequently its political personnel) has lost the ability to hegemonize, meaning to represent its interests as the interests of the society as a whole. So they try to represent SYRIZA as the biggest and only threat to society. They have resorted to a scare campaign that tries to argue that "all your sacrifices will be for nothing if SYRIZA gets elected and leads to chaos, things will get a lot worse". The scare campaign sometimes takes a grotesque Cold-War style, against "the red threat that will destroy the nation". A SYRIZA victory is

represented in the mass media as some sort of apocalypse.

SoZ: Our impression is that SYRIZA has considerable "softened" its original programme. Taking over the banks is no longer a goal of Tsipras. That also seems to be the case concerning stopping the payment of debt. Can you outline the present main demands of SYRIZA?

PP: Tsipras has presented the "immediate program", meaning not the full policy of SYRIZA but the first priorities of a left-wing government and the program around which it will ask for the people's vote in this election. This program has some aspects that are very important: raising the minimum wage, re-instating some cut pensions, re-instating collective contracts and bargaining rights for the unions, re-instating laid off public sector workers, cancellation of some taxes that hit the popular classes etc. These are accompanied with some measures to "restructure" the state. But at the same time the future of the banks (or the privatized state enterprises) was not mentioned at all. On the debt issue, indeed "stopping the payment" is downplayed and the emphasis is given on "negotiation and a European solution". But at the same time it was stated that the implementation of SYRIZA's program is not up for negotiation and that the "surplus" of the budget cannot go to debt repayment.

The bottom line is that the leadership is trying to argue that its program will be a "win-win" situation (protecting workers while gaining the approval of the capitalists that will not be harmed). That is why it is softening its rhetoric, downplaying all issues that are considered an immediate "attack" on capital. And yet, no matter what the leadership of SYRIZA wish for, the measures described above will be perceived as an "act of war" from the local and international bourgeoisie.

SoZ: Will a future Tsipras government be ready to support the building up of popular mass movements? Or will they try to contain such movements to come to an agreement

with the "investor-community" and the Troika?

PP: Everyone in SYRIZA argues that "without the people on the streets, few things can be done". But what is not clear is whether we all agree that – for this reason – we need to mobilize and organize or that – for this reason "few things will be done". During the past months, SYRIZA has failed (and sometimes didn't even try) to play the role of the organizer of protest movements. SYRIZA members are always present in struggle, but the party as a whole didn't engage with these tasks in a co-ordinated, conscious way. So, I cannot predict, but this could be the case the day after an electoral victory. But I don't think that a SYRIZA government would actually try to contain the social movements. And even if it tried, it would probably fail to do such a thing. First of all, it doesn't have the control over the unions and the social movements, like the old powerful social-democratic or communist parties. And secondly, the party activists, and cadres would not tolerate such an effort. What I know is that if a left-wing government tries to contain the social movements, it will actually "saw the branch on which it sits", and this reality will be another factor that a SYRIZA government should keep in mind.

SoZ: What are the main political controversies between the SYRIZA leadership and the Left Platform at the moment?

PP: The issues mentioned above, around the banking sector, the re-nationalization of privatized state enterprises and the cessation of debt repayments as a "weapon in our arsenal" are things that the Left Platform is arguing that they should be part of our program. But the main controversy lately has been the issue of political alliances. The Left Platform insists that our only allies are on the Left, meaning the Communist Party and ANTARSYA. The leadership insists talking vaguely about some sort of "broad unity" that goes "beyond the ranks of the Left", while refusing to make clear what this means. That is why we push for the slogan "left-wing government", instead of some new formulations like

"government of social salvation" that are open to various interpretations. Apart from the future alliances with other parties, this issue was raised recently around the candidates with the SYRIZA ballot. The Democratic Left, former socialdemocrats or some "repentant" centere-right MPSs are trying to "jump on the train". This is a very controversial issue not only for the Left Platform, but for thousands of SYRIZA members, beyond party tendencies and affiliations.

Last but not least, the left-wing is arguing against recent efforts to "neutralize" the functioning of collective organs of the party and turn it into an "electoral machine".

SoZ: What are the main political tasks for a future left government? What is the opinion of DEA and the Left Platform?

PP: The reversal of austerity, the "reconquest" of everything that was lost during years and years of neoliberalism. A left-wing government should act as a force of "class unilateralism". It must commit to serve workers' and poor peoples' interests and not some vague concepts like "the country" or "the economy". In this process, it should declare "war on capital". Those responsible for the crisis, those who still benefit from it, must finally pay. And even to implement some mild pro-worker reforms, such a confrontation will be inevitable, no matter what are the wishes of a left-wing government. To confront blackmails, economic sabotage, international strangulation etc, a left-wing government should be ready and willing to counterattack with measures against capitalist "liberties" and their power over the economy. Of course we are aware that to implement such measures, it will be crucial for the Left (all the forces of the Left) to mobilize the workers movement, the only force capable to neutralize the power of capital. In the times of neoliberalism, and even more so in the midst of the deep crisis, there is no "middle ground" or "win-win scenarios". Capitalists don't negotiate a thing, and any effort to compromise would lead to capitulation.

DEA understands the election of a left-wing government as a starting point for a new period of intense class struggle. The left-wing government should use its position to push forward such a struggle, but no matter what it will or will not do, we understand that its very presence in office will be a "destabilizing" factor, and that the extraparlimentary struggles will be the crucial "field" that we should focus our activities, if we want this "adventure" to end not with a strategic defeat but with a historical working-class victory.

SoZ: What are the positions of other left groups (KKE, ANTARSYA) towards a SYRIZA government? Do they "critically support" a SYRIZA government or do they oppose it?

PP: The line of the Communist Party is becoming more and more sectarian as we move to the elections and as the prospect of a SYRIZA government is getting closer. Sometimes its leadership spends more time attacking SYRIZA than the government. Unfortunately ANTARSYA over the past months retreated even from the unity in action that was established in the past in some workplaces or neighborhoods/neighborhoods etc. These comrades seem to have concluded that SYRIZA will inevitably betray and fail and refuse to engage in the battle to avoid this scenario.

Of course I believe that many communists understand the importance of a left-wing government, and I also believe that there are many non-sectarian comrades in ANTARSYA. I want to believe that a position of "critical support" could prevail after the election.

From our part (DEA and the Left Platform) we insist that – despite the different electoral tactics – the United Front of the Left will be a crucial task for the coming period. The trade-union forces of the Communist Party and the very militant comrades of ANTARSYA are very important allies in the coming confrontation.

I believe that we – and many more SYRIZA members – will be active in the same struggles with all

these comrades, supporting any positive measures by a left-wing government, defending it from right-wing attacks, pushing for more radical policies, supporting the workers struggles when the left-wing government neglects their interests.

SoZ: How important is international solidarity for a future left government in Greece? Are there any signs for an "alliance of the south" especially with Spain?

PP: It will be absolutely crucial. In the face of international blackmails and strangulation, of course SYRIZA should hold its ground and the people should mobilize, but to win against such forces, the international mobilization of the Left and the working class in defence of a left-wing government that is trying to break through the neoliberal prison that have been built in the European Union could be a decisive factor in the end.

The Greek ruling class has powerful allies in Brussels, Berlin, London, Paris, Washington etc. We will need our own allies, demonstrating and struggling in the streets of these capitals. Of course a future left-wing government has the task to provide an example that will be truly worth defending. If that will be the case, then it will be up to our comrades, and class brothers and sisters around Europe to fight on our side.

That is the way we understand the effort to avoid isolation: not seeking for possible alliances with parts of the ruling class of this or that country for a supposed "European New Deal", but building solidarity from below, in a common struggle of the workers against the neoliberal EU.

In our view, the so-called "alliance of the South" should be understood that way. There are no "common interests" with Matteo Renzi, François Hollande or Mariano Rajoy, who attack the workers of the South. But we stand together with the workers and the left in these countries. We argue that Greece is the "weak link", that can lead to the break-up of the chain.

The counterattack of the working class and the Left can begin in one country, but it can be completed and successful only internationally. This prospect may seem far today, but I believe that the "wildfire" can spread. The rise of Podemos is such an example that we welcome wholeheartedly.

SoZ: Are there any special topics which the German left should emphasize in the coming months ?

PP: Confronting the mainstream propaganda and scare tactics around the possibility of a SYRIZA victory would be helpful. We need to break the divide between the workers of the "South" and the "North". As we fight against "anti-Germanism", explaining that German workers are not to blame for

what Merkel is doing, you could argue against the myth of "lazy Greek workers", explain that SYRIZA is not a threat to German workers, austerity is. Raising this awareness will be important as a first step for the crucial battles ahead of us.

In the international solidarity against efforts to strangle a left-wing government, we understand that the working class and the Left in Germany will play a very important role, as you are struggling "in the belly of the beast". As we are heading to a confrontation with the dictates of Brussels and the "creditors", raising your voices against the neoliberal structure of the EU and against these "creditors" will be important. And of course, your struggle against your government, will be the best contribution to our common struggle.

MEXICO

We Are All Ayotzinapa

DAN LA BOTZ ·

At this writing on December 5, students, labor unionists and community groups had taken over the Sonora State Legislature, while teachers blocked the Highway of the Sun that links Mexico City to the resort city of Acapulco with the Christmas holiday season just about to begin. [The charred remains of one of the students, Alexander Mora, were confirmed a day later — ed.]

Mexico has not seen such a crisis at least since the election protests of 2006. Indeed, perhaps it has never seen anything quite like the wave of social protest that has engulfed the country since, on September 26, police working with gangsters killed six, wounded 25, and kidnapped 43 students.

Protests over the murders continued throughout October, some spontaneous and others well organized, reaching a peak on the November 20 anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution when tens — some say hundreds — of thousands marched and rallied in the zócalo, the national plaza.

Already in late September, protestors striking out at symbols of government and politics burned the Iguala city hall and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) state office in Chilpancingo. A large protest crowd on November 8 burned the door of the National Palace in Mexico City. The parents of the disappeared students led some of the largest marches and rallies.

The United States shares responsibility. President Barack Obama repeatedly lauded the government of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and its war on drugs even as 60,000 were killed, 20,000 disappeared, and 1.5 million displaced. And Obama has, in the last two years, praised President

Enrique Peña Nieto, even as thousands more died in Mexico's drug wars.

Washington spent \$3 billion in the last six years on the Mérida Initiative, a border security, counter-narcotics, and counterterrorism program established by the George W. Bush administration in 2008. Clearly the U.S. support for the Mexican government dramatically magnifies the level of violence and damage to Mexican society.

Violence and impunity, however, are principally a problem of the Mexican government and political parties.

Presidential Corruption

The Ayotzinapa disappearances and the protests over them would alone constitute a serious national crisis.

Then in early November, the media discovered that, in a flagrant conflict of interest, President Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife Angélica Rivera had a \$7 million home in an exclusive neighborhood — the president's wife called it "their real home" — a house belonging to a subsidiary of Grupo Higa, a company that had done hundreds of millions of dollars of business with the State of Mexico when Peña Nieto was governor, and had just signed a contract on November 3 with a Chinese-led consortium to build a \$3.7 billion high-speed railroad between Mexico City and Queretaro. The president and his wife quickly announced that the house was not a gift but that she was buying the home and government officials claimed to be canceling the contract for construction of the railroad.

Peña Nieto's government has been embarrassed by the revelations of conflict interest and the government at the highest levels has been shaken by the wide-spread criticism and massive protests.

Realizing the depth of the crisis, the extent of the public disaffection, and the size and significance of the movement, on November 27 Peña Nieto took the movement's slogan "We are all Ayotzinapa!"

In a remarkable official statement showing that the government has been shaken by the crisis, the president said, "The shout 'We are all Ayotzinapa' is a cry to continue transforming Mexico. The shout 'We are all Ayotzinapa' is an example of a nation that has come together in solidarity in difficult moments. As a society we should have the capacity to channel our pain and indignation into constructive propositions."

Peña Nieto also proposed the creation of a new anti-corruption system, revamping the police, a government takeover of crime-controlled municipalities, and special economic zones to help the country's most backward regions. Few are impressed with these oft-repeated strategies.

The Crisis of the PRD

While the disappearance of the 43 students has challenged the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of President Enrique Peña Nieto, it has had a devastating impact on the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Both Iguala and the state of Guerrero where the students were killed were run by the PRD.

The PRD, founded in 1989 by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and other leaders of the PRI, former Communists, and other leftists became a major left-of-center political force, although electoral fraud kept it from ever winning a presidential election.

Cárdenas, the founder, three-time presidential candidate (1988, 1994, and 2000), the symbolic leader and the moral authority of the party announced on November 25 that he was resigning from the PRD — a serious, some suggest possibly mortal, blow to the party.

At the same time, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who was the PRD's presidential candidate in 2006 and again in 2012, has also been linked to the PRD establishment in Guerrero. As a presidential candidate of the PRD, López Obrador campaigned alongside the PRD state governor and Iguala mayor in Guerrero, and his opponents have suggested that López Obrador and his National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) are also tainted.

The left's electoral parties are in no position to give leadership to this movement. That, no doubt, is for the best. The movement itself, however, could produce a new left.

ATC

PAKISTAN

Why we cannot hang extremism

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

These are difficult times for the Sharif government. 'Military courts under a civilian government's authority' is a claim hard to digest. From a position of separating the military from running the affairs of the state to justifying military courts, things have taken a big U-turn.

Although the Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam had agreed to the amendment, they changed their minds after looking at the possible outcome of such courts. They would have lost their support among hard-liners. Their insistence to remove madressahs and religion from the text of the amendments was not without reason. Most of their supporters in madressahs would have opposed them on the issue.

The fact is that most of the terrorist activities have had a link with madressahs one way or the other and were carried out in the name of religion. It is the first time that the PML-N government has not given in to the religious parties on the pretext of forging a consensus and has preferred to go ahead and forced them to abstain.

Instead of strengthening a civilian government in the aftermath of the massacre in Peshawar, all the political parties have agreed to change the rules of the game in favour of military generals. A massive media campaign to justify this awkward position of the civilian government has given ordinary citizens the illusion that our military capabilities can root out fundamentalism through military courts and speedy trials. And the ideas of the ruling classes normally become the consciousness of the many.

The Peshawar incident has changed many things. It was a turning point. Revolution and big incidents are always game-changers. Tahirul Qadri's 'revolution' could not take place, but Imran Khan's

'change' is seen everywhere. From a position of nothing less than the resignation of the prime minister to total cooperation with the PML-N government – with national security as justification – there has been a massive change in Imran Khan's strategy. Both are in a losing position. The military is the one that gained authority and credibility.

All the plans of the PML-N to try Gen Musharraf for constitutional breach have been shattered. Instead of trying the generals, the civilian government is more worried about completing its own tenure. To be on 'one page' with all the parliamentary political parties and the military the PML-N has to pay a heavy price. This is almost like the eighties, when Mian Nawaz Sharif was a minister and chief minister under a military government with full patronage of the generals. The only difference is that he is now prime minister.

It is not just the PML-N that is changing. Others are also following the fashionable trend of 'taking everyone along'. The PPP, National Party, MQM, Jamaat-e-Islami, Awami National Party, you name it and they are on the same bandwagon. After initial hesitation, the PPP and ANP agreed to the rules of the game.

The PPP has not learnt any lessons at all. They have been victims of the establishment's direct and indirect rules since the formation of the party in 1967. However, this trend is not new for them. They saluted Musharraf on his humiliating departure from power and are now complaining that he is conspiring to overthrow their provincial government in Sindh.

The one who happy in this happy family is Imran Khan and his colleagues in the PTI and elsewhere. They have worked hard to come to this position. Three months of dharnas, long marches, massive

public meetings, huge media coverage, all had one main aim: the PML-N should not take the route that they are on. No normal relations with India, no actions against generals or the Taliban but 'talks' – this was the hidden agenda of the PTI. The Peshawar incident gave them a justification and they are now back to business as usual.

All is not lost by the suggestion of establishing military courts. The plan of action against terrorism has touched some grey areas, which was hard to imagine some months earlier. Madressahs and their alleged links with terrorism have come into the debate. This used to be a no-go area. When the interior minister said that 90 percent of madressahs are not linked to terrorism, the admissions was that maybe the rest of the 10 percent are.

Maulana Aziz of Lal Masjid refused to condemn the Peshawar incident. This used to be a routine habit of extremists – justifying any terrorist act by blaming American counter attacks. And extremists were not alone in such supporting arguments for terrorists. The PTI and others had the same logic. 'It is not our war', 'the Taliban are our brothers', 'they are also Pakistani', 'let us divide them by prioritising the good and the bad Taliban and so on. However, the times have changed.

The plan of action against terrorism is an effort to rethink strategies without changing the pattern of

thinking towards extremism. It is a quick state response to the growing hatred of ordinary people against terrorism. It is a desperate effort to satisfy the desperate parents of all those children going to school. There is a great need to redress the whole issue. It is time to look back and learn lessons. The state cannot eliminate extremism without eliminating the root cause. And that is the role of the state towards religion. Some things can never be religious.

Electricity is not Muslim or Hindu. It is just electricity. So is a state – just a state. We have experienced enough problems in the shape of massacres. The parties represented in parliament have to change the pattern of thinking if they want to an effective response to fanaticisms.

The recipe of military courts for speedy and effective justice for hard-core terrorists has been rightly opposed by almost all progressive parties, groups and civil society actors. It will be a whitewash. Hangings cannot change the course of history. Ideas cannot be hanged, only bodies can. We have to get rid of extremism that teaches that killing is a solution. That is true for terrorists as well as for the state.

The International News

DEBT

Thomas Piketty and public debt

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

A few days earlier in an op-ed in the French daily paper *Libération* Thomas Piketty fiercely exposed the absurdity of neoliberal policies, notably by the French and German governments, which enforce on countries such as Greece or Spain blatantly antisocial measures allegedly in order to repay their public debts. Piketty writes, 'The amnesia award goes to Germany, with France a faithful second. In 1945, these two countries had a public debt at over 200% of GDP. By 1950, it had fallen to less than 30%. What happened, did they suddenly create budget surpluses that let them pay off that debt? Of course not: it was by inflation and pure and simple repudiation that Germany and France got rid of their debt in the last century. If they had tried to patiently build surpluses of 1% or 2% of GDP a year, they'd still be at work on it, and it would have been more difficult for the postwar governments to invest in growth. These are however the two countries that have been explaining since 2010-11 to South European countries that their public debt must be paid back to the last euro. This is short-sighted selfishness, because the new budgetary treaty adopted in 2012 under German and French pressure, that organizes austerity in Europe (with excessively rapid reduction of deficits and a totally inoperative system of automatic sanctions), has led to generalised recession in the Eurozone.' [3]

The CADTM takes this opportunity to examine how Piketty analyzes public debt in his work *Capital in*

the Twenty-First Century, which in 2014 became a bestseller in several languages. [4] The CADTM takes over several of Piketty's arguments but has a different approach to possible solutions. We first sum up Piketty's position, next we develop the solutions suggested by the CADTM. [5]

In his 1,000 page book Piketty devotes a dozen or so very interesting pages to the question of public debt over the last two centuries, focusing his analysis mainly on France and the United Kingdom. He rightly states that in discussing public debt, studying the past is worthwhile for understanding and dealing with the challenges of the current crisis: *"This complex question of the indebtedness of States and the nature of the corresponding wealth is at least as much a concern today as it was in 1800, and examining the past can enlighten us about this phenomenon, which is so significant in the world today. For even if public debt in the early twenty-first century is still far from attaining the astronomical levels of the early nineteenth century (at least in the UK); on the contrary, in France, and in many other countries it is near its historic record levels, and is probably the cause of more confusion today than during the Napoleonic era."* [6]

Between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, France and the United Kingdom adopted policies that were quite different regarding public debt. Whereas in the years 1760-1770, public debt stood at nearly 100% of national income in both countries, forty or fifty years later the situation had changed completely. France's public debt was only 20% of its national income in 1815, whereas Britain's debt had skyrocketed to 200% of national income.

How did that happen? In France, the burden of paying off public debt and the people's refusal to

bear that burden alone played a central role in the revolutionary explosion of 1789. Measures taken during the Revolution radically reduced the burden of public debt. Piketty sums up the sequence of events as follows: *"The French monarchy's inability to modernize its taxes and end the fiscal privileges of the nobility is well known, as is the ultimate revolutionary outcome, with the convening of the Estates-General in 1789, which led to the implementation of a new taxation system in 1790-1791 (including a real-estate tax affecting all landowners, and an inheritance tax on all estates) and the 'two-thirds bankruptcy' in 1797 (which in reality was an even more massive default, with the episode of the assignats [7] and the resulting inflation), which closed the books on the Old Regime. That is why France's public debt was suddenly reduced to extremely low levels at the start of the 19th century (to less than 20% of national income in 1815)."* [8]

Britain took a completely different path. In order to finance its war to oppose the Declaration of Independence signed by the 13 British colonies in North America, and *"above all, the multiple wars with France during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, the British monarchy chose to borrow without limit. Public debt went from approximately 100% of national income in the early 1770s to nearly 200% in the years after 1810 – ten times that of France in the same period."* [9]

Piketty explains that it took the United Kingdom a century of austerity and budget surpluses to reduce its indebtedness gradually to less than 30% of national income at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century.

What lessons can be drawn from Britain's experience? First, there is no doubt, according to Piketty, that the heavy public debt increased the extent of private wealth in British society. Wealthy Englishmen readily lent money to the State.

Piketty goes on: *"This heavy public indebtedness generally served the interests of the lenders and their descendants quite well – at least in compari-*

son to a situation in which the British monarchy would have covered its expenditures by making them pay taxes. From the point of view of those who have the means to do it, it is obviously much more advantageous to lend a given sum to the State (and then to receive interest on it for decades) than to pay it in the form of taxes (without compensation). [10] He adds that the massive recourse to public debt by the State enabled the bankers to raise interest rates, which was beneficial to the wealthy lenders such as entrepreneurs, the independently wealthy, and bankers. This powerfully recalls the current situation.

According to Piketty, the essential difference with the 20th century (see below) is that public debt was reimbursed at a premium in the 19th century: *"Inflation was quasi nil between 1815 and 1914, and the interest rate on government certificates was very substantial (generally around 4%-5%), and in particular was well above the growth rate. Under such conditions, public debt can be a very good deal for the affluent and their heirs."* [11]

Piketty offers a hypothetical case in which: *"cumulative public debt ... is equal to 100% of the GDP. Suppose that the government does not seek to reimburse the principal, but only pays the interest each year ... if the interest rate is 5%, every year it will have to pay 5% of the GDP to the holders of this additional public debt, endlessly. That is basically what happened in the United Kingdom in the 19th century."* [12] Now, let us travel in time and space: in Greece in 2014 public debt was over 175% of GDP. If we entertain the hypothesis that the State will reimburse that debt to the Troika and its other creditors at a rate of around 5% [13] on average, and if we also take into consideration that growth is non-existent [14] and that the rate of inflation is also nil, Greece will have to pay its creditors, indefinitely, the equivalent of 8% of its GDP without reducing the debt, since only the interest on it is being paid off. [15]

Now let us return to the 19th century: total public debt in France, which was very limited in 1815, increased rapidly over the next decades, in particular

during the period of the censitary monarchies (1815-1848). After the defeat at Waterloo in 1815, the French State went deeply into debt to finance the compensation paid to the armies of occupation, then again in 1825, to finance the famous "émigrés' billion" [16] paid to the aristocrats who went into exile during the Revolution (to compensate them for the consequences of the Revolution, and in particular the confiscation of part of their land holdings). In all, public debt increased to the equivalent of over 30% of the national income. Under the Second Empire, debts were paid "cash on the nail."

Piketty recalls the short work *The Class Struggles in France*, written in 1849-1850, in which Karl Marx denounces Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's Minister of Finance, Achille Fould – a worthy representative of the bankers and high finance –, who decided to increase taxes on beverages in order to pay off wealthy holders of government bonds. Twenty years later, following the defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1870-1871, the French State further increased public debt to pay a war tribute equivalent to some 30% of national income. Finally, the indebtedness policy conducted between 1880 and 1914, which was favourable to creditors, brought public debt to a higher level in France than in the United Kingdom – around 70-80% of national income, compared to less than 50% previously.

Piketty adds, "*Government annuities were a very secure investment throughout the 19th century in France, and contributed to reinforcing the extent and level of private fortunes, as was also the case in the United Kingdom.*" He concludes that the policy of public indebtedness pursued during the 19th century in France and the United Kingdom "*explains why the socialists of the 19th century, beginning with Karl Marx, were extremely mistrustful of public debt, which they perceived – rather clairvoyantly – as an instrument used to encourage the accumulation of private capital.*" [17] He goes on to say, very accurately, "*A large portion of the public debt (...) is held in practice by a minority of the population, so that the debt results in a major redistribution of wealth within a country*

(...). Given the very high concentration that has always characterized the distribution of wealth (...), studying these questions while ignoring the inequalities between social groups amounts to disregarding de facto a major aspect of the subject and the realities that are at play." [18]

Piketty explains that over the course of the 20th century, France underwent a major change in the way public debt is managed. The public authorities benefited from inflation, and then made use of it to reduce the real value of the debt. "*The consequence for the State is that, despite a large initial public debt (close to 80% of national income in 1913) and very high deficits during the period 1913-1950, in particular during the war years, in 1950 France's public debt was again at a relatively low level (approximately 30% of national income), as in 1815. In particular, the huge deficits of the Liberation were almost immediately wiped out by inflation in excess of 50% per year for four consecutive years, from 1945 to 1948, in a supercharged political atmosphere. In a way, it was like the 'two-thirds bankruptcy' of 1797 – the books were closed on the past in order to proceed with the reconstruction of the country with a low public debt.*" [19]

Based on this experience in the second half of the 20th century, a very different vision from that of Marx and the socialists during the 19th century was developed, founded on the conviction that indebtedness can be an instrument in the interest of a policy of public spending and redistribution of wealth in favour of the poorest citizens.

"*The difference between the two visions is quite simple: In the 19th century, debt was reimbursed at a premium, which was to the advantage of the lenders and tended to bolster private fortunes; in the 20th century, debt was diluted by inflation and reimbursed in "funny money," making it possible de facto to put the burden of financing the deficits on those who had lent their wealth to the State, without having to increase taxes as much. This "progressive" vision of public debt in fact continues to hold sway with many thinkers in the early 21st century, even though inflation has long since*

fallen back to levels that are not far from what they were during the 19th century, and its distributive effects are relatively obscure

." [20] Thomas Piketty is quite right to stress the dangers of a unilaterally positive vision of public debt.

Piketty's proposals

Let us now analyse what Piketty proposes. From the outset, he makes it clear that he does not defend public debt in anyway: *"I have repeatedly stated that it often results in reverse redistributions, from those who have less to those who can afford to make loans to the State (and who as a rule ought to pay taxes instead)."* [21] We can only agree with this statement. He adds that *"national capital is very poorly distributed, with private wealth exploiting public poverty, which means that we currently spend much more paying interest on debt than we invest in higher education. This is actually a rather old situation: considering the rather slow growth since the 1970s-1980s, we are in a historical era in which debt is a heavy burden on the treasury. This is the main reason it must be reduced as quickly as possible (...)"* [22]

Piketty considers (but rejects) two solutions for reducing public debt, before proposing a third one. The first rejected solution is to privatize public assets to repay the debt. The second consists in cancelling the debt. The third one, which he supports, is to levy an exceptional progressive tax *"so as to spare those with the least amount of wealth, and ask more of those with the most."* [23] I will not spend much time on the first solution, because it is so clear to me that it must be rejected. This is the solution currently being rolled out by governments that are merely extending the wave of privatisations undertaken in the 1980s-1990s.

As for the second solution, which Piketty also rejects, it is obvious that he does not fully explore all possible scenarios for debt cancellation. The only model he mentions explicitly is the one applied to Greek debt in March 2012, a so-called *haircut* operation, while there are other possibilities.

He is right to reject this kind of partial debt cancellation devised by the Troika (the European Commission, ECB, and IMF) for Greece. In this case, debt cancellation was based on measures that run against the civic, political, social, and economic rights of the Greek people, and it contributed to dragging Greece even further into a downward spiral. The operation aimed at making it possible for foreign private banks (mainly French and German ones) to pull out while limiting their losses, for private Greek banks to get fresh capital from the public treasury, and for the Troika to tighten its long-term grip on Greece. While Greek public debt amounted to 130% of GDP in 2009, and 157% in 2012 after partial debt cancellation, it reached 175% in 2013! The unemployment rate, which was 12.6% in 2010, was 27% in 2013 (50% among youths under 25). Piketty is thus completely right when he rejects such haircuts, which merely aim to keep the victim alive in order to bleed it longer.

On the other hand, he is wrong to not give serious consideration to the idea of debt cancellation or the suspension of debt payments as decided on by the debtor country, on its own terms, and under citizen control. This is what Ecuador in 2008-9 and Iceland from 2008 onward did in two different sets of circumstances. Based on an audit decided on by the government and carried out with the active participation of citizens in 2007-2008, Ecuador unilaterally suspended payment on the portion of its public debt owed as securities maturing in 2012 and 2030, which were mainly held by foreign banks. [24] The outcome was positive: Ecuador bought back 91% of these securities at less than 35% of their market value. Thanks to what the country had saved in debt repayment, it could greatly increase social spending, particularly in the fields of education and healthcare (see Appendix 2 for a more detailed presentation of Ecuador's experience). In the case of Ecuador, we should not simply take the current process as a model: it is essential to continue analysing the situation there. However, it does demonstrate that a State can take a unilateral sovereign decision in terms of debt auditing and sus-

pension of payment, and consequently increase public spending in fields such as education and health.

From the end of 2008, Iceland unilaterally refused to pay for the debts of private banks that owed money to foreign creditors. This occurred in the context of strong citizen mobilisation that put pressure on Iceland's government to refuse the claims of foreign creditors, especially the UK and the Netherlands.

What happened in Iceland? Because of the collapse of the banking system in 2008, Iceland refused to pay compensations to people in the UK and in the Netherlands, who had deposited a total of €3.9 billion in subsidiaries of private Icelandic banks that had just collapsed. The British and Dutch authorities compensated their own citizens, and demanded that Iceland pay them back. Under popular pressure (demonstrations, sit-ins, referenda), the Icelandic government refused. As a result, Iceland was listed as a terrorist organization, Icelandic assets were frozen in the UK, and the Icelandic government was sued by London and The Hague in the Court of Justice of the European Free Trade Association States (EFTA). [25] In addition, Iceland completely blocked the outflow of capital. Ultimately, it fared much better than many other European countries that had met their creditors' demands. Of course, we should not simply take Iceland as a model to be emulated, but we should draw lessons from its experience.

Ecuador and Iceland are two recent examples that should be examined carefully for they show that there are solutions for debt cancellation other than the Greek *haircut* or other forms of restructuring. [26] Those two examples offer proof that if you do not comply with creditors' demands your country does not simply collapse, quite the opposite.

Let us return to Piketty's position. He is convinced that cancellation will hardly affect the richer creditors, because they will manage to "*restructure their portfolios on time*" and consequently he claims that "*there is no guarantee that those who will have to*

pay are those who should." [27] However, he produces no evidence that is based on concrete examples or statistical data to support this, while history shows that when a country hints that it might stop repaying its debt or when it actually does, the market value of its debt securities plummets, and it is very difficult for stockholders to unload them at a good price. [28] This is what occurred between 2007 and 2009 in Ecuador, and all those who follow what is happening on the debt market know that it is virtually impossible to get rid of a large amount of securities without significant losses in the case of unilateral debt cancellation or suspension. Moreover, it is easy for a country taking such measures to provide compensation and protection to those with limited income, assets, and savings. It is quite possible to make sure that those who should pay *do* while protecting those who deserve to be protected.

Let us now examine Piketty's proposal on finding the means necessary to reduce the burden of public debt. After considering the possibility of "*a 15% proportional tax on all private assets,*" [29] he rejects this idea, because as he writes "*it would not make much sense to levy a proportional tax [30] on all European private assets.*" [31] He claims that "*it would be better to use a progressive schedule so as to spare those with the least amount of wealth, and levy more on those who have the most wealth.*" [32]

Piketty is favourable to a partial reduction of the debt, amounting to 20% of the GDP. In order to reach this objective, he suggests that a progressive exceptional tax be levied: "*0% under €1 million, 10% between €1 and €5 million, and 20% beyond €5 million,*" [33] while recognising that other rates could be used.

It must also be mentioned, and deplored, that Piketty never considers the issue of the legitimacy of public debt. It is actually astonishing, because throughout the book he shows that a regressive tax policy results in an increase in public debt, and that, as he states repeatedly, those who pay back the debt are for the most part lower-income people,

given the share of taxes they pay, while those in the higher income brackets lend to the State, since this is a safe investment. He does not suggest either that citizens should organise and audit the debt, while he must know that in France (and elsewhere in Europe), since 2011 citizen debt audit initiatives have been developing with a certain amount of success. [34]

The CADTM's proposition on public debt

To contribute to the debate needed to find solutions to the public debt crisis, the CADTM argues that the portion of public debt identified as being illegitimate (or illegal) should be repudiated instead of being repaid.

The CADTM adds that the following measures should be instituted: 1. Those who own small quantities of government bonds will be completely reimbursed; 2. The following rule of thumb should be applied in line with point 1: *"When public debts are cancelled, small savers who have invested in government bonds, and wage earners and old-age pensioners who have part of their social security contributions (pension, unemployment, health-care, and family benefits) invested in institutions or bodies that manage the same kind of bonds must be protected."* [35]; 3. The portion of public debt that has not been identified as illegitimate should be decreased by making those who gained from it contribute to paying it back. One possible option to do this would be to levy an exceptional progressive tax on the richest 10%. The revenues from this tax could be used to prepay a portion of the debt that is not considered to be illegitimate. There are other possible solutions, and the CADTM remains open to discussion.

The procedure used to identify the illegitimate part of public debt that must be cancelled will be based on a far-reaching citizen debt audit, which must mobilize people and ultimately lead public authorities to formally repudiate this debt. The CADTM is making concrete propositions while participating actively in different citizen debt audit initiatives. It is through a democratic debate linked to the debt

audit process that we will be able to more precisely define propositions leading to a popular consensus, and thanks to the mobilization of as many people as possible that these ideas will be put into practice by our government leaders.

The different forms of responsibility in the debt process must also be determined during the citizen debt audit, and those responsible for running up debt nationally and internationally must be held legally accountable. If the audit demonstrates that there are offences linked to the illegitimate part of the debt, the perpetrators (natural or legal person(s)) must be severely sanctioned and forced to pay reparations. They should not be allowed to work in any credit or banking sector jobs (any banks found to be guilty could have their banking license revoked), and should be given jail sentences if their actions deserve such punishment. Furthermore, the public authorities who committed to any illegitimate loans must be held legally accountable.

A legal framework must also be established to avoid crises like the one that started in 2007-2008, and should include the following five measures. 1) It must be illegal to socialise private debt; 2) An obligation to conduct continuous auditing of the public debt with citizen participation; 3) The non-applicability of statutory limitations to offences linked to illegitimate debt; 4) Illegitimate debt must be considered null and void; [36] 5) A golden rule must be adopted according to which it is illegal to cut any public spending needed to guarantee fundamental human rights, which take precedence over spending to repay debts.

A State must be able to borrow so that it can improve the living conditions of its people, by improving public infrastructure and investing in renewable energies. Some of these projects can be funded by its current budget thanks to determined political choices, but government borrowing can make other more far-reaching projects possible. For instance, such money would be needed to make a transition from the "car culture" to the large-scale development of public transport, to definitively close nu-

clear power plants and replace them by renewable energy sources, to build or re-open local railways throughout the country, starting in urban and peri-urban areas, or even to renovate, rehabilitate, and construct high-quality low-energy public buildings and social housing.

The CADTM argues that a transparent public borrowing policy must be established, and would like to make the following propositions: 1. All public borrowing must be used in a way that guarantees improved living conditions, and breaks with the logic of environmental destruction; 2. All public borrowing must contribute to a wealth redistribution process aimed at reducing wealth inequalities. This is why the CADTM argues that all financial institutions, major private corporations, and wealthy households should be legally bound to purchase government bonds in amounts proportional to their wealth and income, which earn 0% interest and are not indexed on inflation. The remainder of the population could purchase these bonds on a volunteer basis, and would be guaranteed a real positive yield (for example 3%) that is greater than inflation. In this case, if the annual inflation rate were 3%, the interest rate paid by the government would be 6% for that same year.

Such affirmative financial action (comparable to the policies adopted to fight racial discrimination in the United States, the caste system in India, and gender-based inequalities) would help us to move toward more tax justice and a more egalitarian distribution of wealth.

The CADTM also argues that national banks and the ECB (for eurozone countries) must offer countries 0% loans to fund their national budgets.

Piketty's central idea to create a worldwide, progressive tax on capital

Piketty declares that it is essential "*to adequately revamp the 20th century social-democratic and neo-liberal fiscal programme.*" He believes that we must defend and improve both the welfare state and the progressive income tax system. We must also innovate "*by establishing a progressive*

worldwide tax on capital, accompanied by a high degree of financial transparency." This "*institution would enable us to avoid a spiral of perpetually increasing inequality and effectively regulate the disturbing wealth concentration dynamic that has been developing throughout the world.*" [37]

Piketty has no illusions about how fast his proposition will be put into practice: "*A worldwide tax on capital is utopian: it is hard to imagine in the near future all the nations on earth agreeing to put it in place, establishing a tax schedule that would apply to all the great fortunes on the planet, then harmoniously distributing the revenues raised to all countries. However, it is a useful utopia (...).*" [38]

Piketty specifies that "*In my opinion, the goal must be to levy an annual, progressive tax on capital [39] at the individual level, i.e., on the net value of the assets each person owns.*" [40] He proposes three variants for this progressive tax on private capital.

Variante 1: a rate of 0% below €1 million; 1% from €1 to €5 million; 2% more than €5 million

Variante 2: upward adjustment, 5% or 10% beyond €1 billion

Variante 3: downward adjustment, 0.1% below €200,000, and 0.5% from €200,000 to €1 million.

This tax is complementary to what already exists, but it could be used to decrease the current tax payments (or to reduce the national debt, note 1, p.840). It would result in a relatively small increase in current national incomes. Even if it were very low, this tax would give authorities knowledge on the wealth of the inhabitants in the areas concerned.

Piketty adds: "*At the present time, the international organisations in charge of regulating and monitoring the world financial system, such as the International Monetary Fund, have only extremely approximate knowledge on the distribution of financial assets throughout the world, and in particular the amount of assets based in tax havens.*" [41] If it were established, "*the tax on cap-*

ital would be a kind of world finance registry, which does not exist today." [42]

A programme with complementary measures must be created

We fully support Piketty's proposition for a progressive tax on private wealth or capital to employ the term he uses; however, we do not agree with him when he argues that the highest priority must be placed on this objective. Instead, a programme with complementary measures must be created. A progressive tax on capital, along with the cancellation of illegitimate debt and a drastic reduction in the portion of public debt not found to be illegitimate, must be included in a comprehensive programme that would enable society to make a transition toward a post-capitalist and post-productivist system. First implemented in one or two countries, such a programme should also have European and worldwide ambitions. It should put an end to austerity measures, reduce the amount of time worked by hiring new employees while maintaining wages, and socialise the banking sector. There must also be a general fiscal reform, measures to ensure gender equality, and the implementation of a well-defined policy that will ensure the ecological transition. [43]

Piketty is under the illusion that he will be able to convince others of the need to give highest priority to his proposition, whereas what would be truly effective and unite people would be to define a common platform, bringing together the maximum number of people in favour of radical democratic change that will foster social justice.

In addition, as we argue in *"Cancelling debt or taxing capital: why should we choose?"*: *"The essential critique that can be made of Thomas Piketty is that he thinks the solution may be found within the current system. He proposes a progressive tax to redistribute wealth and save democracy, but he does not question the very conditions in which this wealth is produced or the consequences of the current system. His idea is only a solution for one of the negative effects produced by the system, but he*

does not tackle the true causes of the problem. First of all, if a tax on capital were applied as a result of social struggle, the great danger is that its product would go up in smoke to repay illegitimate debt, if that debt is not first cancelled. Furthermore, can we content ourselves just because the wealth produced by the system is shared more fairly, if this same system remains predatory, has no respect for people or common property, and destroys our ecosystems at an increasingly faster rate? Capital is not only a useful means of production that deserves a regular 5% return on investment as Piketty suggests, it is also an important vector of social relationships of domination by the possessing classes over society as a whole. Capitalism as a mode of production is not only the cause of more and more unbearable social inequalities. It is also a menace to our ecosystem, the justification for the plundering of common property, domination, exploitation, and alienation of the people through materialistic values, and a logic of accumulation that transforms men and women into spiritually enslaved individuals obsessed by material possessions to the detriment of the immaterial basis underlying our humanity." [44]

One of the characteristics and weaknesses of Piketty's approach is that he does not call for a mobilisation of the social movements to try to have an influence on current policies. He is conscious that the people played a decisive role in the orientations taken since World War I, and denounces the repression of the miners in Marikana, South Africa in August, 2012, but in the more than one hundred pages at the end devoted to his own propositions, which reflect on the solutions to the basic problems, no mention is made of organised citizen action, and no allusion is made to the *Indignados* movement, even if in the pages just before his propositions, he does mention the *Occupy Wall Street* movement. At best, he expresses the hope that the dissemination of research like his will raise people's awareness and thereby ultimately lead to change. This is a major weakness in Piketty's approach. It comes as no surprise then that he pro-

poses to establish a "Eurozone Budget Parliament" [45] alongside the European Parliament. He suggests that "This Parliament could include about fifty members for each of the big countries in the zone, in proportion to the population. Its members could be chosen from the finance and social affairs commissions of the national Parliaments, or appointed in some other way." [46] In addition, he is favourable to "the election of a European Union President on the basis of the popular vote, a proposition which should be logically accompanied by an extension of his or her powers." [47] Piketty embarks on a pathway to making reforms that does not question the European treaties and institutions in which the defence of the interests of major capital owners is set in stone. Yet, we all know that fundamental change is necessary, and that it must include the abrogation of those treaties and the initiation of a constituent process with the production of registers of grievances by citizens united in action.

To conclude, Piketty's work is extremely valuable in terms of the clear data it provides on trends in wealth inequalities over the past two centuries. His book gives us a very useful tool for understanding them, and will enlighten the debate on possible alternatives. [48] Unfortunately, he fails to go far enough in terms of the need to join theory and action, issues relating to debt cancellation, and taxation thresholds.

Appendix 1. Capital in the Twenty-First Century: Valuable research despite some basic shortcomings

Piketty has gathered his data meticulously and provided a useful analysis of the unequal distribution of wealth and income, yet some of his definitions are somewhat confusing and even questionable. Consider, for instance, his definition of capital: [49] "In all civilisations, capital has served two great economic functions: on the one hand to provide dwellings (that is to say, to produce "housing services," the value of which is measured in terms of the rental value of the dwellings: this is the value of well-being of having a roof over one's head as

opposed to being outside); and, on the other hand, as a factor of production for producing other goods and services." He continues: "Historically, the early forms of capitalistic accumulation seem to concern tools (from flint, etc.), agricultural infrastructure (fences, irrigation, draining, etc.), and rudimentary dwellings, before evolving into more sophisticated forms, such as industrial and professional capital and increasingly elaborate dwellings". Piketty hereby proposes a scenario that suggests capital has been present from the origins of humanity.

This major confusion continues in the heart of his analysis in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. For Piketty, an apartment worth €80,000 or €2,000 on a savings account may be defined as capital, in the same way as a factory or commercial premises worth €125 million. The ordinary citizen who owns an apartment, has some reserves in a savings account and a life insurance policy worth, say, €10,000 will readily agree with Piketty's definition, which corresponds with those found in standard economic textbooks and repeated by their bank manager. However, they are wrong, because capital in our capitalist society is much more complex than these simple definitions. Capital is a social relationship that permits a minority (the richest 1%), to get richer by exploiting the labour of others. Yet when Piketty talks of a progressive tax on capital, he confounds the different levels of wealth that are €1,000 on a savings account with the Lakshmi Mittal or Liliane Bettencourt fortunes.

The same confusion continues in his analysis of income: Piketty considers that the income from renting out an €80,000 apartment is a capital gain of the same kind as the income Liliane Bettencourt makes from her corporation L'Oréal.

This also goes for a retired person's savings account, (if €10,000 is deposited at 2% interest it earns €200 a year), but as little as this is Piketty considers it to be capital income.

As far as wages are concerned, Piketty considers that all income declared as wages are wages

whether this means the €3 million salary package of the CEO of a banking group or the €30,000 salary of a bank employee.

We must ask ourselves what exactly Piketty means by "capital" and "labour," and better define the difference between capital income and labour income.

For example, below a certain level income from rent, interest on a bank account, or corporate shares should not be defined as capital. Likewise, personal wealth below a certain level should not be considered as capital either.

In addition, if we want to understand how the 1% accumulates capital, we must go beyond remarks such as this: *"If capital plays a useful role in the production process it is natural that it earns a return."* [50]

Piketty's confusion is undoubtedly the result of his fundamental convictions: "I am not interested in denouncing inequalities or capitalism as such (...) social inequalities are not a problem in themselves if they may be justified, that is to say for the common good." [51]

My critique of Piketty's definitions in no way minimises the interest of the monumental portrait his research draws of the wealth and income inequalities that have developed over the last two centuries.

Appendix 2. The struggle of the Ecuadorian people against illegitimate public debt

Towards the end of the 1990s, a series of popular movements, particularly Jubilee 2000 Guayaquil (Ecuador's biggest city and port) began a campaign against the unjust debt demanded from the country. At first, the positions of this social movement were moderate and confused. In 1998, they went to the Paris Club hoping to present a case for restructuring Ecuador's debt along with obtaining a significant reduction. After waiting patiently for two years, they realised that the Paris Club did not have the slightest intention of renegotiating, and that it had only agreed to discuss the issue for public relations.

In 2001-2002, CADTM International and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CDES) began a campaign against Ecuadorian debt specifically centred on the sale of fishing boats to Ecuador by Norway. The two groups mounted a case demonstrating that the debt owed to Norway for this purchase was illegitimate because the sale had been a measure in the interest of Norway's ship building industry, at the time in crisis in need of export orders, and not in the interest of the Ecuadorian people. These boats had hardly been used for their original purpose of fishing, instead they were made available to one of the countries wealthy banana producers to transport bananas. This concrete example illustrates how a campaign against debt can be started: by drawing attention to a specific debt, and linking to it the notion of illegitimate debt. We managed to work with the Norwegian organisation SLUG, and to introduce the idea of debt auditing to clarify what, if anything, Ecuador really owed.

This campaign was managed against a background of social unrest between the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. In 2000 and 2005, several important popular movements succeeded in bringing down two neoliberal Presidents. In 2000, the President was removed and new Presidential elections were won by Lucio Guttierrez on a left wing, anti-IMF, and anti-US platform. Once in office, he changed his policies completely announcing, *"I am the best friend of the USA, Chavez is our enemy."* This caused discontent, frustration, and another popular uprising in 2005 that forced the President to abandon the Presidential palace by helicopter. There followed a transitional government with Rafael Correa in the office of Finance Minister in a period when oil prices were quite high. The question of the debt was important because the social movements had been conducting this campaign for 7 or 8 years.

As Finance Minister, Rafael Correa allocated all the extra oil revenues to health and education spending, with no question of dilapidating them on foreign debt payments. The debt was considered to be illegitimate, and the people must benefit from the

export revenues and the taxes earned on them. The World Bank and IMF reacted violently and refused to allow Ecuador to use the oil revenues on social spending. The World Bank threatened to suspend its lending to the country if such measures were taken. However, Correa refused to be pushed around by the World Bank, and maintained this attitude before the rest of the Ecuadorian government. Ultimately, he preferred to resign and enter into opposition rather than withdraw a decree that was in his country's interest. The interim President who replaced Correa decided to launch a debt audit commission, but with very limited powers. Nevertheless, the results of the study on Ecuadorian debt were interesting and contributed to raising awareness on the question of debt.

Correa ran for President in the 2006 elections proposing a new radically different more democratic constitution, and putting an end to illegitimate debt. "Elect me as President and I promise to take measures so that the country can stop paying for illegitimate debt." He also promised to close the US naval base on Ecuadorian territory and to abandon the negotiations that were leading to a free trade treaty with the US. His objective was to regain Ecuadorian independence with a project for a democratic political system, constitutional change, abolition of illegitimate debt, national sovereignty and independence, and the closing of the foreign military base.

The 2007 – 2008 debt audit and its positive consequences

Correa was elected in December 2006, and immediately started a referendum campaign in February 2007 in favour of a new Constitution. He was victorious in spite of the opposition of all the big media.

The next step, as from May 2007, was to settle the debt question. The first thing the new President did was to expel the World Bank's permanent representative to Ecuador. The message was clear: The WB had not respected Ecuadorian sovereignty in 2005, driving Correa to resignation, it had interfered in Ecuador's internal affairs, Go home! World Bank

clear off (to put it nicely)! In July 2007, by Presidential decree, Rafael Correa created a commission to audit the national debt. The Ecuadorian participants were drawn from "grass roots" civil society movements, and from four state institutions: the General Accounting Office, the Anti-corruption Commission, Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Justice. In addition, six foreign experts on debt were called upon. It was in this context that I took part in this commission mandated to analyse the internal and external public debt contracted from 1976 to 2006.

We had access to all the information needed to carry out our work as auditors. After fourteen months, a report was established on the debts that were illegitimate and submitted to the government with our conclusions and recommendations. During these fourteen months, we had three meetings with the President and the Government, which then studied our conclusions and recommendations for one and a half months.

In November 2008, Correa announced a unilateral suspension of the reimbursement of two thirds of the commercial debt concerning bonds on the financial markets coming to maturity in 2012 and 2030. For six months, Ecuador remained silent, letting the financial markets stew in incertitude. During this time, the international investment bank "Lazard" was asked to discretely purchase these Ecuadorian bonds on the secondary debt market for the Ecuadorian State. This operation enabled Ecuador to buy back a large share of the bonds and then make an offer to those who still owned bonds that had not yet been sold to Lazard Bank. A large portion of the bonds were bought back in this way at 20% of their nominal value. In April 2009, there followed an offer to buy back the remainder at 35% of nominal value. By the end of the offer period in June 2009, 91% of the concerned bonds had been bought back officially. The remaining 9% were never repurchased. The bond holders had had long enough to sell them back to the State.

In this way, it cost Ecuador only \$900 million buy back \$3.2 billion of its own bonds. The total

amount saved including the interest that would have been paid until the maturity of the 2030 bonds is \$7 billion, which became available for social spending for items such as health care, education, and infrastructure development.

If we consider Ecuador's budget, we see that from 2009 – 2010, the cost of servicing the debt diminished radically and socially useful spending increased considerably, enabling the living conditions of people to be improved. This is why Rafael Correa was re-elected for another term, under the new constitution in 2009. This term finished in 2013, when he was again re-elected with 57% of the votes, a higher score than in either of his previous presidential campaigns!

What lessons can we draw from this experience? Rafael Correa won the 2006 elections on an illegiti-

mate debt and anti-World Bank platform, and at the same time, he created an important base of popular support. This shows that an organisation, a candidate or a collective of organisations such as a Popular Front, which is in the opposition, can gain the support and the votes of a large portion of the general public, so that illegitimate debt can be repudiated. This is possible if there is long-term action and awareness raising by the popular movements. The discourse on debt is extremely important for raising public awareness and demonstrating that alternatives to current government policies do exist.

Translated by CADTM

CADTM

TURKEY

The AKP, the Kurds and the siege of Kobane

URAZ AYDIN ·

Turkey and the Syrian issue

Yet, at the beginning of the wave of revolutions in the Arab countries, the Turkey of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, erected into a "Muslim Democratic" model by the Western imperialisms, appeared to be well placed to show an example to these Muslim societies at full boiling point. Its fraternal relations with the Muslim Brotherhood movements seemed also to favour its ascent in the region.

It is with the popular revolt in Syria that Davutoglu's "strategic depth" (the title of a book by the latter) began to sink into the abyss of a strategic stalemate. Erdogan first tried to play the role of mediator between the insurgents and his "friend", President Bashar al-Assad, with a view to negotiation, thus trying to prove his position as "big brother" in the region. But following rejection by Damascus, the Turkish government totally changed its attitude. Unable to analyze the dynamics of Syrian society and the relationship of regional and inter-imperialist forces, Ankara thus gambled on a quick overthrow of al-Assad. This illusion of being able "to pray in Damascus three days from now" (as Erdogan said in September 2012) led him to engage all his weight in this process alongside the Gulf monarchies and the United States.

It was first of all with its efforts at orchestration of the opposition that the Turkish government attempted to direct the situation and weigh on the Syrian National Council to influence the constitution of the new regime following a possible rapid fall of al-Assad. And then, with the militarization of the uprising faced with the violent repression of the regime, and after having obtained the green light

from the Obama administration, Ankara centred its entire foreign policy on an ideological, political and especially logistical support (through delivery of weapons) to the Syrian opposition (first of all to the Free Syrian Army, then after the weakening of the latter to different so-called moderate Islamist groups). Obsessed with its goal of overthrowing the Baath regime, the AKP has become - a saying in Turkish very appropriate to the situation - "more royalist than the king". Thus following the use of chemical weapons in 2013 attributed to the regime, the Turkish government sought the support of the United States and tried to convince them of the need for military intervention in Syria (the agreement between Putin and Obama finally defused this).

This diplomacy centred on an active engagement in the Syrian issue, and the adoption of a foreign policy not matching with any of those of its main allies, has ended up isolating the Turkish state at the international level, a situation that it tries to legitimize by the laconic, and melancholy, formula of "precious solitude". But this relentlessness of the Erdogan regime in achieving its aspirations to become the main regional power in the Middle East has had significant and dangerous impacts in the medium term on domestic policy.

Toward an authoritarian-religious and discriminatory regime

The coming to power of the AKP in 2002 on the basis of a crisis of both economy (crisis of 1999) and political representation (discrediting of the main bourgeois parties) opened a phase of relative democratization of the regime - motivated by the objective of integration into the European Union - accompanied by a powerful neo-liberal offensive. But following the domestication of the military who ex-

erted all their weight on political life and the consolidation of party control over the main institutions of the state (judiciary, presidency of the Republic, armed forces, police apparatus and so on) the liberal democratic phase faded to give way to the construction of an increasingly authoritarian and conservative-religious regime.

The turning point of this change in direction was the referendum of the September 12, 2010 (the anniversary of the coup in 1980) concerning changes in certain articles of the constitution of 1982, presented as a democratization of the system. Convinced of its broad hegemony in society thanks to the 58% obtained by the "yes" camp in the referendum, the AKP has subsequently gradually made its authoritarian-conservative turn. Through the speeches of the former Prime Minister (current President) Erdogan and legal measures, the Sunni character of the regime has increasingly been asserted: attempts to ban abortion and caesarean section ; deification of the family (with "at least three children") ; courses on the Koran and on the life of the prophet in secondary education; restriction of the sale of alcohol; legalization of the wearing of the veil first for university students, then for state officials and finally in schools; an unprecedented development of religious education with an increase of 7% in "Imam high schools" between 2010 and 2014.

If all non-Muslim, non-religious and non-Sunni fringes of society had reason to be worried faced with this escalation of religious references in the system, the nearly twelve million Alevis (out of a population of 80 million people) seem to be the most affected by this gradual confessionalisation of the regime. It is true that under the AKP multiple "Alevi workshops" have been organized in order to discuss the claims of this religious minority, primarily their recognition at state level - with financing of their "cemevi" (places of worship) and payment of wages to the "Dede" (spiritual leaders). But beyond the fact that no concrete action has been taken in respect to this question, the Alevis are the subject of a systematic stigmatisation by Erdogan,

taken up by the conservative media and the organic intellectuals of the AKP. In this context it should be remembered that the great majority of young people murdered by the security forces during the Gezi revolt were Alevi and this relates primarily to the level of violence used during police repression in the Alevi neighbourhoods. At his rallies Erdogan incites tens of thousands of people to boo the leader of the Republican Party of the People (CHP), Kemal Kilicdaroglu, recalling the fact that he is Alevi.

The discursive strategy of the AKP also articulates skilfully but dangerously elements of the Syrian issue to the Alevi question in order to consolidate its Sunni religious base. Thus the CHP, founding party of the (western and secular) republic, today led by an Alevi and historically supported by the Alevis, is presented as the Turkish equivalent of the Baath party, a "putschist" party with an Alawite dictator at its head. And the refusal of the CHP, the main opposition party in parliament, to approve the Syrian policy of the government is explained by the alleged denominational kinship between the two parties (ignoring the historical and theological differences between the two beliefs). But it should be stressed in passing that a certain amount of sympathy has emerged in certain currents of the Turkish left and especially in the republican-secular fringe of society for al-Assad, regarded as anti-imperialist and defending a secularist regime against the offensives of the jihadists supported by Western imperialism. This same schematic political approach explains the almost total absence of support for the Syrian revolution but also the lack of solidarity with Syrians migrants (who number more than 1.7 million in Turkey of which only 225,000 reside in the "reception camps", installed moreover in the vicinity of cities with a high Alevi population). Therefore there is a dynamic of cultural-religious polarisation which the AKP government has engaged in, sowing the seeds of a denominational divide which will be difficult to repair.

The Kurds of Syria, a problem for Turkey

One of the main reasons for the commitment of Erdogan's regime to the struggle for the overthrow of al-Assad was certainly the presence of a large Kurdish population on the Syrian-Turkish border. The formation of a regional administration in the Kurdish north of Iraq following the imperialist intervention in 2003 without doubt constituted a most significant political trauma for the Turkish state. It is therefore clearly the fear of seeing the same scenario realized as a result of a change of regime in Syria which pushed the Turkish government to attempt to intervene in the Syrian crisis from the beginning of the uprising and to establish control over the opposition (faced with other "friends of Syria"), first of all through the Muslim Brotherhood, and then by support to other Islamic currents. However the situation has become all the more critical following the withdrawal of the armed forces of the regime from a part of Syrian Kurdistan in July 2012, after which the Democratic Union Party (PYD) succeeded in taking control of this region bordering Turkey, subsequently proclaiming its autonomy.

The PYD is a party originating from the trend towards decentralization of the PKK in 2003 but still recognizing the ideological and political leadership of Abdullah Ocalan, imprisoned and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1999. The administration of the three townships of Jazira, Afrin and Kobane following the "Revolution of Rojava" ("west" in Kurdish, designating western Kurdistan) is furthermore an attempt of application of the strategy of "democratic autonomism" (or "democratic federalism") developed by Ocalan, supposed to replace the former adhesion of the PKK to Marxism-Leninism (which he renounced in the early 1990s).

On reading the Charter of Rojava declared in January 2013, one is struck by the democratic, secular, multiculturalist discourse and by the ecological sensitivity that it contains. The emphasis on the rights of women, ethnic and religious minorities, especially in the midst of the Syrian chaos, is impressive. If all these commitments are not a completely dead letter, despite the instability in the re-

gion, we must state that the political pluralism of this experience of self-government through various councils and assemblies is not his strong point, far from it. The PYD, not having a strong historic implantation in Rojava, succeeded in establishing its hegemony after its return from exile from Iraqi Kurdistan in 2011 thanks in large part to its military power (YPG: Units of Protection of the People). It did not hesitate to use this to exclude and liquidate politically the various currents of local Kurdish nationalism united since autumn 2011 in the ENKS (National Council of the Kurds of Syria) under the aegis of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Mesut Barzani, a historic rival of the PKK.

It is, moreover, through the intermediary of the PDK and the regional administration of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan with which it enjoys strong economic reports that Turkey has tried to intervene to marginalize the PYD. If the PDK has sometimes been ready to support the manoeuvres of Ankara, neither support for the ENKS nor the attempted blockade of Rojava, by the closure of its border with Iraqi Kurdistan, have succeeded in preventing the development of the autonomist experience under the domination of the PYD.

However, guessing that pressure through the PDK would not be enough for the destruction of Rojava, the AKP has not hesitated to play the jihadist card (facilities for border crossing, health, financial and logistical aid) to crush the Kurdish rebellion. Which international public opinion could witness in view of its late involvement in the international coalition and its restraint regarding support for resistance to the siege of Kobane.

However, the tensions between the PYD and the ENKS (and therefore the PDK) appeared to be allayed following the common battles of the YPG and Peshmerga, in Sinjar and Mosul against "Islamic State", and then with the Dohuk agreements according to which the PYD will share power with the ENKS in the Rojava and the Peshmerga will participate in the resistance of Kobane. This is presented as a "national union" at the level of western

Kurdistan by the KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan, Union of Communities of Kurdistan, which encompasses all the structures related to the Ocalan movement). However it is quite possible that this also means an indirect control by the United States through the influence of Barzani.

The AKP and the peace process

The crisis Ankara faced in regard to the events of Kobane came after the Turkish state had been conducting negotiations with Abdullah Ocalan for nearly two years. The AKP, through the Turkish intelligence services, had already begun talks with the representatives of the PKK in Oslo in 2009, but had to reverse this following the nationalist reaction affecting its electoral base. But as a result of the takeover and the proclamation of autonomy in Rojava (and a misguided attempt on the part of the PKK to conduct a "people's revolutionary war" based on the Syrian experience, to form a liberated zone in the city of Hakkari, which cost the lives of more than a thousand Kurdish fighters) the government resolved to resume the negotiations, but this time directly with Ocalan, a prisoner on the island of Imrali. This initiative by the AKP is due less to the democratic convictions of the latter than to the obstacle that instability due to the Kurdish question represents for the regional interests of Turkish capitalism and Ankara's neo-Ottoman aspirations.

Also, during the national holiday of the Kurdish Newroz, on March 21, 2013, Ocalan proclaimed, via a letter read by a Kurdish party deputy in front of a huge crowd in Diyarbakir, the opening of a peace process, of which the first steps should be the implementation of a cease-fire and the withdrawal of armed combatants beyond the Turkish borders, in the mountains of Kandil in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the PKK's bases are located. The other steps were to follow. If this "peace process" or, according to the official version, "solution process" has been greeted with enthusiasm by different sectors of society, but especially by the Kurdish people - victim of a thirty years war - the disappointment accumulated after two years of waiting has been greater. In fact, out-

side of a few advances concerning the teaching of the Kurdish language and the release of some of the thousands of civilian activists (including mayors and a deputy) of the Kurdish movement incarcerated in 2009-2010, none of the claims of the Kurdish people - such as primary and secondary education in Kurdish, the return to civilian life of armed combatants, the acceptance of Kurdish identity through a new democratic and pluralistic constitution, or the improvement of living conditions (or even the liberation) of Ocalan - have been met.

It is clear that throughout this period of negotiations the AKP was faced with a dilemma. It was supposed to resolve this thorny issue which prevents it from being perceived as a true model for an entire geographical and cultural area without scarring its electoral base, as nationalistic as it is conservative. On the other hand Erdogan needed to broaden his electorate to win the presidency in 2014 (as he indeed succeeded in doing) and needed therefore to win the votes of the Kurds (mostly religious) but also not to lose those already acquired. Finally the AKP tried to do both at the same time, leading it to take almost no concrete measures and fill the void left by a discourse which was both democratic and nationalist. It thus hoped to play for time and keep the Kurdish support necessary to the construction of its new regime, while de-radicalizing the Kurdish armed and civilian movement. However the Kurdish masses, in the expectation of even partial satisfaction of their aspirations, had to be content with the messages from Ocalan, regularly transmitted through members of the Democratic People's Party (HDP, a left reformist formation linked to the Kurdish movement) announcing each time that the process was continuing and that it was going soon reach a decisive stage.

Kobane and the dilemmas of the Kurdish movement

It was in this atmosphere of disillusionment and activist impatience that the Kobane crisis broke out. The reaction in the face of refusal of the AKP to help the resistance in the city of Kobane besieged by Islamic State, to open a corridor to the inside of

its borders for the delivery of weapons and the passage of volunteer fighters (which it eventually had to accept under US pressure), as well as the government rhetoric identifying the PYD/PKK as a terrorist organization equivalent to Islamic State, together with indignation at the widely shared conviction that the AKP was logistically supporting the latter, was translated by an explosion of anger by the Kurdish masses. Responding to the call by the HDP to mobilize support for the resistance in Kobane, tens of thousands of Kurds occupied the streets in both the Kurdish area and in the west of the country on the evening of October 6, 2014. The brutal repression by the security forces led to an equally violent reaction by the indignant crowds: use of firearms, mass looting of stores, setting fire of administrative buildings and schools, murders of civilians suspected to be Islamic State activists. In the west of the country, the entry into play (with the blessing of the government and security forces) of the hordes of nationalists and Islamists ready to clash with the Kurds fuelled this unleashing of violence, and genuine attempted pogroms were undertaken against the Kurdish neighbourhoods. In addition, in Diyarbakir (the main Kurdish city) armed conflicts between (pro-PKK) Kurdish demonstrators and its historical Kurdish radical Islamist opponent Hezbollah - under its new name Hûda-Par - caused deaths on both sides. Faced with this turn of events, Ocalan and the HDP called on their supporters to be calm and not make use of violence but without really succeeding. Despite his indisputable leadership even Ocalan could not control the masses of young Kurds.

These events arising in the context of support for the resistance in Kobane have unveiled a series of tensions that were developing within the different structures linked to the Kurdish movement.

The main tension is between the positions of Ocalan, conducting negotiations from his prison cell, and the leadership of the armed branch taking refuge in the mountains of south Kurdistan (in Iraq). While affirming on each occasion their commitment to Ocalan, the PKK leaders have for a long

time said that for them the peace process is almost finished. The leader of the armed wing and co-president of the executive council of the KCK, Cemil Bayik, had already said in April 2014 that "the AKP government is a government of war. The Kurdish people must organize in order to protect themselves against probable attacks. To expect the government to resolve the Kurdish question would be reckless" [1]. Following the events in Kobane, Besê Hozat, also co-chair of the KCK, stated that Ocalan and the Kurdish movement had made all the steps needed for peace and that if the AKP continued on this same track it will be facing a "violent war", "a chaos extending through all the century" [2]. A member of the executive committee of the KCK, Murat Karayilan, claimed that the attacks of the Turkish state against the Kurds constituted a "declaration of war" and that the process of negotiations no longer had any meaning, that it was finished. "But we await the last word from our leader Apo (Ocalan)", he added [3].

It is not difficult to understand that these messages are directed more to Ocalan than to the AKP. The leadership of the KCK also tries to put pressure on him while trying to demonstrate to the rank and file of the Kurdish movement that they are still in the game.

The position of the HDP is much more difficult. With the peace process, the Kurdish movement had attempted a change of perspective in trying to make the HDP a party not just of the Kurdish cause, but a "Party of Turkey", by integrating various other left political and associative structures. It was thus obliged to support the revolt of June 2013, the largest mobilization in the west of Turkey, known as "Gezi", where the participation of Kurds - for perfectly understandable reasons, given that their historic leader was involved in negotiations with the state - was limited.

However, despite the setback in the municipal elections of March 2014 (outside of the regions with a Kurdish majority in the south-east), the HDP, through lack of an alternative but also thanks to the personal qualities, sincerity, and radical democratic

discourse of its candidate, Selahaddin Demirtas, managed to reach 10% in the presidential elections of August 2014. It thus bettered its usual 6-7% by winning the votes of a section of Turkish secularists and democrats. But, in the wake of the riots in October and the rise of nationalist feeling among Turks, it seems doubtful that the HDP can maintain these votes for the general elections planned for June 2015.

As the main legal structure of the Kurdish movement (with 27 members in Parliament) it is the HDP which faces all the attacks of the political class and particularly the AKP. In addition, the legal framework in which it must work is hardly compatible with the radicalism of the Kurdish youth who are as much its base as that of the KCK. All the more so in that these youth, organizing themselves in the YDG-H (Movement of Patriotic Revolutionary Youth), aligns more on the positions of "the mountain" - to continue to lead the resistance in the streets and to "liberate" the neighbourhoods - than its own.

Thus the HDP cannot risk criticizing the degeneration of riots into gratuitous violence, or take responsibility for its inability to measure the consequences of its appeal on the street, and recognize the impossibility of controlling its rank and file, which would put it in a difficult situation in relation to the government. The only criticism came from the deputy for Diyarbakir, Altan Tan (who originates from the Islamist movement), who after having stated that the HDP should have prevented the arson and destruction during the mobilisations and criticized the supporters of the PKK for having first attacked the members of Hûda-Par, has drawn the wrath of the KCK. According to Mustafa Karasu, a member of its executive board, Tan was interested only in broken windows while Kurdish patriots were murdered by the cooperation of the police, the fascists, the Hezbollah and Islamic State. To which Tan replied curtly: "The looting and the burning of hundreds of shops, supermarkets, jewellery stores and banks, the burning of roads and cars, the assassination of a youth of sixteen and his friends in the

house where they were refugees, the fact that he was then thrown off the balcony, had his head crushed with stones and that his corpse was subsequently overridden by a car, that armed actions are organized against several police stations in the region on the evening of the day when the instruction by Mr. Ocalan to stop the events has been read in the Parliament - I do not consider this as "a few broken windows"... The oppressed cannot behave like the oppressor" [4].

Apart from this critical reaction, unusual in its ranks, the HDP, torn between its loyalty to Ocalan and its responsibility to its base, has preferred to opt for a conspiracy theory to explain events. According to Sirri Sureyya Onder, former filmmaker, deputy for Istanbul and the main "messenger" of Ocalan, the agents of various foreign intelligence services on the ground steered the events, while a "coup mechanic" would have been implemented. Of course there was no precision on the actors in this "mechanic" [5]. Besê Hozat has also stated recently that if the AKP did nothing for the continuation of the process, new conspiracies and coups would take place [6].

It should be clear that the rhetoric of the coup (to which Ocalan does not hesitate to resort to explain any obstacle to the negotiations) is the main alibi of the AKP to criminalize any challenge aimed its regime. Thus the revolt of Gezi, the anti-corruption operations of December 2013 aimed at the ministers of the AKP and the Erdogan's cronies, the revolt of Kobane or even minor incidents such as the failure of the undersea subway in Istanbul would be so many "putschist" attempts to undermine or overthrow the government. And behind all of this would be of course the foreign powers (anonymous) inevitably with the contribution of the former ally and new adversary, the brotherhood of Fethullah Gülen. This reading based on the primacy of conspiracy seems to have reached the ranks of the Kurdish movement.

While the heroic resistance against the barbarity of Islamic State continues in Kobane, with the support of the strikes of the international coalition and the

participation of veterans of the Free Syrian Army (imposed by Turkey) and Peshmerga (imposed by Barzani), the Turkish state is preparing to strengthen its security and repressive apparatus in order to prevent further mass demonstrations. From the point of view of the Kurds, the continuation of the cease-fire and the negotiation process is strongly linked to the situation in Kobane. There is an ur-

gent need for the revolutionary left, despite its weakness, to give its full support to the struggle of the Kurdish people whatever the criticisms of its leadership. It has the task of organizing a broad democratic movement, pluralistic and in solidarity with the Kurdish cause, to stop the infernal machine of the AKP which promises a dark future for all the peoples of Turkey.

GREECE

Fourth International: On 25 January, a turning point for Greece and Europe!

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

• The next weeks will be decisive in Greece and Europe. Behind the electoral battle of 25 January 2015 a conflict between the fundamental classes of the Greek society is being played out, including with a European dimension. This is a fact. If there is a strong defeat of the right parties and a Syriza victory in these parliamentary elections, the fight against the austerity policies could tip over to the side of the people particularly as there is an insistent campaign by EU governments and commissioners for Samaras. The opinion polls give Syriza 28%. To gain an absolute majority, on its own, it needs about 35%. The result might depend on the results of the small lists, which will not be represented in Parliament if they do not obtain 3%. Of course, an electoral victory of the Greek left would not be enough, but it would show that austerity policies can be blocked and the course of the things reversed.

It is one of the weak links of the chain of the austerity policies that could break.

Greece was one of the countries where the neo-liberal capitalist attacks were applied the most brutally: the average income available fell by 35% between 2009 and 2013, unemployment stands at more than 28% – and more than 50% of 15 to 24 year olds, public services have been destroyed, salaried workers and sectors of the petty bourgeoisie have been terribly impoverished. These are the results of the "memorandums" imposed by the troika (the IMF, ECB, EU), which have led to a real regression of the living standards of millions of

Greeks. The country has been bled dry, with the active complicity of the ruling classes – and their political representatives, from New Democracy (ND) to PASOK – who appropriated not only the wealth produced by the working masses of Greece (indigenous and migrants), but also the billion euros recycled over the years by the EU in the form "structural aid" to the owners of this Greece. The geostrategic place of Greece in NATO counts for a lot in this reactionary outburst.

• It is the rejection, by Greek society, of this barbaric policy which has led to the current political crisis. It is one of the key factors which prevented the government of Samaras from winning a majority of 180 members in Parliament to elect a new president of the Republic, former EU commissioner (Stavros Dimas). But the specificity of the Greek crisis is the central role that Syriza occupies, against the right, far right and social democracy represented by the vice-president Evangelos Venizelos. Although in a series of European countries it is the ultra and far right that benefit from the crisis, this is not the case in Greece, with Syriza, and in the Spanish State with Podemos, where these forces polarize resistance to austerity policies at a mass level.

In fact, one cannot understand the Syriza "dynamic" without taking into account the destructive depth of the economic crisis alongside the collapse of one of the pillars of the traditional Greek political system: Pasok – Greek socialist movement, the historic crisis of the right, the drop in support for the KKE (CP) from 13.1% in 1989 to 4.5% in June 2012. An ultra-sectarian KKE, which in an official statement unhesitatingly affirmed in June 2014: "in recent years, Syriza has made a systematic effort to

save capitalism in full view of the workers". This change of the political chessboard is especially the result of a social fightback against the attacks of the ruling classes and the European Union. Nearly 30 days of nation-wide strike, not to mention the partial fights in a large number of sectors have determined the rhythm of the country's social and policy situation in recent years and months. The various components of Syriza, their members in the trade unions – in collaboration, often, with militants of the Antarsya coalition, the student movement, etc are the vectors of these mobilizations. Moreover, the initiatives against the neo-Nazis (Golden Dawn, which has strengthened its presence) and in defence of the rights of migrants and refugees have been continually articulated to the battle against the relentless austerity measures and repression.

The Greek radical left is the product of the accumulation of all this social and political experience. Its victory is possible, but the game is not over yet.

- First, because the right has not said its last word. The Greek right wing remains strong with a social and political base. New Democracy is an ultra-reactionary formation. Central in it are semi-fascists coming from Laos, a far right organization. It has guilty links with the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn and the sectors of the military and police. The spectre of a military coup continues to cast a shadow in the background of Greek political life even if it is not an immediate threat. There is also ranting against the left, workers, migrants. Lastly, let us not forget that the right can enjoy total support from the bulk of Greek bosses, of the European bourgeoisies and of the troika. Its choice is direct confrontation with Syriza and the Greek.

- The danger for the European ruling classes today is political. Their goal: to inflict a new defeat on the Greek people. The Greek crisis can have economic consequences on the situation of Europe in the financial, monetary and banking torment, but the most important "risk" is social and political contagion. Greece has a strategic place in Nato's military dispositive, and an open crisis in Greece would have consequences for international power strug-

gles. A defeat of the austerity policies could give back confidence to the millions of workers who have been strongly tested in recent years. It is thus decisive for the European leaders to do everything so that the experiment fails. This popular determination leads certain sections of the European bourgeoisie and elites to indicate the possibility of negotiation with a new Greek government. It is within this framework that the leaders of the EU could use what remains of the traditional liberal or social liberal left: the remains of Pasok, the socialists movement of Papandréou, or the remains of Dimar (left democratic), particularly if the Syriza leadership undertakes the formation of a coalition government which seeks an agreement with EU leaders. The European powers will combine confrontations and manoeuvres, confrontations and pressures to impose a policy, in continuity with the current government, while hoping to force the Syriza leadership to capitulate. Some are already calling it the "Syriza parenthesis".

A lot is at stake today in Syriza, which is at a crossroads. The "presidential office" and Alexis Tsipras – the Syriza leadership – are multiplying contradictory statements: rejection of the troika's "memorandums", stopping paying debt charges, and suppression of most of this debt, but at the same time seeking an agreement with the leaders of the European Union who, in order to continue their loans, demand application of the budget policies, the fall in the Greek people's standard of living, and the destruction of the public services.

At this stage, the dominant theme in Syriza's campaign is the commitments of the Thessalonika programme: restoring wages and pensions to their pre-crisis level; return to the pre-crisis collective agreements; return to a minimum threshold of taxable income to 12,000 euros; suppression of the tax on heating fuel oil. These measures, if they are applied, will have a meaning for the Greek people and further afield in Europe: austerity can be blocked.

This is why this dual discourse will very quickly run up against the policy of the ruling classes, in Greece and Europe: either the diktats of the EU are accept-

ed, and the experiment will be defeated, or one remains faithful to the fight against austerity, while calling for mass mobilization, and there is the possibility of a social rebound. It will be difficult to escape this alternative. "Not one step backwards" is the slogan of the comrades of the "Left platform" in Syriza. And it is what is strongly felt by the active layers of the electorate of Syriza and the masses of young people, unemployed, and trade-union activists in Adedy (public sector) or GSEE (private sector).

For the slogan "Not one step backwards" to take on stronger substance, it must gain support from a unitive policy of the whole of the Greek left, Syriza obviously but also the KKE and Antarsya. Within the KKE, there are increasing doubts about the ultra-sectarian orientation of the leadership. As for Antarsya, it is divided on the possibility of an alliance with a "national communist" current – Alvanos's Plan B. The Greek left wing, Syriza and Antarsya have particular responsibility in building a unitive project, which goes beyond these organizations, but can bring together trade unionists, campaign activists, ecologists.

These political choices are all the more decisive as the social situation is contradictory. Decline of social mobilizations, since 2013, express fatigue, lack of concrete results, the worries provoked by the need to deal with increasing all-invading precarity. This has not led to lesser politicization but a transfer of the hopes for change, for blocking the daily avalanche of Counter-Reformation, into a change of government incarnated by Syriza.

- The challenge is clear and decisive: it is necessary to defeat the Greek right and far right and to do everything so that the Greek left, of which Syriza is the main component, wins these elections, in order to create a social and political dynamic for a left government, which must strive to bring together all the forces ready to break with the austerity policy and to fight against the pitfalls of chauvinistic nationalism. This government must be a government of the lefts and not a national union government preparing conciliation with the ruling classes and

the EU. The rejection of the memorandums, of the budgetary diktats of the EU, the non-repayment of most of the debt, the first measures of an anti-austerity government, are the questions on which the confrontation with the EU will be played out, but they will not be able to be consolidated without a policy which from the outset breaks with all the antisocial attacks on the Greek people in the last four years in the field of wages, health, the right to work and housing; which starts to take anticapitalist measures, of incursion into capitalist property, nationalization of the banks, and certain key sectors of the economy, reorganization of the economy to satisfy elementary social needs. To impose these solutions, social mobilization, workers' control, self-organization and social self-management are essential. Finally the conquest of the government, within a parliamentary framework, can, in exceptional circumstances, be a first step on the path to an anticapitalist rupture but, there too, this one can be confirmed only if one government anti-austerity creates the conditions for a new power being pressed on Popular Assemblies, in the companies, the districts and the cities.

A decisive battle is beginning in Greece, but all the peoples of Europe are concerned. The Greek people should not remain isolated. The fight to put an end to austerity can start in Greece but it will be able to develop only with the mobilization of powerful forces of the labour movement throughout Europe. We must stop the governments of the European Union continuing to impose their diktats, refuse any interference, any blackmail. It is for the people to decide. We must, through the campaigns, the trade union movement and all organizations, build, in all the European countries, a wall of solidarity with the Greek people, against the troika and right-wing policies. It is also the task of revolutionaries to strengthen links with the Greek revolutionary left to support convergence and steps forward in unity. It is our responsibility.

Secretariat of the Bureau of the Fourth International

11 January 2015

A radical introduction to Namibia's unequal territory

GUILLERMO DELGADO ·

Currently almost a third of the population lives in so-called 'informal settlements' (SDFN, 2009) and half the population has only 'the bush' for sanitation purposes (NSA, 2012a). Yet, Namibia is considered to be a peaceful, prosperous, 'upper middle income' country (New Era, 2011). Inequality is, after all, a relationship between the empowered and the dispossessed.

Namibia contains extreme inequalities that often place it on the list of unequal countries, just next to South Africa. If one takes Gini coefficient as a measure, Namibia ranks as the third most unequal country in the world with an index of 63.9, followed by South Africa with an index of 63.1 (World Bank, n.d.). This inequality can be clearly seen in the country.

Namibia, like South Africa, is also one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with a significant proportion of descendants of European colonial settlers. Most of the country consists of protected areas (for nature preservation or diamond exploration) or private freehold farms owned largely by a minority of mainly white farmers.

Today most citizens still live in so-called 'communal areas' in the northern regions bordering with Angola. Only a small portion of the territory consists of towns and cities, which follow the apartheid structure, with privileged central areas for wealthier whites and underprivileged peripheral areas for blacks.

This structure, which served the purposes of apartheid, today conveniently benefits the 'property market' promoted by real estate agents and banks. In the three main municipalities in central Namibia, there are no actually-existing 'mixed-in-

come' neighbourhoods, which in Namibia has racial implications. Given these conditions, it could be argued that contemporary liberation struggles will emerge mainly within towns and cities.

Namibia's crisis building urbanization

Namibia's urban land crisis is a result of free market logic left to regulate the provision of land and housing for the general population. An 'entry level house' in Namibia currently costs about R700 000, which only 10 per cent of the population can access. House price increases have averaged about 20 per cent annually over the last ten years. Today, house price increases in Namibia are the second highest in the world, just after Dubai, according to a report in *Namib Times*.

If one was fortunate enough to have purchased a house for R300 000 in 2007, one would be able to sell it today for R900 000. Property is a preferred method of investing for those able to access finance, as it is in many parts of the world. In Namibia, this is a small minority.

To qualify for the median house price in central areas, one would need to earn a minimum of R23 000 per month, while almost 70 per cent of those considered to be employed earn less than R4 000 per month (NSA, 2012b). As in South Africa, the definition of 'employed' is unconvincing, including for example having spent an hour in the last seven days fetching water for your household.

National unemployment stood at 51 per cent in 2008, but after the National Statistics Agency revised its method, this figure decreased to 27 per cent in 2012. Unemployment after this 'recalibration' is nevertheless on the increase.

During the years when the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) conducted wage bar-

gaining reports (2004 - 2009), workers' annual real wages' increased on average by 1.8 per cent (LaRRI, 2008). Real wages are wage increases after inflation, which in Namibia has averaged 8 per cent annually in the last ten years, according to *Trading Economics*.

Namibia is also a very expensive place to live, since its territory is extremely arid and it has only a small industrial base that makes it highly dependent on imports, mainly from South Africa. The cost of living in Windhoek, the capital, is reportedly 35 per cent more expensive than Cape Town, while the purchasing power of Windhoekers is 58 per cent lower than that of the Capetonians, according to *The Namibian*.

The many narratives that aim at providing explanations for this urban and social crisis usually claim inefficiencies in the system. In the case of housing, one reason given is that supply is too low. Indeed, the state-owned enterprise in charge of housing has been delivering an average of 600 houses annually against a backlog of 185,000 units.

Another reason often advanced is that insufficient land is available. Municipalities are responsible for servicing land and some have either little budgets or operate on a cost-recovery basis. Moreover, professional fees for seemingly necessary consultancies on spatial development – land surveyors, planners, engineers – are high. Some consultants charge between 50 to 100 times the highest sectoral minimum wage in the country. Most of the country's technology and materials are imported, which adds to costs in every sector.

However, as urbanist Peter Marcuse once famously said: 'Homelessness exists not because the system is not working, but because this is the way the system works'. Powerful interests are vested in 'the property market' (read: land and housing). As usually happens during crises, this has different effects for different income groups.

A house price increase means a (fictitious) profit for the homeowner that diminishes the non-homeowner's prospects of buying a house. An increase in

rent means a higher (again, also fictitious) profit for landlords, while to the tenant it means less disposable income and/or eviction. In Namibia, rental regulations are weak, and landlords can act as renters without any obligation to maintain the property.

Housing and land are an arena for intense class struggle. The question is whether this has been already activated as such. A review of a recent land protest and its background may show that this is in fact currently taking place.

The margin for potential urban civic struggle

In a recent case, a saga involving blatant favouritism on the part of the municipality of Windhoek has been exposed. Reportedly, prime land was given away cheaply to TV stars, politicians, and family members of the political elite. At the same time, however, evictions and threats to informal settlers have taken place, enforced by elite beneficiaries of the land-grab, according to *Namibian Sun*.

Recently, a 'land invasion' led by the popular ruling party (SWAPO) youth league spokesperson put 'urban' land in the centre of the media and public debate. The 'land invasion' took place in a middle upper income area, to enforce 'affirmative repositioning'. The youth leader resigned from his position as spokesperson shortly before he was expelled from the party, even though it soon emerged that his expulsion was against the procedures of the party. This occurred only three weeks before elections, when international observers and media would be watching the situation particularly closely.

The 'land invasion' initially drew support from dissident trade union leaders, as well as members of the Shackdwellers' Federation of Namibia (SDFN). The dissident youth leader called for a demonstration in front of the City of Windhoek's municipal offices. However, no labour organisations appear to have openly supported this action, and the SDFN withdrew its intention to participate a day before.

The demonstration took place on Thursday, November 20, and it attracted about 2 000 people. Some 14 000 applications for land were delivered to the municipal offices, according to *Namibia Sun*. By any measure, this was one of the largest public demonstrations in recent times in Namibia. To put it in perspective, only about 100 people marched to parliament in August this year when about 40 changes to the constitution were single-handedly passed without public consultation.

Why now? The ruling party will certainly secure around 75 per cent of the votes in these November elections, and the other parties are still too small to represent any significant threat. However, recent developments in South Africa, such as the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU, which has eroded the cohesion of the tri-partite alliance that keeps the ANC in power, along with the rise of the EFF, might be factors that the so-called dissident youth leaders have taken into account.

The demonstration targeted the lack of land and corruption among the political elite, but no specific claims have been made against the ruling party. Moreover, the main leader behind these demonstrations is effectively still a member of the ruling party and therefore a supporter of its presidential candidate.

It must be said that the demonstration was peaceful. The municipality ensured that the applications were received, issued a receipt for each one, and even set a deadline for formal replies to the applications. But it remains to be seen whether the initiators will follow up on this and other socially necessary struggles. One question is whether this move was only a strategic move on the part of the elite to consolidate its power.

The fact remains that the possibility of a united protest on urban land issues involving the youth, the unemployed, trade unions and self-help groups was made manifest. The demonstration may have been a sign of things to come.

Housing and land will continue to be a divisive issue. The recent launch of the National Mass Housing Program (the 'largest development program since independence', according to its promoters) would have been an excellent opportunity to ameliorate this crisis, but its market-based, conservative approach and erratic undertakings have rendered the project largely unpopular.

The process has mainly benefited middlemen, while rendering housing inaccessible for the working class. The construction of a 36m² house costs R238 800 or about R6 600 per m². Government will have to subsidise more than half of this cost, but even the ministry of finance is weary of disbursing funds in view of the money-making nature of the scheme.

Cronyism in the tender process has been widely reported to favour family members of high-ranking politicians. These include the daughter of the president, who reportedly was not even paying the minimum wage to the construction workers hired by her company, according to *Namibian Sun*. (At R13 per hour, the construction sector is the highest sectoral minimum wage in the country.)

Such schemes might ultimately trigger the political dissent necessary to activate a contemporary liberation struggle. It may still be premature, but shifting ground at the regional and planetary levels might render such speculations timely.

SYRIA

The PKK and the issue of self determination for the Kurdish people

JOSEPH DAHER ·

It is nevertheless possible, in a constructive critical approach, to discuss two aspects of these mobilizations to enable us to come back to the central issue of any prospect of self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria: the liberation of the Kurdish people is intimately linked to the victory of the Syrian revolution.

The first element to question is the will to isolate the struggle for self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria to the dynamic of the Syrian revolution, as we have seen in the International Solidarity call with Kobani made on November 1 signed by a number of left figures, including Noam Chomsky. [1]

In a previous article, [2] we discussed the mistake to isolate the Kurdish issue of the Syrian revolution. We will add here that to deny this connection and deny the struggle of the Syrian popular movement for freedom and dignity is in the benefit of enemies of the Syrian and Kurdish people: neither the Assad regime or the reactionary Islamic forces have an interest in a developed political experience, Syrian or Kurdish, which exists outside of their authoritarian program.

This does not mean that we should not denounce the various sections of the Syrian opposition that still deny the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people and especially the role of the the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, supported by the Western states, Turkey, and the Gulf monarchies, which had an ambiguous attitude during the attacks of the reactionary Islamic forces, including Jabhat al Nusra, against the Kurdish regions in the past. These positions are all the more reprehensible that we must

remember the decades of political, social and cultural oppression of the Kurdish people in Syria and policies of colonization or arabisations of the northern regions of Syria implemented by the Assad regime. The northern regions of Syria were also the poorest and the least provided with social services. Not to mention the silence of a large part of the opposition during the Kurdish intifada in Syria in 2004 and some even accusing it of serving foreign "imperialist" projects in order to weaken Syria. [3]

Second observation: the Western left has an uncritical view of the PKK and presents the autonomous regions of Rojava as examples of self-organization from below of the popular masses. Those two elements can be nuanced strongly.

First, we must address the authoritarian practices of the PKK and its Syrian branch, both in their internal organizational functioning and against other citizens and political actors. The authoritarianism of the PYD was demonstrated in its repression and imprisonment of activists and the closure of critical organizations or institutions, such as the independent radio Arta in February 2014. The members of the Syrian Kurdish opposition parties like the Yekiti Party, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria and Azadi party have particularly suffered from the repression of PYD forces in the autonomous regions of Rojava. [4]

In fact, there have been several protests against the PYD forces and their practices in some cities in Rojava such as Amouda and Derabissyat. In the end of June 2013 for example, the two cities have experienced demonstrations and other protest activities to denounce the repression and arrest of Kurdish revolutionary activists by YPG (Units of protection of the people), the armed wing of the

PYD. [5] In July 2013, new events occurred in Amouda the PYD did not hesitate to fire on the crowd, killing many demonstrators. Furthermore, since October 2014, mandatory conscription was decreed and implemented by the PYD in areas under its control. This decision has caused the departure of many young people from all communities, to escape imprisonment for refusing to serve.

Some protests were organised in recent weeks by the inhabitants of Amouda to condemn both the abduction of women and their enslavement by the IS on one side and on the other side the forced military conscription of young girls in the PYD -with the special case of Hemri Aidi, a young girl of 15 enlisted by force. YPG forces have actually repeatedly enlisted children in their ranks. [6]

We are far from the dynamics from below of the popular councils established in various "liberated" regions of Syria since 2011 with the involvement of local popular forces in the management of various sectors of the society. The Kurdish autonomous regions are on their side more led by dynamic from above and controlled by the PYD. The many portraits of the Kurdish PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan that cover the walls of government centres of Rojava symbolize this fact.

Do these criticisms mean that we should reject everything? Absolutely not, the three cantons of Rojava provide a form of autonomy that are interesting on many aspects (women's rights, minority participation, secular institutions, etc...). These experiences of autonomy are moreover positive for a Kurdish nation oppressed for decades.

We should also not forget the distrust displayed by the PKK and the PYD to popular protest movement in the past when they were not launched on their

initiatives or controlled the party. The PKK for example displayed a passive attitude during the Kurdish intifada in Syria in 2004, seeking more to calm the Kurds who rose up against the oppression of the Assad regime, or at the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process in 2011. The PKK actually currently coexist in the cities of Qamishli and Hasaka with the forces of the Syrian regime and is not trying to get rid of.

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

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

This does not change the fact that we need to uphold a principled position of support to the Kurdish national liberation movement in its struggle for self-determination in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. It deserves, like all forms of struggle for liberation and emancipation, unconditional support. Once this fundamental principle established, it seems necessary to take a critical look at how these movements are

BURKINA FASO 2014

Social movements and the fall of Compaoré

LILA CHOULI ·

Interview with Lila Chouli

AEL: You published *Burkina Faso 2011: Chronicle of a Social Movement* in 2011, which describes the methods of the Compaoré regime to suppress social movements in 'The Land of Upright Men'. Could you give us a historical overview of earlier social movements?

Lila Chouli (LC): The presence of social movements has been persistent within the Burkinabe socio-political landscape since the beginning of the post-colonial period. There is a real tradition of struggle in the country, whose "founding act" indeed is the fall of the First Republic on 3 January 1966 – the result of a popular movement. Looking merely at recent times – the Blaise Compaoré regime left behind a country that was characterised by mobilisations that claimed the streets, going beyond the organised structures and that was not the sphere of the urban and/or "intellectuals".

In rural as much as in urban areas, key questions such as access to land, involuntary resettlements, agribusiness, land disputes, corruption, impunity, the state of collective public facilities, etc., were very often at the centre of spontaneous revolts. Among the social movements that have really shaken the regime, there is the 1998 one, in response to Norbert Zongo's assassination.

This movement spread in a sustained manner over two years, across the entire territory and brought different social and political elements together. We have been observing a real increase of popular mobilisations since this particular sociopolitical crisis.

The second such movement, which also almost brought down the regime, goes back to 2011. This popular movement – borne out of the death of the highschool learner Justin Zongo – followed multi-

ple police arrests and the deadly repression of demonstrations demanding that light be shed on the case. It effectively had already put the country in a situation of quasi insurrection. Additional problems that arose were a series of military mutinies and social conflicts in basically all sectors of the economy (from farmers to administration, including the mines, etc.). The country had become ungovernable. All along, the question of the 2015 elections and handover of power was underlying this social movement.

AEL: What eventually allowed the social movements of October 2014, against the constitutional changes, to bring about Compaoré's fall?

LC: What really led Compaoré's fall was a primarily young population (60% of Burkinabe are under 25) that was fed up, and the degree of awareness this population has regarding the real reasons for the burdensome reality faced by the vast majority. It is significant that primarily because they experienced its trials in a very concrete manner (land grabs, dispossession, repression, etc.), it wasn't merely among the intellectual and urban classes that individuals would point fingers at the regime and rebel against it.

These protest dynamics are also due to the ground-work some trade unions and public organisations carried out (Collectif contre l'impunité [Collective against impunity], Organisation démocratique de la jeunesse [Democratic youth organization], Mouvement burkinabé des droits de l'Homme [Burkinabe Human Rights Movement], Coalition contre la vie chère [Coalition against high cost of living, etc.], that for years broadened and politicised the realm of protest activities in the country. The day Blaise Compaoré resigned, young protesters – be they members of a civil society organi-

sation or a political party or not – put the political opposition under pressure demanding he step down.

The motion to establish a Senate in May 2013 – perceived by the majority as a means for Blaise Compaoré to modify the Constitution – became the catalyst to mobilise and to demand a change-over. On 29 June 2013 the political opposition, which for a long time had forsaken public mobilisation as a means of making political claims, prompted by its leader, called for a march, which was against the setting up of this chamber and the modification of Article 37.

This march brought together an impressive crowd, consisting of different social classes, of all ages, whether activists in political or civil organizations or not. It initiated a series of marches and meetings that were all characterised by a high turnout. At the same time, we saw the establishment of a plethora of organisations against the modification of Article 37, among them Balai citoyen ['Citizen broom'] in July 2013.

The resignation of members of the political bureau of the party in power on 4 January 2014, amongst them three leading figures (Roch Christian Kaboré, Simon Compaoré and Salif Diallo, pillars of the Compaoré regime) and the formation of their new party also had a significant effect. In the wake of the army mutinies of 2011, notably of the presidential guard, which had exposed the regime's unmistakable vulnerability, the departure of these leading figures provided a good prism through which to view the status quo. What however facilitated the fall of Compaoré has indeed been the radicalism of the popular masses.

AEL: Balai citoyen also played its part in the fall of the Compaoré regime in Burkina Faso. What do you make of it? And what are your thoughts regarding its support for Lieutenant-Colonel Zida?

LC: It cannot be denied that succeeded in bringing together people that did not see themselves represented by established political organisations, which

effectively was one part of the 'critical mass' mobilised against Compaoré. Furthermore, it also mobilised people around social issues (power cuts, state of hospitals, etc.). In that sense, it is an important movement.

However, Balai citoyen had a tendency to consider fighting for Blaise Compaoré's departure to be sufficient in itself; it considered organisations insisting on the exigency and necessity to create an alternative political and social project as not being separate steps but inseparable, and to be in fact adding fuel to Compaoré's cause.

This groundwork would have avoided a weakening of the debate on the postCompaoré period, which expressed itself through the support given to the attempt by the second in command of the former Praetorian guard's – of a president removed by the popular movement – to divert popular victory.

It is the expression of a limited, even confused political sense: in one day, Balai can say "we're wary of politicians, so we remain prudent" and provide backing to Lieutenant-Colonel Zida, who is close to Gilbert Diendiéré, Compaoré's Chief of Staff, so he could seize power, acknowledging that the army deserves a "minimum of confidence".

AEL: If the transition was to lead to elections, do you think there is a credible political alternative in Burkina Faso? What about the Sankarist parties?

LC: The fact that during the popular uprising no politician was called upon by the protesters is still a good indication of the credibility of the formal political opposition. In an opposition consisting of dozens of parties there is none that offers an alternative.

Responsible for the Union for Progress and Change (l'Union pour le progrès et le changement, UPC) and leader of the opposition, Zéphirin Diabré, for example, clumsily stated last year: "Today the world is ours, belongs to us neoliberals; we defeated and conquered it" (which he subsequently denied).

Asked about his programme by the journalist Anne

Frintz, who interviewed him in Ouagadougou prior to the popular uprising, Z. Diabré replied: "UPC does not have a specific programme ... The project is that of the background sweepers". He pointed out to her: "Within the opposition we speak with one voice. We all attack the same problem: poverty. We work for better education, access to care and health, an export and food crop agriculture and above all, better governance. We must tackle corruption, which is a national sport here ... The difference between the opposition groups is their ability to implement the programme. The will and commitment."

With regards to the Sankarist parties, understandably fighting for justice to be served for the assassination of Thomas Sankara, they cannot be considered to be carrying an alternative political project (economic, social, etc.). Judging by the mass of people identifying with Sankara and gauging from these parties' low popularity, one has to recognise that they are not considered as his true heirs in terms of a political alternative, including the rejection of all external domination.

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NIGERIA

Boko Haram: caliphate and rentier state

DAVID SEDDON ·

Nevertheless, the organisation behind the kidnapping remains poorly understood. Officially called Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad ('People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad'), the militant Islamist movement's shorter and more familiar name translates as 'Western education is forbidden'.

Boko Haram was founded in 2002, in Maiduguri – the capital of Borno state – by Mohammed Yusuf. Yusuf reportedly used the existing infrastructure of a popular conservative Islamic sect, the Izala Society, to recruit members, before breaking away to form his own movement with the goal of creating an Islamic state. He established a religious complex with a school, attracting boys from poor Muslim families from across Nigeria and neighbouring countries, and becoming a recruiting ground for jihadis.

The Council of Ulama advised the Nigerian government and the Nigerian Television Authority not to broadcast Yusuf's preaching. Their warnings were ignored, and gradually the movement began to gain ground. Today it claims perhaps 5,000-10,000 adherents – double the estimates of just two years ago.

Boko Haram's initial success is as much to do with poverty, inequality and corruption as with the attraction of the religious teachings of Mohammed Yusuf. While Nigeria's southern and, to a lesser extent, western and central regions have generally grown wealthier in the past decade or so, the north and east have remained very poor. As the UK-based Economist explained, if Nigeria's northern states were independent countries, some of would rank at the very bottom globally, despite the fact that

Nigeria is OPEC's seventh largest oil producer: "Nowhere else in the world are more children out of school. Fewer than 5 per cent of women in some parts can read or write. Estimates put three out of four residents in the north east below the poverty line, around twice as many as at the southern end of the country.

The growth and spread of Boko Haram is not only a *consequence* of the region's extreme poverty, inequality and corruption; it has also become an exacerbating *cause*. The movement has long financed itself through plunder and kidnapping for ransom; the Chibok kidnapping was just one example of something that has been going on for more than a decade. Now, it raises revenues from extortion and looting, and from terrorising local officials, shopkeepers and other businesses in the towns, and farmers and villagers in the countryside. It also collects 'taxes' from traders and transporters at roadblocks and checkpoints.

Recent recruitment has often been by force, but in reality not much coercion is required since those who join often see little alternative. Agriculture has collapsed in parts of the northeast, and in many places fields lie empty and markets are deserted – even in areas still under government control. It is estimated that the combination of economic collapse and insecurity has driven more than half a million people from their homes.

Boko Haram itself may have killed between 5,000 and 15,000 people in the past five years – at least 2,000 in the first half of 2014. One source suggests that 650,000 people had fled the conflict zone by August 2014 – an increase of 200,000 since May. In September, a Boko Haram group attacked the villages of Kubi and Watu in Adamawa State to the south of Borno. Houses and small shops were looted, plundered, and torched, and many local people

were slaughtered. State security forces failed to show up. At a newly established refugee camp in Yola, capital of Adamawa State, most arrivals reported having fled from Boko Haram.

With its recent substantial growth, Boko Haram now appears capable of securing its own territory in the northeast. In recent months it has taken control of at least two-dozen towns in Borno and the neighbouring states of Adamawa and Yobe. Gwoza, a hill town of almost half a million people in Borno, some 100 miles southeast of Maiduguri, is the capital of the self-declared caliphate. Few outsiders dare visit this stronghold.

The movement has also managed to acquire armoured personnel carriers and antitank weapons; it even has some tanks and artillery, and may have the capacity to bring down aircraft with anti-aircraft missiles: in October 2014, claims began circulating that it had downed a Nigerian fighter jet and beheaded the pilot.

Nigerian security forces, despite being promised the resources to deal with this threat, are under-equipped, poorly organised and suffer from low pay and morale. The army has approximately 18,000 troops in the northeast – an area of some 10 million people, living in widely dispersed settlements, in rough and often densely forested terrain. Roughly half of that force remains in Maiduguri. The Nigerian forces have no air power, as Boko Haram destroyed much of the fleet in a major raid in 2013, leaving it relatively free to roam the region in vehicles looted mainly from military garrisons and police posts, and to deploy an impressive armoury against its enemies.

It is significant that Boko Haram has not only developed its own state-like characteristics, but that the Nigerian state for its part appears unable or unwilling to combat it effectively. A budget supplement of \$1 billion allegedly allocated to respond to the developing threat seems mostly to have disappeared into the pockets of senior military staff. So few of the allocated funds reach the front line that soldiers often go unpaid for months. Desertion is common and mutiny not unknown. Soldiers have

shot at their own officers, and there have been a number of executions by firing squad. In the field, security forces tend to supplement their meagre or non-existent pay by bribes and extortion, stopping drivers of both private and commercial vehicles at checkpoints designed to raise money as much as to identify Boko Haram supporters.

Local police are also under extreme pressure and, lacking the equipment to confront Boko Haram directly, often resort to arrest and detention of locals as a way of extracting information. Abuse in detention is commonplace; some police stations have what is informally known as an 'officer in charge of torture' for the interrogation of detainees. Extra-judicial killings, by both the army and police, account for thousands of deaths in the north and northeast. Such practices only fuel Boko Haram's recruitment. Boko Haram's success is not only due to the fact that the region's civilians are 'caught between a rock and a hard place'. The movement is seen to offer a vision of some kind of alternative.

Radical Islam's 'purity' – a crucial part of Boko Haram's rhetoric – often seems attractive to poverty-stricken locals in contrast to the corrupt and dissolute status quo. The severe punishments meted out to those suspected of opposing the movement are seen by many as 'rough justice' rather than abomination. Resentment of the region's economic and political marginalisation, as well as anger at its widespread poverty and backwardness, are powerful forces: the Nigerian state is easily seen as the problem rather than the solution, and locals may pursue alternatives rather than struggling for change within the existing system.

Boko Haram also sets itself against the 'Western' influences, which are seen not only by radical Islamists but also by many ordinary Muslims as deeply corrupting, and as 'alien' to the beliefs and practices of the Muslim peoples of northern Nigeria. The name 'Boko Haram' is no accident: for decades, Northern politicians and academics voiced their fundamental opposition to Western education. In a 2009 BBC interview, Yusuf claimed that Western education 'spoils the belief in one God'.

If this sounds extreme, it should be recognised that the north of Nigeria has always been a Muslim stronghold, and the deep division between the Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south has a long history. Severe clashes with ethnic and religious dimensions – in which hundreds or thousands were killed and tens of thousands forced to flee their homes – date back more than a decade.

Islamic law –shari'ah – was imposed by local authorities beginning with Zamfara in the northwest as long ago as January 2000, and covered 12 northern states by late 2002. Yusuf believed that this effort had failed to prevent widespread corruption, and founded Boko Haram in response.

Boko Haram is undoubtedly influenced by the Wahabist tradition of Islam, and Borno's Deputy Governor Alhaji Dibal has claimed that Boko Haram has received training and funds from Al Qaeda (through Al Qaeda in the Arab Maghghreb – AQIM). But this is not confirmed.

Some sources suggest that even if Al Qaeda at one point had links with the movement, it broke with it when it decided that Yusuf was an unreliable person. In November 2013, Boko Haram was designated a terrorist organisation by the USA, which persist in the belief that it has links with Al Qaeda.

The violence of Boko Haram has also been linked to the militancy of the Arewa People's Congress, the militia wing of the Arewa Consultative Forum, the main political group representing the interests of northern Nigeria. Significantly, Sagir Mohammed, co-founder of the ACF, has stated:

'We believe we have the capacity, the willpower to go to any part of Nigeria to protect our Northern brothers in distress... If it becomes necessary, if we have to use violence, we have to use it to save our people. If it means jihad, we will launch our jihad.'

Amandla November/December 2014

The revolutionary processes caught in the grip of reactionary forces

The two major forces, which have distinguished themselves and have dominated for some time the political scene in the region, are the representatives of the former authoritarian regimes on one side and the Islamic fundamentalist and reactionary forces in its various components from the Muslim Brotherhood to the Jihadists on the other side. These forces are of course not completely similar and major differences exist between them, but they share a common counter revolutionary position against the popular movements and the objectives of the revolution. In Tunisia, for example, the organisation that won the last October parliamentary elections are gathered under the umbrella of Nidaa Tunes, which represents the interests of the former regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, followed by the reactionary Islamic force of En-Nahda.

The return or the consolidation of the power of the representatives of the former authoritarian regimes is not limited to Tunisia only, but is a regional phenomenon.

In Egypt, former dictator Hosni Mubarak has been cleared of the two charges held against him: corruption and above all its role in the repression and the death of more than 850 demonstrators during the 18 days of the popular uprising that led to his overthrow in February 2011. Mubarak's sons, Alaa and Gamal, accused of having embezzled or facilitated the diversion of more than 125 million Egyptian pounds (about 14 million euros), have also been cleared. The charges against seven senior security officials, including former Interior

Minister Mubarak Habib al-Adly, were also abandoned.

As a reminder, since the arrival to power of Sissi, at least 1400 supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood have been assassinated, and more than 15000 supporters or sympathisers of this organisation have been imprisoned. I have already talked and mentioned the counter revolutionary role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the past, but this does not prevent us from condemning the exactions and crimes of the regime of Sissi against the members of the Muslim Brotherhood, as they constitute violations of basic democratic rights. To stay silent in front of these crimes is to give a free pass to the counter-revolution in its repression and betray basic fundamental principles of defence of democratic rights. The regime of Sissi also attacked the liberal and left opposition, arresting numerous activists, including for having 'violated' a controversial law that limits the right to demonstrate, in opposition with international human rights standards. Some human rights activists have also been imprisoned or forced to leave the country.

The counter revolution represented by the regime of Sissi is still advancing forward, with the resolute support of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Monarchies, and now even Qatar. This latter, former supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and that still welcomes representatives of the organisation, has expressed its support to the regime of Sissi on December 9 2014 following the pressures of the various Gulf monarchies in the framework of the conference of the Gulf Council of Cooperation.

Sissi's regime seeks to rehabilitate the former authoritarian regime of Mubarak and co in continuing the same policies. At the same time, the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been

and is severely repressed, has not made a deep self-criticism of its period in power and of its authoritarian policies and counter revolutionary practices. Since the overthrow of Morsi, the movement has even strengthened its aggressive religious sectarian discourse against the Christian Coptic minority, in accusing it to be responsible of all kinds of conspiracies and to be the main responsible of the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood, all the while refusing to support the social demands and the numerous workers strikes repressed by the current regime. The only slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood is not the objectives of the revolution, but only the return of Morsi.

In the case of Syria, while in the past the solution of an authoritarian regime without Assad and with some sections of the Syrian opposition (liberals and Muslim Brotherhood) close to the West and the Gulf monarchies but not representative of the Syrian revolutionaries was favoured by the various international and regional imperialist forces, today these latter forces agree to say that Assad could finally stay and be an ally in the so called "war against terrorism". The Assad regime would therefore be cleared of all its crimes and the destructions caused by its armed forces and local and foreign militias for the defence of the regime.

We can also notice that the intervention in Syria of the West, led by the USA and with the collaboration of some Gulf monarchies, did not have much effect and did not prevent the progresses on the field by the jihadist forces, particularly of the Islamic State and Jabhat al Nusra (the Al Qaida branch in Syria) against the Syrian revolutionaries and the regions under the domination of the Kurdish forces of the PYD in Syria. Similarly, there is still a refusal by the various so-called "friends" of the Syrian revolution to help politically and support militarily the democratic and popular forces in Syria, including the Free Syrian Army and the Kurdish groups of the PYD, which fought and are fighting the Assad regime and the reactionary Islamic forces.

It should be remembered that it is these two actors, the democratic components of the FSA and the

PYD, in addition to the Syrian popular movement that first struggled against the expansion of the reactionary jihadists and Islamic reactionary forces in Syria. They are the ones who have paid a heavy price to the tyranny of these groups, while the Assad regime was allowing and abetting their expansion and focused its repression against the democratic and progressive popular forces, civilians and armed, in the country.

In Tunisia, as we mentioned earlier, Nidaa Tunes, the representatives of the interests of the former regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and En-Nahda, the Islamic reactionary movement that was in power since October 2011 with two other political forces, were the two most important forces in the legislative election of October. Nidaa Tunis appears as the most attractive choice in the eyes of the Tunisian Bosses' Union, western foreign embassies and international financial institutions.

On its side, En-Nahda has worked to maintain and continue the ultra-liberal economic and social policies of the Ben Ali era. En-Nahda has also engaged itself with an important zeal to fulfil the commitments of Tunisia to the European Union and the international financial institutions like the IMF and the WB to be granted new loans exceeding billions of euros. Meanwhile, combative trade unions and the demands of the workers have been deemed excessive, including at the level of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (known as the UGTT), according to Rachid Ghannouchi, head of the En-Nahda Movement, in an interview in July 2014. Moreover he accused the UGTT of being a legacy of France and that this institution is not a priori a natural institution of the "Muslim city".

The arrival to power of En-Nahda did not stop the violence against political opponents, as exemplified by the various political assassinations that took place under their watch. Besides, this violence against political opponents has also been seen through the militias called the "Leagues of the Protection of the Revolution" (LPR) considered to be controlled by En-Nahda. Numerous attacks have been led par the LPR and salafist groups against

different political groups and activists, including against political meetings of the Popular Front and its members and other activists and associations (including artists prevented to perform for "violating Islamic principles"). This is without also forgetting that on December 4, 2012, the day of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the assassination of the leader and founder of the Tunisian trade union movement Farhat Hached, the LPR attacked the headquarters of the UGTT in Tunis with sticks, knives, gas bombs, causing more than a dozen injured.

The violence of the militias has also been accompanied by a hardening of the State repression against political activists and particularly against many trade unionists arrested several times because of their trade union activities.

Before having to leave power, the Troika, in other words En-Nahda and its allies, voted an austerity budget and anti-social policies. The new fiscal policies, that were openly disadvantageous to the working and popular classes, have been the detonator of a broad protest movement, causing not only the end of these measures, but also led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, Ali Laarayedh, member of En-Nahda.

The opposition that take place between representatives of the former regimes and reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces have been observed in the legislative Tunisian elections or in the repression of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by the regime of Sissi. This does not mean that the clashes between these two forces have not given way to alliances and collaborations at some points. It is indeed necessary to remember that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak has maintained good relations and even worked with the leaders of the army until the fall of Morsi in July 2013. They have not hesitated to praise the role of the army as "protector of the nation and the revolution" several times before the overthrow of Morsi. In addition, when the Muslim Brotherhood dominated the parliament and occupied the presidency, they have not chal-

lenged the political and economic power of the army, as they did not condemn the army' repressive role against the Egyptian people's movement for example, during the 18 days of the uprising in 2011 or during Maspero's crimes in November 2011 against the Egyptian Coptic demonstrators.

In Tunisia, Nidaa Tunes and En-Nahda have also collaborated on numerous occasions in the past and have not hidden their intentions to do so in the future. In an interview in October 2014, Rachid Ghannouchi did not exclude the possibility of working with Nidaa Tunes and added that it was En-Nahda that prevented the adoption of the law of immunization of the revolution allowing people that belonged to the former regime to stand for elections. Following the victory of Nidaa Tunes at the legislative elections, the vice president of En-Nahda, Abdelfattah Mourou, declared that he was not against En-Nahda's participation in the next government. The leader of the movement of Nidaa Tunes and candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, Beji Caïed Essebsi, has also indicated that the En-Nahda movement wasn't not an enemy and he even said that if the supreme interest of the State requires it, Nidaa will not hesitate to form a front with En-Nahda and that this can't be considered a betrayal for those who voted in the parliamentary elections for Nidaa.

During the first sessions of parliament, this collaboration was also noticed. The only vote taken on December 2 involved a suspension of session of 48-hours, to allow more time for Nidaa and En-Nahda to negotiate among themselves and / or recuperate each of their allies. The Popular Front was the only parliamentary group to oppose this vote and was joined only by independent members. At the second meeting on December 4 Nidaa and En-Nahda again voted together for the three posts to fulfil in parliament.

Besides as a reminder, the business baron and supporter of En-Nahda Frikha Mohammed stated that the UTICA (association of employers in Tunisia) proposed to the different parties, including En-Nahda, to integrate businessmen in their list and

added that there is some consensus on economic policies between En-Nahda, Nidaa Tunis, and others like Afek (ultra liberal party).

In conclusion, these two actors, representatives of the former authoritarian regimes on one side and the reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces, are enemies of the initial objectives of the revolutionary processes. Popular movements, activists and groups that were and are carrying the original objectives of the revolutionary process have been attacked by these two forces. The representatives of the former authoritarian regimes and the reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces are two forces of the counter-revolution and this despite a different political propaganda. The representatives of the former regimes present themselves as the defenders of modernism, as the saviour of the unity of the nation and champion of the fight against "terrorism". The reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces present themselves on its side as the guarantor of the Islamic religion, morality, authenticity of Islamic and Arab identity, while making the link with the Islamic "Umma".

These two discourses that certainly differ in appearance, should not make us forget that these two movements share a very similar political project: the will to limit and suppress democratic and social rights, while seeking to guarantee the capitalist system of production and continue the neoliberal policies that impoverish the popular classes in the re-

gion. Similarly these two counter revolutionary forces will not hesitate to use a political discourse seeking to divide and antagonize the working popular classes on sectarian religious, ethnic, gender, regionalist bases, etc ...

For those who choose to support one of these two counter revolutionary forces presenting it as the choice of the "least worst", they actually choose the road of defeat and the maintenance of an unjust system in which the popular classes in the region live. The role of revolutionaries is not to choose between different factions of the bourgeoisie or different fractions of the counter-revolutions that are supported by various international and sub-regional imperialist actors. Our role is to oppose the different counter revolutionary forces and build an independent front from these two forms of reactions and basing it on democratic, social, anti-imperialist basis and opposing all forms of discrimination and working for the radical change of society in a dynamic from below in which the working classes the agent of change.

In conclusion, given the clashes or collaboration between the forces of reaction, let's not choose one form of the reaction, but support, build and organize a popular and radical alternative for the original objectives of the revolutions: democracy social justice and equality.

December 16 2014

Syria Freedom Forever

LGO press release on the situation and tasks

After discussing the situation and the political events which arise from the parliamentary and presidential elections, the participants stressed the prescience of the previous positions of the LGO, confirmed by subsequent events. They judged that the political bipolarization between the two currents of neoliberal capitalism - confirmed by the results of the elections and the events that flow from them - does not reflect the major contradictions running through Tunisian society.

Moreover, the central committee stressed the need for the Popular Front to continue to advance its project as a political alternative to the forces of the counter-revolution represented by political Islam and the forces coalesced around Nidaa Tounes, by pursuing mass mobilization and the struggles on the ground in the different sectors and regions, as well as in parliament, faithful to the program of the Popular Front and the promises made during the election campaigns.

The central committee concluded its work with the following decisions :

The Ligue de la gauche ouvrière calls for the development of the political interventions of the Popular

Front, through a political and organizational restructuring, in order to ensure:

- The mobilization of supporters and sympathizers gained during the elections around the main issues and the pressing demands of the broadest masses,
- The denunciation of the political choices being made,
- The opening of a wider debate within the regional coordinations around the most important tactical and strategic questions for the Front.

The Ligue de la gauche ouvrière left refuses to participate in the government of the parliamentary majority, not only because of the planned alliance between Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes with the participation of the Islamists, but especially in terms of rejection of the economic and social program hostile to the interests of the broad masses as seen in the disastrous budget recently adopted by the Assembly.

The Ligue de la gauche ouvrière refuses to grant confidence in the expected governmental composition because its program and components will only work to restore the old regime in its major choices and orientations. The LGO calls upon the members of the Popular Front to move away from the logic of the imaginary political polarizations between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha inside and outside of parliament.

GREECE

With the Greek people, for a change in Europe – A call launched in the Spanish State

The upcoming Greek elections can represent a turning point in the European scenario. Greece has become a political and economic testing ground of the European elites, spreading misery and weariness throughout all the South of Europe as a response. The economic recipes based on austerity and cuts, and on paying the debt at the expense of the rights of the citizenship, only left a trail of unemployment, child poverty, despair and barbarism. Furthermore, the thread of the resurfacing of fascism represented by Golden Dawn, turns into a present reality atrocities and problems that we thought Europe had left behind.

But the Greek people didn't fall into the resignation of being the Troika guinea pig. Demonstrations, strikes, workers cooperatives and solidarity has been the response to the dictatorship of the financial capital and the markets. The opportunity appears now for sacking those politically responsible of the plunder. As soon as the call for elections was made public, the International Monetary Fund suspended its "help" (help that was only given in exchange of the sacrifice of people's rights) until knowing who will lead the next Greek government. This shows that those that profited from the crisis, at the expense of the majority of the population, have a deep distrust on democracy and their respect of the voting polls is conditional to the election of the candidates that defend their interests. No one votes for the markets, but they decide on a daily basis over our lives and our future.

For sure there is an alternative to their policies. The situation of the Greek people is not the product of immutable laws but of specific decisions and interests. The electoral rise of SYRYZA is the proof that an ample social majority is saying 'enough!' to corruption and to the looting to which they were subjected during the last years. A political force that has been in contact with the struggles taking place on the streets and that is ready to bring political change to the institutions. A change that will only be possible if the Greek people maintain the mobilizations in the streets, self-organize on all possible levels of society and count with the international solidarity of the European citizenship.

We are convinced that the Greek people will sack the thieves using the voting polls. In that case, the difficulties and the blackmails will be enormous and our obligation as European citizens is – and will be – to show solidarity with democracy and the aspirations of change of the Greek people. Their victory will be ours, but their defeat too. On account of that, the persons signing this manifesto, we make an open call to the citizenship to show solidarity with the Greek people. Not allowing democracy to be defeated by the markets, by impulsing actions that will accompany the Greek people on their journey to gain sovereignty and rights.

Gerardo Pissarello, Jaime Pastor, Ada Colau, Diego Cañamero, Teresa Rodríguez, Juan Diego Botto, Lola Sánchez, Xose Manuel Beiras, Yayo Herrero, Miguel Urbán, Martiño Noriega, Lidia Senra, Pedro Ibarra, Teresa Forcades, Vicent Navarro, Santiago Alba Rico, Arcadi Oliveres, Alberto San Juan, Ramon Zallo, Emmanuel Rodríguez.

EUROPE

European Union: social and democratic rights radically challenged!

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The mainstream media often mention the dangers of the Eurozone falling apart, the failure of austerity policies to fan the embers of the economy, tensions between Berlin and Paris or Rome, or even London and the Eurozone, disagreements between ECB directors, the enormous difficulty in agreeing on the EU budget or the wincing of certain European governments concerning IMF remarks about austerity levels. These problems are real but they should not overshadow the essential issues.

The leaders of the strongest European countries and of big business alike are delighted to have created a common economic, commercial, and political zone in which European transnational corporations and the major Eurozone economies benefit from the collapse of the Eurozone's Southern economies. The stronger economies gain a competitive advantage over their North American and Chinese competitors. Their objective at this point is not to revive growth to reduce differences between the stronger and weaker economies of the EU.

Furthermore the European elites see the economic collapse in the South as an opportunity to privatise public companies on a large scale and acquire common goods at give-away prices, helped by the Troika (ECB IMF and European Commission) with the active complicity of the peripheral governments. Big Capital in the Southern European countries is in favour of this prospect, hoping to get a piece of the cake it has been ogling for a long time. The grabbing of public sector companies in Greece and Portugal foreshadows what will happen in Spain and Italy, where public companies are rela-

tively much bigger in respect to the size of their economies. The leaders of the strongest European economies are hoping to pass another wave of important privatisations in their own countries.

The collusion between governments and big business has gone public. At the head of several governments, in important ministerial posts and at the presidency of the ECB, we find men and women who are part and parcel of the world of high finance, [1] in particular former directors of Goldman Sachs. [2] Certain high-profile politicians are rewarded with jobs in big banks once they have fulfilled their loyal service to Big Capital. [3] This revolving-door complicity is not new; it is just more obvious and systematic than at any time over the last fifty years.

To imagine that the policies imposed by the European elite have failed because economic growth has not returned would be to totally miss the point. The goal of the board of the ECB, the European Commission, the governments of the strongest EU economies, the boardrooms of the banks and other big companies is neither a quick return to growth nor the reduction of inequalities in the Eurozone and the EU that would favour a more coherent system and the return of prosperity.

One fundamental issue is paramount, and that is the capacity of the elites, who have meekly put themselves at the service of the multinationals, to manage crises, even chaotic situations, in the interests of these big companies. The scale of the crisis is presented as the motive justifying a shock therapy against the economic and social rights of the European peoples.

The very principles of our cultural, social and economic rights are being challenged eroded down to

their bases, as are the civil and political rights to elect political representatives. Indeed, the European Parliament does not genuinely exercise any legislative power, the Troika dictates the legal acts to the national parliaments of the countries that it has subjected. Other parliaments have their sovereignty and power severely limited by various European treaties, such as the TSCG, which set unacceptable fiscal constraints, adopted without democratic consultation. Other such rights are also being violated: the effective exercise of universal suffrage, the right to reject treaties, the right to amend the Constitution through a democratic constituent process, the right to organise protests and see them through to success. The EU and its member countries resort to authoritarian methods, with representatives of the economic oligarchy again directly exercising power.

To push the greatest offensive, on a European scale, since WWII against the human rights of the populations, the governments and employers have a full panoply of arms available: rampant unemployment, repayment of public debt, later retirements, end of unemployment benefits, labour precariousness, reducing wages and benefits, job cuts in the private and the public sectors, the constraint of a balanced budget that is a pretext for severe cuts in social and public spending and the pursuit of ever greater competitiveness between EU Member States and in the face of worldwide competition.

Capital's objective is to further threaten stable employment, radically reduce the capacity of workers to organise, and substantially push down direct and indirect wages while at the same time maintaining enormous disparities within the EU so as to sharpen the blade of labour competition. First, there are the inequalities between women and men, between workers with permanent or temporary jobs, between full-time and part-time workers, between generations having gained pension rights based on systems that are universal and obligatory and younger generations faced with ever more individualised and uncertain systems; not to mention over-

exploited clandestine workers who have no benefits or labour-related social rights.

The inequality gap has widened over the last twenty years, pushed by employers' initiatives and helped along by successive governments (including left-wing governments). There are also the different inequalities between workers in the different EU countries.

Then there are inequalities between workers in the different EU countries. The differences between workers in the principal and secondary economies within the EU complement those found within national boundaries. Workers' wages in the stronger countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden,) are two or three times higher than the wages of Greek, Portuguese, or Slovenian workers. The minimum wage in Bulgaria (156 Euros a month in 2013) is 1/8th to 1/9th that of countries such as France, Belgium or the Netherlands. [4]

In South America, although there are great disparities between the stronger economies (Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela) and the weaker ones (Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay), there is no more than a fourfold difference in the legal minimum wage there—which is much less significant than in the EU. This difference clearly shows how strong the competition among European workers is today.

The European authorities also strengthen the "Fortress Europe" policies by blotting out the rights of non European nationals to enter the European territories. As they "refine" their criminal methods they cause thousands of deaths among applicants fleeing to the European shores. The right to asylum itself is trampled upon.

It is clear, that behind the smoke screen of official announcements, a terribly unjust and deadly logic is at work. It is high time it be exposed, in order to better resist it and defeat it.

Translated by CADTM

CADTM

How can we preserve the "biodiversity" of Podemos and build popular unity?

MANUEL GARÍ ·

Last Saturday, December 20, Alberto San Juan (film and theatre actor) in an interview broadcast during the evening programming of La Sexta TV, in conversation with the Gran Wyoming (real name, José Miguel Monzón Navarro, television presenter, humorist and writer), said "we are all Podemos", which is why instead of criticizing, we must act. I can only be in total agreement with this message. The problem is that it has many meanings, so it has different meanings and levels of meaning that have to be unravelled.

From the standpoint of the activist - which is my case - or, at least, of the person who is registered and is a virtual elector of Podemos, what San Juan affirms is a great truth. We became members because we wanted to - some of us from the very beginning - and we do not intend to join the legion of "podemosologues" dedicated to scoring points without rhyme or reason. However, we have an opinion, and we are going to act so that the party proposes to society and organizes itself in the way that we are convinced is best for the social majority [(the majority of the population, the exploited and oppressed.)

And here begins the first problem. The project of Podemos is going to be realized through an organizational model that is centralized and based on an "electoral war machine" - under the clear leadership of Pablo Iglesias; a leadership, I would like to clarify, that is undisputed and indisputable - as well as through ratification of its decisions by mechanisms which, in practice, prove to be plebiscitary (questions and answers on the Internet, on the basis of an overwhelming media presence of Iglesias).

Following the formal establishment of Podemos, and already before the European elections, there crystallized a confrontation and a lack of channels of dialogue between the sectors that had founded Podemos: the group of professors from the University of la Complutense in Madrid [(to which Pablo Iglesias and Juan Carlos Monedero belong) and Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA). The sharpest expression of this division was when the false "theory" was spread about, according to which IA was conspiring to "carry out a coup d'état" in order to win the leadership of the nascent organization.

This led to the justification of a manoeuvre, this time real and not imaginary, with the aim of occupying exclusively the leadership and completely excluding IA. That caused an estrangement between the two parties, which, as I have said many times, in no way favoured the project.

Given the manner in which the organizational model was approved following the Citizens' Assembly of Vista Alegre (in October 2014), it is not easy to say that all the components of Podemos can act without having to overcome significant restrictions. But above all, what concerns me is the fact that a practice has been established in the preparation of the lists for the election of internal leading bodies which makes difficult the representation of those who are not endorsed by the leading nucleus around Iglesias. Complete lists, individualized vote, limited debate on the projects, all of that in parallel with the prestige of the leadership and its access to the mass media, has resulted in the election of a one-colour Citizens' Council.

This method was repeated in the election of part of the municipal Citizens' Councils, crystallizing a formula where there exists only one "official" local

candidacy, with the same name as the one that was headed by Pablo Iglesias for the Citizens' Council at the level of the state. The association of ideas is immediate for the voter. With this, in practice, the majority of Podemos, which holds an absolute majority in the leadership, is in the process of constituting itself as an organized tendency, although this was not its intention, nor was it announced or expressed publicly. If we add things up that supposes that in many cases whoever gets 75 per cent of the votes gets 100 per cent of the places on the Municipal Council (the local structure of Podemos). If this formula is crystallized, the plurality and the diversity that exist within Podemos, which are part of its richness and strength, will not be present in the leading bodies. In the absence of a more or less proportional plural participation in these bodies, the integration of internal plurality becomes more difficult. There will be sectors that will have great difficulty in considering themselves as full participants in Podemos.

I have always been convinced that on this question, the leadership will make changes in terms of practices and formulas, which can only be to the benefit of the entire organization. Otherwise, it will lose the "biodiversity", which will make it more vulnerable to the plague and epidemics. If internal changes going in the right direction take place, making possible polyphony and miscegenation, Podemos will strengthen itself in the face of new challenges and attacks - even more so if it gets into government - coming from the holy alliance between capital and the 1978 regime (the one that guaranteed a stable "exit" from Francoism), supported by the Bundesbank, the European Central Bank, the European Commission, the IMF - the new deadly quartet.

It is more likely - and, of course, it would be desirable - that in the next composition of lists - whether for internal bodies or primary and popular elections - we manage things so that the system of presenting candidates does not prevent the full participation and joint participation of all the sectors within the leadership of Podemos or of its institu-

tional representation. There exist procedures and mechanisms for this purpose and they are consistent with the organizational norms of the organization.

For this reason, the announcement of the support of Pablo Iglesias for the candidacy of Teresa Rodríguez (one of the five MEPs - two of them women - of Podemos, who is a member of Izquierda Anticapitalista) in Andalusia is very encouraging. This could indicate the end of a stage of a "deficit" of internal cooperation and the beginning of another which normalizes the existence of different opinions within an organization. Podemos would then enter a phase where its practice includes diversity. If all the components of a political force act in a fair and fraternal manner with regard to the others, the pluralist democratic debate will make possible more effective unified action.

We must add a third level to the polysemic formula: "we are all Podemos". It concerns the whole of society. What is the social base that the leadership of Podemos seeks to win? What electoral base does it intend to build? I think the majority analysis within Podemos depends on the concept: "The 99 per cent against the one per cent." This approach prevents an understanding of all the antagonistic fronts that traverse a society in which, unfortunately, the one per cent has stable alliances among broad layers of the population, for economic reasons but also those relating to social cooptation and ideology. The present strategy of Podemos involves the adaptation of its discourse to electoral necessities and to the dominant "common sense" and the level of consciousness of the majority of the population that it is addressing. A project is being constituted that aspires to put together an electoral majority around the polarization "people" (*la gente*) against the "caste" (*la casta*), "the people" against "the oligarchy". It tends to subordinate the integration of social and political demands into its discourse and its programme to tactical electoral choices, which are therefore marked by immediate concerns. The criterion of selection is: does it or does it not help to build the widest possible national-popular unity

to win the next general election.

Podemos is being constructed as an electoral party of a new type that does not seem to aspire to a territorial base through internal discussion and active participation of the Local Circles in its construction. It combines the delicate precision of its project of social change and its continual readjustment by electoral necessities, and the missing determination of its social support, with the formulation of more and more concrete proposals that are more and more pragmatic and which are destined to win support among the so-called middle classes. It aims to strengthen its "respectability" as a political force. In this sense, it relegates to a secondary level the relationship of the organization with the social movements.

We are thus renouncing the building of popular unity in search of popular power as a force that is antagonistic to the bourgeoisie. As far as I am concerned, I consider, on the contrary, that it is necessary to relate the work towards electoral victory and the formation of a left government, on the local level, on that of the autonomous communities, of the central state (the Spanish State is made up of 17 autonomous communities which have wide powers) with the impulsion and the strengthening of the mobilization, the organization and popular unity, starting from below. These two processes must reinforce each other in order to overcome these obstacles and to be able to deal with the reactionary counter-offensive which will amplify if Podemos forms a government.

The legitimate and necessary aspiration to take advantage of the window of opportunity offered by the present crisis of the regime and, above all, the decline of the two major parties (the Popular Party of Rajoy and the Spanish Socialist Party led by "young" Pedro Sanchez) is resulting in a rapid evolution of the positions of Podemos, leading to the moderation of the programme on which Podemos stood in the European elections in May 2014 on decisive questions. In this way, Podemos intends to appear as a realistic alternative government, exercising state responsibilities, and that the best peo-

ple would be part of its government, people who are experts in their domain. The participatory development of the programmes of the popular forces is not mentioned, nor is the necessity for the future government to support and be supported by the strengthening and the direct participation of people's organizations. The moderation of the electoral programme and the discourse of Podemos has accompanied the increase in its electoral hopes and its evolution towards an attitude that, if the organization is not refocused, will end up imitating the model of the "catch-all" parties.

We have gone from looking for "centrality" through putting forward central themes which affect broad sectors of the population beyond their ideological affiliations, to the attempt to contest the PSOE for the political "centre". Hence the new social-democratic image that is projected in order to erase the more left-wing past of the electoral programme of the European elections. The draft economic programme for which two university professors (economically Keynesians and politically social-democrats, that is to say, Juan Torres and Vicenç Navarro) were given the responsibility has been the instrument for carrying out this operation. The model of relationship that the leadership wants to establish with the people means that, in its direct and unmediated relationship with the electorate, it can combine very different messages.

At this third level, that of the whole of society, we are not all Podemos. Within the society there are fractures that go well beyond the one per cent opposed to the 99 per cent. The class struggle exists and pursues its course. It seems that the document of the experts Torres and Navarro Torres on the proposals for an economic programme of Podemos forgets that the implementation of the measures will imply the "wrath of the markets."

It is unthinkable to establish at government level a programme for the social majority without envisaging conflict, without taking into account that the bourgeoisie does not need and does not want new pacts (such as those made on the way out of the dictatorship, the so-called "Moncloa pacts" of

1977). Because there are contradictions of interests between the various layers of society, we are not all Podemos in this country.

Those who are Podemos are those who have scores to settle with the regime that emerged from the 1978 reform and the "austericide" (the austerity

that kills), those who work for a change in favour of the social majority. This is where we can find the material to strengthen the internal unity of Podemos and heal the wounds inflicted or suffered during the previous process. We are opening a new stage for Podemos because we have the obligation to open a new stage for the people.

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



SOUTH AFRICA

The state of labour 20 years after democracy

NIAL REDDY · 27 January 2015

Sixty-six years later, South Africa's mines have again become a window into the heart of our society. On August 16 2012, police massacred 34 mineworkers in front of the world's TV cameras. Their crime had been to demand a living wage, of R12 500 per month.

When the ANC government came to power it built a vision of a free and just society that would work to erase the injustices of the past. The cornerstone of this vision was the guarantee of decent work for all.

It was moments like the 1946 miners' strike and the many struggles that preceded and followed it that helped South Africans to understand the cold economic logic that underlay Apartheid – the system of racial labour control. The ANC's vision relied on redeeming labour from this brutal history, and making it part of a democratic economy.

This was, lest we forget, a formidable task. South Africa's economy bore the curse of its incredible mineral wealth. The huge reserves of gold, diamonds, coal, platinum and other precious resources gave rise to a small club of giant conglomerates that had a powerful hold over the state and influenced the way the entire country developed. The result was an economy dominated by these and closely related industries, which was highly capital intensive, and left 30% of the working population without jobs.

By the end of the 80s, Apartheid had expended its usefulness to this "Minerals-Energy Complex", and now more than anything wanted to take part in the opportunities offered by globalization and the rapid expansion of finance. Fixing the gaping problems in the South African economy, investing in a diverse manufacturing sector and in the infrastructure to

provide basic services to millions of South Africans was not on the agenda for capital.

Therefore, as many pointed out, the only road to the ANC's vision was a direct confrontation with capital. Only by breaking the back of the Minerals Energy (-Finance) Complex, by directing the wealth of the economy to the needs of the people through nationalization and public finance, could a decent economy with decent work be achieved.

For the ANC government, Marikana was a watershed. What it revealed, in horrific fashion, was the failure of this historic task.

As the commission of inquiry proceeds, despite political interference and police intimidation, some things cannot be hidden. The brutal police response appeared as at least partly a result of political pressure. Though the faces may have changed, the Minerals-Energy Complex remains.

And though it may rely more on the threat of starvation in underdeveloped rural areas than official state policy, so does the system of cheap migrant labour from which its profits derive. Despite the promises of decent work, Marikana showed how far the current government is willing to go to defend it.

At the time of writing, mid 2014, tens of thousands of workers in the platinum sector have picked up the spear of their fallen comrades, in what is reputed to be the longest strike in South African history. This marks the most important battle in the labour rebellion that was sparked by Marikana, which quickly ignited labour unrest on the farms in the Western Cape before spreading to other sectors of the economy.

The upsurge in union militancy has also led to a re-alignment of political affiliation, with NUMSA leading the charge to take up the radical demands

of workers and forming a workers political movement. It is the first time that a prominent member of COSATU broke with the ANC and SACP, who were seen as having a close relationship with MEC capital.

Capital's response has been to go on the offensive calling on the ANC to use the post-Marikana developments to smash unions and abandon the National Democratic Revolution in favour of the National Development Plan. This effectively completes the neoliberal transformation begun in 1995.

The purveyors of the new propaganda are claiming victory. It would be understandable if it were just business that bought into the new mantra but many academics and state bureaucrats, whose job it has been to expound the promise of formal employment, have claimed that formal sector workers are a privileged group in the new South Africa. The most common variant of this argument says that powerful unions and strict labour regulation have led to the creation of a "labour aristocracy" whose high wages prevent the creation of more jobs.

If this is the case, the current labour rebellion is impossible to understand. We are instead left with the conjured image of venal union bosses and old fashioned greed.

It is against this backdrop that we ask how workers have fared in 20 years of democracy. As the new government made the promise of a just society dependent on the creation of decent work for all, to pose this question is really to assess the success of the democratic project.

This paper uses empirical data, mostly drawn from Post-Apartheid Labour Market Survey (PALMS) to examine the conditions of workers from a variety of angles, including Employment, Wages, Job Quality, Institutions, and Unions.

Contrary to right wing commentary, we find that the revolt of workers against the existing labour market regime has a very rational basis in declining wages, rising unemployment and weakening employment security. These outcomes, in turn, are a

consequence of the ANC's embrace of the Minerals-Energy-Finance Complex economy, and the failure of workers to mount a challenge to this.

To change these circumstances workers will have to not only rebuild militant, democratically controlled unions, but to mount a serious challenge for state power.

Employment

We start our analysis by looking at employment trends in the economy. Graph 1 shows the change in employment in different sectors of the economy over the period 1994 to 2012. **The main trend is a shift in employment towards the 'tertiary sector' – retail and service jobs. Manufacturing employment grew only slowly and moderately and the primary sector – mining and agriculture – declined.**

Graph 1 Employment by sector 1994 - 2012

Source: PALMS, SARB

The biggest growth sector in terms of jobs over this period was trade which went from almost 1.65 million jobs in 1994 to just over 3.1 million in 2012, growth of almost 90%. This growth comes mostly from the retail sector.

" Financial Services also grew rapidly by more than 220%. This includes people who work in banks and other financial institutions, but also those classified as 'other business services' which are mostly labour brokered workers – especially security guards and cleaners. Over 66% of the total employment growth in the finance sector in this period is due to labour brokered workers. (This is illustrated in Graph 2).

Graph 2 Employment in finance and labour broking '94 – '12

Source: PALMS

Services was another high growth area. In 1994 there were 2.3 million service jobs, and by 2012 there were 3.04 million. All of this growth happened after 2000, as data show that in the late 90s service employment actually declined. Health and

education workers make up the biggest part of the service sector.

Domestic services also grew hugely, by more than 380%, although some of this may be because the statistics were not as good at capturing domestic work in the 90s. In the second half of this period growth was slow but by 2012 there were over 1.2 million people employed in domestic work.

Two other growth sectors have been construction and transport, which grew by 130% and 60% respectively.

Manufacturing employment grew very slowly – just over 10% between 1994 and 2012. This means an increase of only about 160 000 jobs.

However, because of outsourcing, the statistics may underestimate employment growth in manufacturing and other sectors and overstate services. Many of the security guards, cleaners and other workers listed under "finance" in fact work in the manufacturing sector and would previously have been employed directly.

Nevertheless, job growth in manufacturing has been hugely disappointing.

Mining employment decreased rapidly in the late 90s, losing almost 200 000 jobs between 1994 and 2003 as the gold mining industry collapsed under low prices and declining reserves. Thereafter some jobs were recovered mainly due to the expansion of the platinum industry, mining employment was 523 000 in 2012.

These statistics bear witness to the dramatic collapse in agricultural employment as farms mechanized and restructured towards export markets – in 2012 there were just under 700 000 employed in agriculture, under half the 2003 level.

Many economists believe that the manufacturing sector is crucial to growth. It is through the manufacturing sector that the economy improves its productivity and engenders new technologies. Most developed economies went through a period of strong manufacturing growth before shifting to ser-

vices. When developing strategies for reforming the economy around the transition time, many progressive economists pinned their hopes on a growing, diversifying manufacturing sector to generate growth and jobs. This hasn't happened.

Instead we have a shift to the service sector dominated by retail, transport and outsourced work. In Marxist terms the retail sector does not produce value – it only facilitates its circulation. Many of the jobs in this sector are lower paid and more insecure than other parts of the economy.

More research needs to be done to understand the exact effects of these sectoral shifts on workers. **Table 1 suggests that many of the high growth sectors paid lower wages, whilst the sectors which contracted as a proportion of total employment were associated with better paid jobs.**

Table 1 Sectoral shifts and wage 1997 – 2011

Source: PALMS

Both the average and the median wage in the trade sector, which grew substantially and made up almost a quarter of all jobs in 2011, was around 20% below the economy wide level.

The finance sector has high mean and median wages due to rich bankers and their employees. But labour brokered work where much of the growth was concentrated has markedly lower mean (-26.3%) and median (-8.47%) wages.

Similarly, in construction, which made up 2.35% more of total employment by 2011 relative to 1997, mean and median wages are lower.

In transport, wages are generally higher – but the sector grew largely in line with overall employment growth meaning it accounted for a constant share.

An important exception to this rule is the service sector. The sector made up a large share of overall employment, 21.83% in 2011 (up by 3.05% from 1997). Both mean and median wages in the service sector are substantially higher than the whole economy level.

In manufacturing, mean and median wage levels are higher than the average for the economy. But because job growth was slower than the average, the sector made up an increasingly smaller proportion of overall employment.

Other sectors that contracted as a proportion of employment, such as mining and utilities, also had relatively higher wages.

On the other hand, the agricultural sector lost a number of jobs. These were mainly poorly paid.

More rigorous statistical work is needed to understand the effects of these shifts. But the patterns described above strongly suggests that the growing weight of retail and services and stagnation had a negative effect on wages.

The service sector generally has lower "value-added". Retail workers are less organized than their counterparts in manufacturing and mining.

Another important trend in employment over the last two decades was the change in the composition of private and public employment. Graph 3 shows employment in these categories as an index starting in 2000.

Graph 3 Public and private sector employment '00 – '12 (INDEX = 2000)

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

In the first half of the 2000s, public employment shrunk and then grew slightly so that it was basically the same in 2007 as it was at the start of the decade. Private employment on the other hand grew fairly substantially over this period by almost 18%. It grew a further 8% over the next year before collapsing after the global crisis in 2008 and stagnated thereafter, leaving employment in the private sector slightly below the level it was in 2006.

Some of the slack was picked up by the state. Public sector employment grew by almost 15% between 2007 and 2012. In 2012, 2.4 million workers, just over 17% of the total, were employed by the public sector.

The post-Apartheid labour market also witnessed a shift away from lower skilled towards white-collar work, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Skill composition of employment 1994 – 2012

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

The number of white-collar jobs increased by over 90% between 1994 and 2012. The fastest growth was in the skilled category, rising by 113,3%, which includes clerks and various technical professionals. The highly skilled category, which includes a high number of managers, senior administrators and more professionals grew by 74,57%.

Blue-collar work grew much slower, at 38,8% overall. Low skilled employment, elementary and domestic occupations, was the slowest growing category at 33.25%.

As such, blue-collar work made up 5.5% less of total employment by 2012 compared to 1994. Still almost 3 out of 4 jobs in the economy are blue collar.

The main point that we observe here is that the number of new jobs have not matched that of new entrants to the jobs market. Not surprisingly then, this is reflected in a rise in the rate of unemployment (Graph 4).

Although it might seem a pretty simple matter there is considerable disagreement amongst labour analysts about how to define and understand unemployment. At a basic level, the unemployment rate is the number of people in the 'workforce' who do not have a job ('unemployed'), divided by the number of the entire workforce.

One of the main disagreements is about whether to include in the number of unemployed those workers who have given up looking for work. Official statistics usually report the official rate of unemployment as not including these workers - the 'narrow' rate - which is always lower [1]

However, , labour research has repeatedly shown that a large percentage of people who have stopped

looking for work have done so because they no longer have hope of finding a job, not because they do not want to work [2].

Anecdotal reports also indicate that many of the unemployed who have given up the search for jobs continue their search at home with phone calls or through personal networks.

For this reason, the broad measure of unemployment, which includes 'discouraged' workers, is the preferred rate of actual unemployment because it captures all unemployed persons who are able and willing to work.

Graph 4 shows total employment, the 'actively searching' unemployed and discouraged workers. It shows that total employment in the economy grew from 9.09 million jobs to 13.89 million between 1994 and 2002. The fastest periods of growth were between 1998 and 2001 (about 2.7 million jobs) and 2004 and 2008 (about 2.4 million).

Graph 4 Employment and unemployment 1994 - 2012

Source: PALMS, SARB, author's own calculations

Between the start of the global economic crisis in late 2007 and 2010 the economy lost over 900 000 jobs. By 2012 they hadn't been regained. This is one indication of the "extreme flexibility" of the South African labour market which allowed capital to pass off the cost of its crisis to workers.

However, between 1995 and 2003 the number of people actively looking for work and the number of discouraged workers grew faster than the number of jobs created, meaning that the broad unemployment rate increased from 29.5 to 41.5%. The narrow unemployment rate in 2003 was 30.5% - considerably lower.

Over the next five years the economy added jobs fairly rapidly, meaning that broad unemployment declined slightly to 37% in 2007.

In 2008 the Labour Force Survey changed to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey and StatsSA changed the way job seeking questions were asked.

A number of people who were previously counted as discouraged were now regarded as "inactive". This explains why the number of discouraged workers drops suddenly from 356 000 to just over 110 000. This is known as a "structural break". It means that broad unemployment before and after the break are not strictly comparable.

After the change, which coincided with the crisis, unemployment again began to rise rapidly. At first the economy was shedding jobs before regaining them slowly. However, while the number of "actively seeking" remained constant, the number of discouraged workers, using the new, stricter definition, rose rapidly. By 2012, broad unemployment stood at 33.2% according to official statistics.

In human terms, that means 6.9 million people who are eligible to work cannot find a job in this economy. This is a crisis on a grand scale. In comparative terms, at the height of the 'Great Depression' in the early 1930s, one of capitalism's worst ever crisis which toppled governments around the world, the unemployment rate in the US was 25%.

Before we even get to discuss the quality of the jobs that were actually created, these statistics show that the ANC government failed in its promise to expand the boundaries of the so-called "first economy" to encompass all South Africans by creating enough jobs.

Because they make up the majority of new entrants to the labour market each year and are less educated and experienced, the unemployment crisis in South Africa, as in most countries, is concentrated among the youth. The unemployment rate among the 16 to 34 year old age group in 2012 was 45.8%.

Women and people living in rural areas are also disproportionately affected.

The latest QLFS for 2013 estimates that 65% of the narrow unemployed are long-term unemployed – having been out of the job market for a year or more.

Right wing commentators use this situation of chronic unemployment to claim that having a job is a privilege. Other commentators, including progressives, speak of "two separate classes" within the proletariat – formal workers and the mass of unemployed- and under-employed.

According to the business-friendly media it is the high wages of the first group that is keeping the unemployed from getting work. In a previous paper we dismissed this argument and showed that higher wages are likely to lead to higher employment (Reddy, 2013).

In reality there are not two separate classes – workers suffer directly and indirectly from the employment crisis regardless of the "class" to which they are affiliated.

Marx called the unemployed the "reserve army of labour". He described this as the chaos of capitalist development, where workers are continuously cast into the reserve army as new technologies make them expendable, pressuring them to re-skill to be re-absorbed only to be expelled at some later stage again. As the reserve army grows it depresses wages by forcing workers to compete harder for available work – offering to sell their labour for less and less.

Some have claimed that this doesn't happen in South Africa because the labour market is "inflexible" and because business faces skill shortages and is unwilling to hire the long-term unemployed. We challenge this assertion and show here that in fact the labour market is extremely flexible.

One important study showed that wages are negatively affected by local unemployment – in the same way as in other labour markets [3]. The high degree of churning which we discuss later is also evidence of intense competition between active workers and those forced into the reserve army by capital.

What effect then has the unemployment crisis had on wages? In the following section, we take up this discussion.

Wages

[4]

Employers and their experts frequently claim that wages are too high. In 2012 Mike Schussler's influential annual employment report entitled "South Africa can't Afford South Africans", sought to persuade the public to see the economy as a business where wages are a "cost".

Schussler claimed that rising wages were making South African businesses uncompetitive and called for increases in wage inequality.

In fact real wages for most workers have hardly risen since the end of Apartheid. We show here that only wages for the wealthiest workers – mainly managers and some professionals – have increased which have been driving up "average" wages.

Graph 5 shows that average real wages across the economy were largely stagnant from 1997 to 2002 before rising. The mean wage for the whole economy grew by 37,7% between 2003 and 2011 to R6564 (2011 prices) [5]. The trend for formal sector, non-self-employed was very similar, rising from R5415 per month in 2003 to R7316 per month in 2011. Wage increases for public sector workers began slightly earlier in 2001, rising by 22% by 2011 to R8838 per month.

Graph 5 Real mean monthly wages 1997 – 2011 (2011 Prices)

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

Average wages are calculated by adding the total wages paid and dividing it by the number of workers. Although averages are commonly represented as the wage that 'most' workers get, the average actually says very little about distribution. If inequality is very high, as it is in South Africa, the average can be far from what 'most' workers earn. Moreover, if only the wages of the richest workers increase, this could lead to an increase in the average wage even though the wages of most workers have not risen at all. Data shows that this is exactly what happened.

We can show this by dividing workers into groups based on the wages they earn. The 10th percentile (p10) shows the wage of the lowest paid workers who make up 10% of the total. The 50th percentile is also known as the median wage. It divides workers into two halves. One half earns above that wage and the other half earns below it. The 90th percentile shows the minimum wage for the top 10% of wage earners.

Graph 6 Real monthly wages by percentile 1997 – 2011 (2011 Prices)

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

Graph 6 shows real monthly earning trends for all workers by percentile. The graph shows that not even the minimal promises of a free market economic system were met over the last 15 years – workers at the bottom half of the earnings scale received only a fraction of total wages.

Table 3: Real wage growth rates, all workers

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

Workers towards the middle of the distribution saw the largest declines in real wages in percentage terms. The median wage in the economy decreased from 1997 to a low of R2451 in 2003. Between 2003 and 2011 it recovered somewhat to R3029, still 7,2% below its level in 1997. The 30th percentile wage also dropped over the 15 years by just over R200 to R1724 per month in 2011.

The poorest workers saw a slight convergence with those immediately above them. The 10th percentile wage rose from R654 to R851 per month, a 30% increase though still firmly in the region of poverty wages.

These figures show that the average increases described above were entirely driven by increases for higher earners – specifically those right at the top of the distribution. The 70th percentile wage also declined notably in the 6 years after 1997 from R5457 to R4597, thereafter recovering fairly strongly to R6084 per month in

2011. By far and away the largest gains, however, were for the top 10 percent of workers, whose wages increased by 37.7% between 1997 and 2011 to R15028.

By dividing the percentiles to get a ratio we can get a rough and ready measure of inequality at different parts of the distribution (Graph 7).

Graph 7 Real wage percentile ratios 1997 - 2011

Source: PALMS

The p50/p30 ratio was relatively constant suggesting that wages in the middle grew at relatively the same rate. The ratio of the 50th to the 10th percentile decreased showing that low wages caught up somewhat with wages in the middle.

The ratio of the 90th percentile wage to the 70th increased slightly and then stagnated showing slightly growing inequality at the top of the distribution. The biggest divergence was the top from the middle, with p90/p50 going from 3.3 in 1997 to 4.9 in 2011.

We can also show what happened by looking at the change in real wages by skill level (Graph 8). This time we use the mean as there is not too much inequality within each skill category. Similar patterns to previous graphs are discernible.

Graph 8 Real monthly mean wages by skill 1997 – 2011 (2011 Prices)

Source: PALMS

Lower skill gradients experienced stagnant real wages. Elementary occupations and domestic workers (low-skilled) received more or less the same mean wage in 2011 as in 1997, around R2200. Semi-skilled workers saw wage declines at the beginning of the period before a slow increase to R4924 per month in 2011.

Skilled workers saw moderate gains from R7647 to R9126 over the 15-year period. These were realized between the period 2001 to 2007, after which wages declined.

However, again it was only highly skilled workers at the top of the income distribution that had significant earnings increases.

Wages for this groups, mostly managers and other professionals, increased by 71.3% to R18661, almost twice that of the next skill category.

These findings are corroborated by various firm level studies. In their comparative studies of the automotive industry, Black and Hasson note that "the most striking feature about the labour market in South Africa is not so much that wages of production workers are higher than competitors (although in many cases they are), but the exorbitant costs of managers and skilled staff." [6].

A major 2007 report for the World Bank found that the median monthly wage for a manager in South Africa – about \$1850 - was over twice that of Poland and three times that of Brazil. Moreover, SA managers were found to earn nine times as much as unskilled workers, whereas in Brazil and Poland it was only three times as much. Similar patterns were found for other skilled and professional workers. Their study concurred with our findings that "high wages in South Africa appear to be mainly due to high wages for managers and professionals and not to high wages at the bottom of the income distribution." [7]

Thus data from StatsSA completely contradicts the arguments of business that workers have been big winners in the post-Apartheid economy. If there is a "labour aristocracy" it is made of 'highly skilled' professionals and managers. It is the wages of this group that show significant gains. Workers in most of the other categories saw almost no improvement in real wages in the decade and a half after 1997.

When it began in the late 70s most countries to which it spread experienced declining labour shares of GDP. This refers to the share of all the value produced in the economy in a year that goes to workers in the form of wages and other remuneration.

Graph 9 shows the labour share of GDP for South Africa between 1994 and 2011. Here we have netted

out the wages of managers and supervisory workers who are in actual fact more like bosses.

Graph 9 Adjusted labour share of GDP 1994 - 2007

* Adjusted for self-employment

Source: Onaran and Galanis, Is Aggregate Demand Wage-Led or Profit-Led? National., PALMS and author's calculations

It stands as a strong indictment of South Africa's record after 20 years of democracy that workers have received a smaller and smaller share of the wealth that is produced each year.

In 1994 workers got 68% of the value produced, by 2007 it was 59.4%. The wage share of the actual working class shrunk even more dramatically by almost 11% from 56% to 49.3%. That means for every R100 produced in 2007, workers got R11 less than they would have had had the share been the same as in 1994.

The much hoped for redistribution that should have succeeded the end of Apartheid did not materialise .

Of course the above analysis misses the most popular narrative of modern inequality which is the staggering wealth accumulated by the richest of the rich, the "1%".

Our data focuses only on wages and excludes other sources of income like social grants, which are important for the poor, and capital ownership, which is very important for the super wealthy.

The French economist Thomas Piketty has written a book which many consider to be the defining text on inequality in the modern capitalist era. In *Capital in the 21st Century*, he shows that capital has a permanent tendency to reproduce inequality as the return on capital, r , exceeds the rate of growth in the economy, g .

Piketty's book has some theoretical problems but data he assembles are very important. He avoids the problems with household surveys (like we have used here), which are not good at capturing the ex-

tremes of the distribution – the richest and the poorest – but uses tax data instead.

His data on the US contains a rather startling observation, one which somewhat escapes his grand narrative – that 2/3rd of the increase in income inequality over the last decades is attributable to drastic wage increases for the highest earners – chiefly the new class so-called "super-managers".

Various studies have found that South Africa has amongst the highest CEO remuneration levels in the world. This is an issue that has come under increasing scrutiny as strikes in the mining sector catapult wages and the ethics of remuneration to the centre of the public debate. One study has noted a three fold increase in executive salaries in the country's 50 highest earning companies, from an average of R15m in 2005 to R49m in 2014 [8].

More work needs to be done on the relative importance of capital and wages in understanding South African super-incomes.

Piketty's data suggests a substantial rise in the top 1% share of income in South Africa from 9.85% in 1990 to 16.68% in 2011, putting it on par with some of the world's most unequal nations like the US. However, James K Galbraith has criticized excessive faith in tax data, noting that they are only as good as the collection systems that underlie them and that Piketty's results jar with other studies that have found South African and Brazilian inequality, for example, to radically outstrip that of the US [9].

In studies conducted by Dick Forslund he found huge disparities between high net worth individuals found in the databases of the financial sector and high income earners registered with SARS. This casts some doubt that Piketty's data captures the full scope of top earnings in SA [10].

Elodie Morival, a student of Piketty, compared the tax data with national income surveys and found that they told the same story, though this may reflect the limitations of both rather than their accuracy – a clear picture of inequality in South Africa

may have to wait for greater stringency from SARS for high-end dodgers [11].

Job quality

During Apartheid workers had few rights and almost no legal protection. The workplace was a crucial site for creating a pliant and subjugated population, from whom the maximum value could be extracted for the lowest pay.

When the ANC assumed power in an Alliance with COSATU one of the chief ways it proposed to create a new society was the promotion of 'decent work'.

This is a term that was popularized by the International Labour Organization in the 1990s. It embodies the notion of work that is secure, formally regulated and offers benefits with upward mobility for the worker. This is usually based on the so-called "Standard Employment Relation" (SER) which refers to a direct, contractual relation for permanent employment between the employer and the worker.

One of the main features of neoliberal globalization that emerged out of the capitalist crises in the 70s and had a major impact on the world in the next four decades was changes it wrought in the world of work. In short, this involved a shift away from the SER towards new forms of flexible, less regulated and indirect "atypical" employment relations.

Neoliberals have celebrated this – claiming that the removal of stability unleashes creative forces by forcing all of us to sell ourselves on the market like commodities. This allowed businesses to be more "flexible" in a rapidly changing world.

Of course labour has been critical of the effects that precarious employment has on the job conditions and lives of workers.

One influential author, Guy Standing, who worked for the ILO for many years, coined the term the "precarariat". He claims this is a new emerging "dangerous" class that has no interest in investment in social stability and is prone to subversive politics.

Much of the literature on precariousness has a strong Northern bias. There is a tendency to emphasize the "newness" of these changes or their departure from a supposed 'norm' of employment – typically the type of Fordist standard employment relation which encompassed mostly white male workers in rich countries during capitalism's Golden Years.

But for the South, precariousness has always been the norm. At the time of the famous strikes in Durban in 1973, it was reported that half of the 200 000 workers involved were 'contract workers'.

Protected SERs never really existed during Apartheid except for a portion of white workers – a small sliver of the proletariat.

Through the struggles which revived the union movement in 70s and 80s workers began to win greater legal recognition. It is at this time that we begin to see the clear emergence of labour broking and other means of evading regulation.

The freedom to organize and the greater protection and rights that workers won through successive amendments to labour market institutions and law is one of the great prizes of the transition to a formal democracy.

However, these amendments were inspired by an idea of the 'standard employment relation', which was out of touch with global trends in employment. They did not present serious barriers to capitalists seeking to avoid stricter regulation by switching to various forms of "a-typical" employment.

For example, the Labour Relations Amendment Act sanctioned labour broking by allowing a third party to remain as the legal employer.

The massive shift to a-typical employment by capitalists in the last few decades meant that precariousness did not end with Apartheid. Unions have been ineffective at contesting this. Precariousness and a-typical employment is usually described using considerable jargon which seldom has a precise meaning.

In broad terms, *casualization* refers to changes that affect the duration of work, generally by moving from permanent, full-time positions to ones that are part-time or based on fixed period contract.

Externalization refers to processes that involve a third party in the employment relation. This could be through outsourcing where a service or part of the business is contracted to a different company or through a labour broker .

Informalization refers to changes that make work less regulated by labour law or market institutions.

South Africa has been subjected to all of the above on a huge scale. However, because data are inadequate and the phenomena do not have strict definitions, it is hard to give exact measurements of the scale of precariousness.

A related development in the South African economy is the huge informal sector. Similarly imprecise, this is a term that was popularized in the 70s to refer generally to areas of the economy that do not have conventional capitalist features. That is, work is not capital intensive and the means of production are owned by those who work them. Often it refers to non wage-earning or self-employment. In South Africa small traders, craft production and construction services make up a large part of the informal economy .

The informal sector has often comprised between 20 and 30% of total employment. In an important speech in 2003, Thabo Mbeki explained the "two economies" thesis that was to have a big impact on policy. He described South Africa as having a large, capital intensive "first world" economy based on mining and manufacturing with standard employment relations, and a separate "second economy" comprising informal and subsistence activity.

But several researchers since then have shown that the two economies are anything but separate. They are deeply linked through production, the circulation of goods and employment, the last an inseparable part as workers in the massive "reserve army" which along with the pockets of informal activity

help to suppress wages and ensure reproduction of class relations in the capitalist order .

Graph 10 shows the distribution of the workforce in 2001 and 2011.

Source: PALMS, authors calculations

In this scheme, the informal sector is defined as businesses that are not formally registered or do not pay VAT.

Between 2001 and 2011, 8% more of the workforce was included in employment of some sort. However the proportion of the permanent formal sector employment remained fairly constant at about a third of all workers.

The graph suggests that the expansion in employment was firstly in formal non-permanent work, which grew from 4 to 9% of the workforce. Secondly, informal *employees* went from 10 to 15% of the workforce, with the total informal sector employing 22% of workers in 2011.

The trend has thus not been an expansion of a so-called "first economy", but an increase in various forms of precarious and informal work.

As 'informality' has increasingly become part of the main capitalist economy in most countries, the 17th International Convention of Labour Statisticians suggested a definition that focuses on the nature of the job rather than the employer. Using South African statistics, some researchers define informal employment as jobs which have neither a written contract nor benefits (pension and paid leave).

Table 4 Benefits and regulation as a proportion of employees

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

Table 5 shows informal employment as a proportion of employees in the economy decreased between 2001 and 2011 by over 10% to 30.23%. Employees with a written contract, by contrast, grew from 54.9% in 2001 to 79.7% in 2011.

However, the proportion of workers receiving benefits increased at a much slower pace or declined slightly. In 2011 just 67% received paid leave – up from 59,9% a decade earlier. Only 31.9% of workers received medical aid contributions from their employers, more or less the same proportion as in 2001. In 2011 just under half of all workers got pension contributions, less than 2001 when it was 51.6%.

The slight growth in some benefits and the spread of written contracts in the second half of the decade is likely attributable to the growth in public sector employment (see graph 3).

While these statistics suggest that more workers are covered by a formal contract they do not capture changes in the nature of work contracts that may offer workers less protection or are less able to access labour advisory or litigation services

Labour force surveys show that an increasingly lower proportion of employees are engaged in permanent work (Table 5). Between 2001 and 2006 the proportion dropped by more than 5% to 75.44%. The share of employees with temporary work and those in casual or seasonal employment increased by 2.7 and 2.3% respectively.

Table 5 Work duration as a proportion of employees

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

StatsSA changed the way it measures employment duration with the introduction of the QLFSs from 2008. In 2011, a total of 25.8% of employees reported being engaged in work that was either of a limited or unspecified duration. In the same year, just over 64,2% of employees had permanent contracts.

These statistics are an indication of the increasing casualization of the workforce. The standard employment relation, which is supposed to underpin the common conception of decent work, applies to an ever smaller share of workers.

However, the figures here do not capture the full extent of increasing precariousness or the many forms it has taken.

An important example is labour broking. Labour brokers are known formally as 'temporary employment services' but in many, perhaps most, cases they are used for jobs that are essentially permanent or full time.

Labour broking can best be characterized as the *triangular employment relation*. In practice, brokered workers usually work directly for a client company, which defines their day-to-day activity and determines their pay and conditions of work. However they are legally employed by a third party – the labour broker – who is sometimes also responsible for hiring.

Labour broking confers an advantage to the employer by making it harder for workers to access labour law services. Often the confusion generated by the triangular employment relation is an instrument of the control exercised over workers.

When a worker attempts to proceed with court action against her employer, for unfair dismissal, for example, the boss simply claims that he is not the legal employer and refers the case to the broker, who turn claims he/she is not involved. In a great many cases, workers are not even aware that they are legally employed by a third party.

Labour broking also divides the workplace – on a single factory floor there could be a dozen different legal employers with which workers are required to bargain.

This is one reason labour broking has been so popular amongst employers as a means of weakening worker organization and increasing flexibility. The industry is reportedly worth R46 billion annually.

Because of the confusion, few workers report being employed by a labour broker, although the figures in Graph 2 (a proxy for labour broking) suggest that at least 1 million workers are involved in triangular em-

ployment. Bargaining councils and broking companies themselves give similar estimates – but some experts put the figure at twice that [12].

Since it deprives workers of the protection of the labour laws of this country, COSATU has called labour broking a "modern form of slavery" and demanded it be banned. The ANC has made many promises to stop labour broking but has not moved on the issue so far. Alongside the imperative to divide and undermine worker organization, the shift to precarious employment has meant been driven by desire to conform to new modes of "flexible" and just-in-time production and to maximize short-term gains to shareholders. This has shifted the focus from increasing productivity and creating long term value to minimizing costs – chiefly labour costs.

The ANC's liberal, pro-market macroeconomic policies have encouraged this labour regime.

As a result the ideal of stable, protected employment has not been widely achieved. For most workers in South Africa precariousness remains the reality. The celebrated protections in the labour law make little difference.

Precarious workers are much harder to organize. They are more subject to abuse by bosses and are less able to fight for higher wages and better conditions. The next section explains how unions have failed to represent precarious workers.

Like elsewhere, some analysts claim that the working class is now divided with diverging political interests – between the 'precariat' and the unemployed on the one hand, and the formal sector workers on the other.

A point that some analysts ignore is the issue of churning. Studies have shown that South Africa's labour market is very unstable with workers moving frequently between various forms of employment and joblessness.

Table 6 Churning in the labour market 2002 - 2004

Source: Valodia and Devey (2012)

Valodia and Devey showed that more than half of workers that featured in the Labour Force surveys between 2002 and 2004 had changed their work status. Only a very small proportion of workers remain securely in formal permanent positions.

This is another example of extreme flexibility in the labour market, despite what employer claim.

Precariousness affects all workers. By dividing workers it weakens the entire labour movement.

Labour law and institutions

What of the labour laws and specialized institutions that were created after 1994 to deal with labour relations? After Marikana and the massive wild cat mining strikes in 2012, the farm worker rebellion in Western Cape in December that year is has been clear that the labour laws and institutions established after apartheid are in crisis. All of these events completely bypassed the fifteen year old **Bargaining Councils** and to a large extent also the established trade unions.

A liberal democracy allows juridically "equal" partners to negotiate their opposing positions. Workers and employers are anything but equal in capitalist economic systems. There are, nevertheless, several pieces of legislation that were introduced in the mid to late nineties which were progressive in intent. The Employment Equity Act is one important example. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act is another.

It is frequently claimed that South Africa has an overregulated labour market that contributes to labour inflexibility. In fact most attempts to construct international comparisons have demonstrated South African labour law to be relatively liberal. South Africa's latest score on the OECD employment protection legislation index was 1.25 (for 2008), the lowest of all G-20 emerging markets and well below the OECD average.

Benjamin, Bhorat & Cheadle (2009) found, using World Bank data, "that in most measures of labour regulation ... South Africa is not an extraordinarily

over-regulated (or indeed under-regulated) labour market". Perhaps even more worryingly – there is enormous evidence that labour laws and regulations, such as minimum wages, are systematically ignored and avoided by employers.

Perhaps the most galling evidence of South Africa's extreme labour flexibility was the fact that the economy lost over 1 million jobs between the onset of the global crisis in 2008 and mid 2010.

The bargaining council system (renovated from the old Apartheid industrial councils), voluntary associations between employers and registered unions with provisions to extend to agreements to non-parties, has been a consistent target for those lamenting the lack of flexibility in South African labour markets. But BCs have weakened over the decades as part of a marked trend away from centralized bargaining. Veteran trade unionist Neil Coleman (forthcoming) argues that:

While centralised bargaining is critical for the labour movement . . . , it is not in its current voluntaristic form, able to drive the transformation demanded by the South African situation. Indeed the fragility of collective bargaining institutions can be used by employers to attack wage levels. [13]

Over 80% of applications for exemption from BC extensions are granted – suggesting that employers have little reason to be threatened by agreements that cannot be forced by their own workforce [14]. The sectoral determinations instituted where BC are lacking may have had some successes in raise wages but have hardly been sufficient to provide a real challenge to poverty wages.

A range of institutions were also born out of the idea of the "social compact" between Capital and Labour. It is useful to briefly refer to some of the most important among these.

[15] was established in 1995 to facilitate cooperation on economic, labour, and development issues; promote economic growth, participate in decision-making and social equity and work for the resolution of socioeconomic disputes. The work of the

Council is conducted in four chambers: the labour market chamber, the trade and industry chamber, the development chamber, and the public finance and monetary chamber.

The chambers report to a management committee which oversees the work programme and administrative issues. It brings together representatives from all sectors of society who debate and try to reach consensus on social and economic policy issues in what the body terms "social dialogue".

Through the chambers, unions have a platform from which they could advance their claims on the wealth their members help to produce. The chambers allow employers and employees to present all relevant data - such as contained in this paper – in an open and transparent forum where it can be disputed or debated.

This is at least the idea. Anecdotal evidence suggests that unions, in particular, have not used this platform to their advantage. Since some years, Business as well as the Treasury has chosen not to take important issues to NEDLAC. The so called "youth wage subsidy" is one example. A general idea has spread that NEDLAC isn't working or has lost in importance. Its usefulness or legitimacy is put in question.

What has happened in society – or not happened – since 1994 suggests that NEDLAC is in crisis because its foundational idea is in crisis. The two sides, "Business" and "Labour" that are supposed to compromise around a common cause of "what is best for the country", are too far apart. The global crisis for capitalism since 2008 has deepened the divide. In short: there are no deals brokered at NEDLAC.

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) followed in 1995 as a dispute prevention and resolution body. It replaced the Industrial Court. It is not controlled by any political party, trade union or business organisation.

Its policy-making structure is an 11-member governing body. It has three state representatives, three representatives of organised labour, three representatives of organised business, a chairperson and the director of the CCMA.

The CCMA's main brief is to:

- Mediate to prevent and settle industrial disputes;
- Conciliate workplace disputes;
- Arbitrate disputes that remain unresolved after conciliation; and
- Facilitate the establishment of workplace forums and statutory councils.

CCMA provides a free service, even to unorganised workers. About 25 percent of the cases deal with domestic workers. [16] Labour journalist Terry Bell notes: "Employers with deep pockets can still 'thumb their noses' at the CCMA by dragging out the dispute process when they have not got their way. This is done by taking matters to the labour court and further if necessary until financially exhausted worker claimants fall by the wayside." [17]

During the 2014 platinum strike CCMA intervened without success. Anecdotal evidence given to AIDC from Western Cape after the farm worker strike in 2012 point to that the politics of who is the judge is of crucial importance in every arbitration case. That politics and not the letter of the law are crucial is also obvious in the case of Department of Labour.

The case of Section 27 in the Employment Equity Act indicates that the lack of inspections on site or absent implementation of progressive labour laws – like the maximum 9 hour work day (with the aim of implementing the 8 hour work day) in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act – isn't only a question of a too small bucket to ladle with in an ocean of labour law breaking and abuse of workers.

Section 27 of the Employment Equity Act of 1998 ("EEA") was drafted and adopted to address income inequality and to reduce the income gap between the highest paid managers and the rest. *"Where there are disproportionate income differ-*

entials, a designated employer must take measures to reduce it progressively. [...] Such measures may include collective bargaining, compliance with sectoral determinations (section 51 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act); the application of norms and benchmarks recommended by the ECC, relevant measures contained in skills development legislation, and any other appropriate steps."

The provisions of Section 27 have never been used by either the government, the Department of Labour (DOL) or the Employment Conditions Commission (ECC) to achieve its aims. ECC has never recommended any "norms and benchmarks" for reasonable wage disparities between workers and managers to the Minister as it should do. [18] The report form that employers must fill in when reporting income inequality has no space for the average wage in different wage groups. Wage inequality between the groups isn't measured between them. Indeed, the DOL uses the "Paterson scale" in all its reports. It divides the work place in six wage levels based on "decision making" and was first used by Anglo American in the 1960's to make a "scientific" argument for the wage gaps between managers and workers.

For politicians (national, provincial and local), senior bureaucrats and highly paid executives in the private sector, the failure to implement section 27 reflects the protection of self-interest. It is harder to explain the inaction of unions on such an important piece of legislation. It was Cosatu that pushed Section 27 into the EEA in 1998, but all unions demand wage increases in percent "across the board". This increases income inequality on the work place.

To decrease inequality, wage demand must be formulated in Rand across the board, as was done by Amcu during the platinum strike. This is not a new idea in South African trade unions. It has in fact been practiced before by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

Unions

The union movement which emerged slowly out of the important strikes in Durban in the early 70s and the labour market reforms that followed at the end of the decade were a central part of the anti-Apartheid movement.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions was formed in 1985. In ___ it took the decision to form an Alliance with the African National Congress and to give first priority for the national democratic struggle as a precursor to the fight for socialism.

When the ANC assumed power, COSATU reaffirmed this strategy, aiming to use its Alliance with the ruling party to influence policy in favour of workers.

The democratic dispensation removed all the barriers to association, allowing workers to organize freely.

In the new, more sympathetic political climate it was hoped that unions would expand to include greater numbers of workers, especially the traditionally excluded. A stronger union movement could fight for higher wages and better conditions for all workers.

The union movement has faced serious challenges since democracy. The Marikana massacre and the current divisions within COSATU have drawn attention to some of these difficulties.

Whilst the number of union members has grown, the proportion of workers who are organized (union "density" or "coverage") has shrunk consistently. Unions are increasingly dominated by higher skilled, public sector workers and the most exploited and precarious have fallen through the cracks.

Moreover, the union movement has lost the militancy it once had. the political compromises that COSATU made, have, to a large extent, caused a growing "social distance" that separates leaders from the rank and file.

Graph 11 shows that union density varies considerably by sector. In every sector the proportion of

union members decreased between 2001 and 2011.

Graph 11 Unionization by sector, all employees 2001 - 2011

Source: PALMS, SARB author's calculations

The mining sector, where employees live and work closely together in large numbers, has historically had very high unionization rates – close to 80%. Services and utilities, which are comprised of large numbers of public sector workers such as teachers and municipal workers, also have high rates of union density.

Unions have never succeeded in penetrating the agricultural sector, where workers are less skilled, live far apart and often depend on farmers for housing. In construction, work is often temporary or piece meal and unions have had a hard time achieving stable growth.

Graph 12 Distribution of union members by sector, all employees 2011

Source: PALMS, SARB author's calculations

In the period from 2001 and 2011 unionization rates decreased in all sectors. In most cases the decline was between 2% and 5%. In services, 5.71% fewer workers were union members in 2011 compared to 2001.

Moreover, employment growth was generally faster in sectors with lower union density.

Employment in manufacturing, which makes up a large proportion of union members, grew by only 2.84%.

Two of the fastest growing sectors, construction and finance both have extremely low union density rates.

The relatively high growth of employment in services was extremely important in sustaining unionization rates across the economy. In 2011, service sector workers comprised almost half (45%), of all union members. This may also explain the growth in employment in the public sector .

Table 7 shows that whilst unionization rates in the formal private sector decreased notably in the decade leading up to 2012, the trend in the public sector was different.

Table 7 Union coverage, formal sector employees 2001 – 2012

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

In 2001, 29.2% of private sector employees were members of a union. Over the next 6 years the number of private sector union members grew by 456 000 – slightly slower to employment growth leading to a small decline in union density. Between the start of the global crisis and 2010 private sector unions lost 303 000 members although unionization coverage stayed relatively constant – suggesting that union members were similarly affected to non-unionized workers.

Over the next two years private membership continued to decline slowly to 1.76 million members even as the economy regained jobs. This led to a drop in union density to 25.9% in 2012. Unions have not managed well during the crisis.

Union density in the public sector is much higher, and increased from 68.6% in 2011 to 74.2% in 2010 before dropping again to 71.6% in 2012. Public sector workers now made up almost half, (48.7%), of formal sector union members in South Africa, with 1.67 million members.

Despite declines in unionized membership, Overall union density in South Africa still compared favourably to international standards in 2010 (Graph 13). The average for OECD countries was 17.6%, considerably lower than South Africa's 38.6%. However some evidence suggests that Latin American and other middle-income countries had far higher union coverage.

Graph 13 Union density OECD and selected countries, 2010

Source: OECD, ILO

Another notable post-Apartheid trend has been a shift towards higher skilled, white-

collar workers amongst unionized workers.

Table 8 shows that white-collar employees increased their share of unionized workers versus lower skill grades by 5% between 2001 and 2011 to 33.5%.

Table 8 Skill composition of unions, all employees 2001 - 2011

Source: PALMS, author's calculations

The best organized workers in the economy were skilled workers, mostly clerks and technical professionals, who increased their union coverage over the decade to 53.4%. The union density of highly skilled workers decreased between 2001 and 2011 but was still relatively high at 29.8%.

Although they made up almost two thirds of union members, only 25.6% of blue-collar workers were unionized in 2011, a drop of 3.7% from 10 years before. This followed from decreases in union density for both semi- and low- skilled workers of around 3.3 and 2.3% respectively. In 2011 only 14.6% of low-skilled workers were members of a union.

In 2011, only 64.25% of workers in the economy reported holding permanent contracts, but within COSATU the figure was 93% (according to the 2012 survey). The growing cohort of precarious workers are falling through the cracks and not joining unions [19].

These shifts were highly concentrated in COSATU. By 2009, the share of public sector workers in the federation was 40%, up from 9% at the start of the 1990s.

The federation claimed small successes in organizing the most vulnerable – by 2008, 10.2% of the membership were part-time or temporary workers – a 3% increase from 4 years earlier. But far more needs to be done if COSATU is to truly represent the working class.

Bosses have actively used precariousness to divide workers – convincing a "core" permanent workers that improving conditions can only be afforded if

the precarious are excluded. Unionists have sometimes been complicit in this – refusing to devote resources to workers whose membership is more vulnerable or to pursue new strategies for fear of "informalizing" their membership.

Old forms of industrial unionism may need to be changed in order to adapt to restructured workforces and include atypical forms of employment, but union leaders sometimes have a vested interest in keeping things as they are.

Economists often measure the effectiveness of unions by using statistical techniques to get a "union wage premium". This can be thought of as the difference in wages between workers union members and non-members that are otherwise the same in terms of individual characteristics (like age, education, race and gender) and job characteristics (like occupation, firm size and benefits).

Table 9 Union wage premia 2001 - 2011

^ Union wage premium times union coverage

*, **, *** Statistically significant at the 10%, 5% and 1% level

Source: PALMS, author's own calculations

Table 9 shows that union wage premiums for all skill grades were increasing between 2001 and 2011. However for white-collar workers, data were not 'statistically significant' meaning we can't get an accurate picture of wage effects for these groups.

Union wage premia were largest for unskilled workers although relatively constant over the decade – going from 19.4% in 2001 to 20% in 2011. For semi-skilled workers the change was more substantial, an increase of 5.4% to 10.8% in 2011.

However, these methods are quite problematic and often what is reported as the effect of unionization is due to different things that data doesn't easily capture, like unionized workers occupying different jobs to non-union workers. Moreover, the effects of unionization cannot only be gleaned by looking at members wages alone.

To understand how unions have fared we should look at a broader range of data, that economists usually ignore.

Along with a very different social composition, the nature of unions and their function have changed dramatically in the democratic era.

COSATU's strategy of influencing the state from within has required a different kind of leadership with specialist skills. The new and more complicated institutional environment and the emphasis on negotiation has shifted the focus of union activities from the shop floor to the boardroom. Workers are less able to be directly involved.

According to the latest COSATU survey, around 42% of workers said they had not attended a union meeting in the last year and around 35% said they had not had shopsteward elections in the last four years [20].

Although a majority of workers say they continue to directly elect shopstewards instead of having them appointed, they exercise less direct control over their immediate representatives. In 1994, 72% of respondents said that shopstewards should do only what membership tells them to do. In 2008 it was 46%. [21]

The weakening of worker control and the co-operative approach to the ruling party and business encouraged some to use the unions as a "transmission belt" to better things. In the latest survey 52% of workers said they had seen a shopsteward promoted to a managerial position [22].

At the highest level this is reflected in the personal trajectories of people like Gwede Mantashe, Kgalema Mothlante and Thulas Nxesi who have gone from the union movement to senior positions in government.

Union leaders have a strong incentive to toe the party line and to not be too confrontational towards bosses – which may conflict with the interests of the membership.

This professional leadership leads increasingly different lives to the average COSATU member. Many of them are paid very well, have stable jobs with good conditions including cars, and do not experience the same exploitation that workers do. COSATU has called this "social distancing" – without strong worker control it makes it harder for leaders to represent their membership and tends to make unions more conservative.

Another thing that Marikana revealed was the dangers of co-opting worker organizations and turning them into sweetheart unions. In the worst cases NUM had been partly absorbed into mining companies with shopstewards taking positions in human resources department and senior leaders drawing additional salaries [23]. They had ceased to properly represent workers.

The conservatism of South African unions is reflected in industrial action statistics. This may be a surprise to many.

The media regularly reports that organized labour is "holding South Africa to ransom" or "bringing the economy to a standstill" with excessive industrial action. We are led to believe that unions and striking workers are standing in the way of growth. In the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report South Africa usually features at the bottom of 144 nations in terms of labour-capital relations based on surveys with business.

However recent research shows that South African workers are less strike prone and that strikes are shorter when they do happen, relative to other countries [24].

The researchers calculate a measure of strike intensity for a country as the number of striking workers in a year divided by the number of formal sector workers. For South Africa it was 1.1% in 2003, 7% in 2007 and 2% in 2011. On average, for the decade up to 2008 on 2.8% of formal sector South African workers went on strike.

Their data shows that this is considerably less than many other countries such as Spain (7.3%) and Argentina (30.7%) (Graph 14).

Graph 14 Strike intensity 1998-2008

Source: Bhorat, Naidoo, and Yu, "Trade Unions in an Emerging Economy." pp13 based on ILO data

They also measure the 'depth' of strikes in South Africa by averaging the percentage of strikers' workdays lost per year. This tells us how long strikes in South Africa tend to last. Between 1999 and 2008 strikers on average lost 3.77% of their workdays. Again, this is low by international standards (Table 10).

Table 10 Strike depth 1999-2008

Source: Bhorat, Naidoo, and Yu, Trade Unions in an Emerging Economy. pp14 based on ILO data

All BRICS nations for which there is data had greater strike depth than in South Africa. In Brazil strike depth was 12.3 times as high as in South Africa and in Turkey it was 5.24 times higher.

Thus relatively few workers down tools each year and when they do it lasts relatively shorter. Business's perceptions of a militant, recalcitrant workforce probably has more to do with Apartheid era norms of labour control than anything else.

Conclusion

The state of labour in South Africa should be unsettling for anyone who expected the transition to political democracy to end one of the worst systems of exploitation in a modern industrialized economy. The labour practices of the Apartheid era are still in place, despite the sugar coating of a few statutes that carry the imprimatur of protection and remedial action. After two decades of political democracy, our "progress" in the field of labour can be summarised as follows:

Employment:

- An unemployment rate of 45.8% for the 16 – 34 year age group (2012); for ages 15 – 25 it is 56%

- A shift to the low-wage retail and service sectors
- Growth in financial and business services but predominantly in labour brokered services
- A mismatch between the jobs created and new entrants into the labour force

Wages:

- A slight increase for the poorest paid,
- A decline of the median wage level
- Stagnant real wages for lower skilled workers
- A substantial increase for the top 10% of earners
- Moderate gains for skilled workers

Job Quality

- A general increase in precariousness, through casualization, informalization and externalization.
- A much smaller proportion of the employed hold permanent contracts
- A rise in labour brokered jobs (Triangular Employment) to between 1 and 2 million

Institutions

- Centralized bargaining has been weakened and ineffective in raising wages
- The CCMA does not effectively protect workers because formal equality before the law ignores the much greater financial and social power that employers wield
- NEDLAC is essentially non-functioning due to deep divergences between labour and business
- Section 27 has been completely ignored by employers, politicians and labour representatives
- By international comparisons labour regulations in SA is relatively weak

Unions

- Large drop in private sector union coverage
- Employment growth was faster in sectors with low union density

- Shift towards public sector workers within unions
- Unionization among higher skilled, white collar workers is growing
- Very few of the precarious are members of unions

What might workers consider to be an effective program of action in the coming years?

South Africa's economic performance since 1994 has been disappointing to many. Poverty and inequality have worsened to the point where one in four persons go hungry (that's more than 14 million people!) and the country is considered to be the most unequal in the world. But it is the level of unemployment that distresses most South Africans. In the last instance we must understand this unemployment crisis based on the specific nature of Minerals Energy Complex capitalism in South and the way it has evolved under neoliberal globalization. Apartheid bequeathed an economy heavily concentrated in mining and related, highly capital intensive sectors to a mass of the workforce was "surplus" – a permanent reserve army. Liberalization has not fundamentally altered this structure – it has allowed corporations of the MEC to globalize and restructure, facilitated the financialization of the economy and led to growth of trade and retail – but no new, employment creating manufacturing base has been created. The growth potential of this new economy is directly dependent on its competitiveness with the rest of the world – which has been ensured by low wages rather than innovation and productivity gains.

In the last instance – it was the policies chosen by the government that allowed the Apartheid economy to evolve in this way. Policies reflect several things about a government: how it conceptualizes relations between state, market and labour; which of the great classes in society it is beholden to; how it sees the extent of its sovereignty. In essence, policies are the arms of the ideological corpus of the state. In the past 20 years, the government of South Africa has demonstrated which ideology it prefers

to be guided by. It has the dishonorable distinction of having imposed a structural adjustment on its own people that went even beyond what the World Bank or the IMF demanded. It would be intellectually dishonest not to call this what it is – a neoliberal, pro-business, anti-labour ideology.

By contrast, the adoption of a developmental program would have given birth to a very different set of policies: address the unequal distribution of income and wealth; develop a wage-led growth path; make the satisfaction of basic needs the basis for eradicating the informal economy; end monopoly power in select sectors of the economy; give the state a central role in allocating resources including investment and, with respect to minerals, impose greater beneficiation of what is mined.

Apartheid was a system of general repression but the pain it inflicted on workers was particularly severe. Racial separation may appear to be the central plank of its ideology but it was in essence a system of super-exploitation, a pernicious way of extracting surplus value from farm labourers, miners and factory workers. This, and the colonial occupation that preceded it, is the historical root of the low-wage economy that we now live in. Data assembled here is sufficient evidence that the advent of political democracy has only perpetuated this low-wage system with its attendant poverty, unemployment and inequality. What is different now is the veneer of a "new social compact", a system where labour and capital mediate their "antagonistic positions" with a neutral state.

Workers would do well to dismiss this approach to resolve the historical tensions that lie at the heart of capitalist production. For as long as this system prevails, they should continue to press for a greater share of the wealth they produce by using every available statutory instrument along with their labour power. Capital – labour relations have no prospect of improving given the logic of capitalism but even mainstream economists understand that one of the main reasons for South Africa's laggard performance is weak aggregate demand. A wage-led growth path has the potential to stimulate de-

mand and breathe life into ailing industries. But this alone will not be enough. It will need strong redistributive mechanisms to reduce the gaping inequality. And this will take nothing less than transforming the state.

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USA

The Politics of Mass Incarceration

22 January 2015

The Politics of Mass Incarceration — an interview with James Kilgore

In the course of the past year, James has been involved in a struggle to maintain his job as a contract lecturer and hourly employee at the University of Illinois. In early 2014 the ultra-conservative local newspaper published a sensationalistic major feature article about his past and demanded that his actions and criminal convictions mandated his dismissal from the University. At first the University authorities gave in and refused to renew his contract. But after a petition of over 300 faculty members demanded his reinstatement and a university-appointed faculty committee also recommended he be re-hired, the Administration changed its mind. He is now slated to work at the university again in the spring of 2015.

His review of three books about prison, including Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (ATC 153) is here. He was interviewed by Dianne Feeley from the ATC editorial board.

Against the Current: Mass incarceration has suddenly gotten quite a lot of attention in the media and in the political mainstream. Why has it become a high profile issue all of a sudden?

James Kilgore: Lots of things have happened. The first, and most important, is that people in the critically impacted communities have started to fight back. We've had a lot of mobilization around the War on Drugs, some of it sparked by the wonderful book by Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*. She has helped people to name what is happening.

The disenfranchisement of over six million people with felony convictions has also gained a lot of traction, especially during an election year. But people

have been mobilizing in communities. The major mobilizations around police violence are also powerful indicators that things are changing.

The national response around Trayvon Martin's killing was crucial, but the organizing after the non-indictments of the killers of Michael Brown and Eric Garner has the potential to form the nucleus of a vital social justice grassroots movement with young people of color in leading roles. This could be historic but we have to see how it all plays out.

Also, the immigrants' rights movement is an important complement to the largely African-American led resistance to the War on Drugs. Many people don't connect the two, but Latinos have been the fastest growing group in the prison population in the last decade. This has largely been precipitated by anti-immigrant legislation and immigrant focused policing. So overall the mobilization of people of color has been central to putting this on the agenda.

Another critical factor is that politicians and policy makers have begun to see that too much money is going to what they call "corrections." This isn't just about how politically wrong it is to be locking up so many people, but also about the drain it puts on government finances.

Often the fiscal arguments get intertwined with the moral and political arguments against mass incarceration. That can be a problem. But states like New York, New Jersey and Colorado are shrinking prison populations and even closing prisons.

More and more politicians are seeing this, talking about it. The issue is almost becoming fashionable, in fact. That poses lots of opportunities but lots of threats as well.

ATC: You mentioned *The New Jim Crow*. What do you think of Michelle Alexander's views on mass incarceration? Is her concept of the New Jim Crow a useful framework?

JK: The New Jim Crow has been a revelation to millions. No book on this topic has ever created such a buzz, both within the African-American population and among those who have never read a thing about prisons. Her notions that mass incarceration has an explicitly racist content, that the racism is no longer overtly stated (colorblindness she calls it), and that it has a political agenda to mobilize white voters to a conservative agenda are incredibly important.

She is far from the first person to make these points but she has made them most effectively. I salute her work. I have run two reading groups on this book and for almost everyone the experience has been a complete awakening about the politics of mass incarceration and race in the United States.

Having said that, there is much that the book doesn't address what it could have. Michelle herself has recognized this as well. For instance, it focuses almost totally on how mass incarceration affects African-American men. While African-American men have been locked up at a rate that far exceeds that of any other sector of the population, mass incarceration has also had an enormous impact on their families and communities.

There is a complex gender and class dimension to this which she hasn't captured. Women in low-income African-American communities have to pick up the pieces. They are left with financial, emotional and parenting responsibilities in the wake of the capture of millions of men from urban spaces.

They also often take up the burden of supporting the men while they are in prison and after they come home and have to try to negotiate this very difficult terrain of being a job seeker and a survivor with the "felon" label.

Apart from this, Michelle also totally neglected the immigration dimension of mass incarceration

which I noted earlier. Finally, I think the book could have stressed much more heavily that this is a class issue, that it is the marginalized sectors of the working class in those African-American communities who end up behind bars. Henry Louis Gates might get harassed by the police but he doesn't end up doing 20 years for having a couple rocks in his pocket.

ATC: The labor movement has generally shied away from taking up issues related to mass incarceration, apart from prison privatization and the exploitation of cheap prison labor. Why do you think this is the case and do you see any potential for change among the trade unions on this issue?

JK: Unions for the most part have focused on the narrow employment concerns that pertain to mass incarceration. They have concentrated on blocking private prisons, which they view as undermining hard-won union gains, and protesting the use of contract prison labor. Both of these are meaningful issues, but they're not the central working class issues of mass incarceration.

Ultimately mass incarceration is an attack on the most marginalized, most vulnerable sectors of the working-class inner-city communities of color and, in some instances, poor whites in small rural towns.

These populations have been marginalized in the last three decades by deindustrialization and the rollback of union power. They are now part of that mass of workers who can be labelled precarious.

They are in the low wage job market, confined to employment in places like Walmart, Target, etc. — the McJobs world. Unions have had a hard time organizing such workers, especially when they have a felony conviction.

A further complication is that many unions have lots of members who work inside prisons and jails. AFSCME for example organizes prison guards in many states.

Their employment security is tied to the sustenance and growth of mass incarceration. The unions have not yet come out with a proper working-class assessment of all this. In Illinois, where I live, AFSCME has been a major force in the battle to keep prisons open when the governor wanted to close them down.

The unions should be pushing for reallocation of funding away from corrections and for re-training their members who work in prisons for employment in socially useful sectors. Let's have them building public housing or schools in inner-city areas instead of locking up the working class.

That said, a few unions like SEIU are beginning to study this issue and take some more progressive positions. The last AFL-CIO national convention passed a resolution against mass incarceration. It wasn't as powerful as it could have been, but I think the debates around it opened up new space for contestation. Those 2.2 million people behind bars are not going away any time soon.

ATC: Hardline conservatives like Newt Gingrich and Rand Paul have recently come out against mass incarceration. We even have a rightwing grouping Right on Crime, led by Gingrich and Grover Norquist, calling for scaling back imprisonment and focusing more on re-entry and other programs. Is this a positive development? Are there hopes to form a broad coalition on this issue across the political spectrum?

JK: I am always suspicious of such coalition building, although it is totally necessary. The problem is that what might be a tactical move for a very short-term gain becomes a strategy and we end up worrying more about offending our conservative allies than mobilizing the people who are affected.

Coalition building can get some legislation passed that might get some people out of prison. For instance, California voters just passed Proposition 47, which is supposed to get some 10,000 so-called non-violent offenders (I don't like that term) out of prison.

This is a good thing, but it comes at a price. The price is that we begin to divide those who are incarcerated into the deserving and the undeserving, the people who we can live with and the people we want to throw away.

Well, more than half of the people in state prisons have convictions for so-called violent crimes. So even if we let out everyone with a conviction for a non-violent crime, we would still have an incarceration rate twice that of any European country.

But more importantly, focusing on the non-violent fails to address the fundamental cause of mass incarceration. It is not about people making bad choices. It is about the political and economic forces that drove neoliberalism in the United States, shifting the role of the state to security instead of social welfare.

This is ultimately a class issue. If we make it into a question of the violent and the non-violent, we are saying that someone who is caught with drugs is somehow responding to fundamentally different forces than the person who is caught with drugs and a gun.

I met hundreds of people in prison who simply got caught up in the underground economy because there was no alternative. Once you are caught up because there are no meaningful education or employment opportunities in your communities, you have to defend your territory, your life.

In that world, you have to become violent to survive. The point is to restructure that world, not punish those who are swept up in the evils of an uncaring capitalist political economy that casts them onto the rubbish pile and then expects them to come out smelling like perfume.

ATC: There is also an increasing presence of formerly incarcerated people becoming active on these issues. Some organizations like All of Us or None, have called for formerly incarcerated people, particularly people of color, to step forward and lead the move-

ment against mass incarceration. Does this seem like a viable strategy?

JK: It is vital for those who have been critically impacted to play a leading role in these movements. Those who have directly experienced a system of oppression must lead the struggle to overthrow that oppression.

In this case, we must make sure it includes family and community members as well. Because about 90% of those who have been incarcerated are men doesn't mean we will have a movement which is 90% men. That would be a disaster.

Moreover, the movement against mass incarceration must make alliances with those addressing inequality and racism in other quarters. For instance, I would love to see more linkages between those fighting for higher minimum wages and those fighting against mass incarceration.

There is so much overlap. Mass incarceration touches an enormous range of the population. One in four adults now has a criminal record — they are workers, they are transgender folks, they are mentally ill, addicted. They live in communities that are impacted not only by police violence and deindustrialization but by climate change and gentrification. They live on reservations, in trailer parks, in shelters.

Unfortunately, they are everywhere and virtually all working class. This is a point so many people simply miss. Mass incarceration is a working class issue with a potential to reach into many pockets of society, catalyze lots of alliances.

ATC: Ultimately mass incarceration is a systemic problem. Some people speak of alternatives to incarceration as the solution to the problem. The more radical sectors of those involved in campaigning against mass incarceration or what some call the prison industrial complex, call for prison abolition. Where do you stand on these debates and how do they connect to developing a socialist position on these questions?

JK: I think the notion of prison abolition gets at the root causes of mass incarceration. It applies a socialist politics to issues of criminal justice. The notion of a society that doesn't imprison people presents us with possibilities of society based on empathy and solidarity, where when someone makes a mistake our first response is to try to understand and support, rather than punish.

To get there obviously requires a major social movement with a whole new world view. That is what prison abolition proposes. In most cases, when people first encounter the idea of prison abolition, they say, "but what about Charles Manson? What about serial rapists?"

While I understand the reaction, it's simply the wrong question. A diversion. No one is advocating absolute freedom from responsibility for harmful, destructive actions. But prison abolition focuses on prioritizing and proportionality. Why do we imprison someone with a bag of dope and not even charge someone who crashes the global economy or loots workers' pensions?

We have 2.2 million people locked up in prison. Most of these people simply don't belong there. If we imprisoned at the rate of Norway, we would have about 200,000 people behind bars. To make serious progress toward an incarceration level of 200,000, we will need to have lots of serious discussions along the way about what a criminal justice (not injustice) system would look like.

We know we are not starting down this road by calling for the release of Charles Manson. Put that aside and let's move on.

We want the hundreds of thousands poor, marginalized workers who are locked up to be returned to their communities. We want those communities to be restored so they offer meaningful education and employment opportunities. We want adequate public housing. That's what prison abolition is about, not freeing the most destructive individuals our society has produced.

Having said that, at times, advocates of prison abolition, like virtually everyone on the Left, have engaged in sectarian politics, have spent more time attacking those who opposed abolition than focusing on the perpetrators of mass incarceration.

We need to work harder at shaping what prison abolition means and how it might be relevant for people. At the same time, along the way we have to

fight for reforms, changes that impact people's lives — without becoming totally immersed in the day to day and losing the vision of a different type of society. But that's what effective socialists have always done, lead the struggle for reform while keeping their eyes on the prize.

ATC