

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV482 March 2015

USA

Something That Might Be Called Neocon:" Hillary Clinton & Corporate Feminism

SYRIA

The Syrian bourgeoisie and the people's revolution

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Nuclear power

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

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MEXICO

The making of neoliberal Mexico

EDGARD SANCHEZ ·

IT'S MORE than 20 years after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, and Mexico has not become the developed country that was promised back in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, on the political front, what was considered a democratic opening with the end of the 70-year reign of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) defeated by the National Action Party (PAN) in 2000, has closed—12 years later, the PRI is back. Why was the PRI able to return to power?

THE REFERENCE you make to NAFTA is very useful in answering this question. Many analysts even talk about the "restoration of the PRI," but we in the Revolutionary Workers Party don't consider the return of the PRI as a "restoration" as such. This is not the return of the same PRI of the 20th century.

Even though the current president, Enrique Peña Nieto, is part of the Atlacomulco group [a political clan inside the PRI], this is not a restoration of the PRI from the times of the welfare state and revolutionary nationalism. This is not the PRI that we characterize as a Bonapartist regime after the Mexican Revolution. [1]

That Bonapartist regime saw itself as the heir of the Mexican Revolution and as a revolutionary government. It didn't just elaborate an entire ideological discourse, but it also implemented a politics typical of Bonapartism, which gives way to some popular demands. This coincided with the implementation of Keynesianism and the rise of welfare states in other countries throughout the world.

Today, Peña Nieto has nothing to do with that. On the contrary, the structural reforms that he pushed through Congress in 2013 and 2014 aren't just reac-

tionary and neoliberal—they are actually counter-revolutionary, since they push the country back to before 1938. This was the case with the energy "reform" law he pushed through, which will allow the return of American and British oil companies that were expropriated in 1938.

So this is the return of the PRI, but it has nothing to do with the PRI from the 20th century, from the period known as revolutionary nationalism. On the contrary, this is a neoliberal PRI.

The Bonapartist regime ceased to exist in the 1980s when the neoliberal wing took over the PRI. This new generation of PRI leaders, such as Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Manuel Camacho Solís, Luis Donaldo Colosio and Ernesto Zedillo—this whole group of the "Chicago Boys," as we would call them, returned to Mexico, took control of the party and began to change the regime. The process began with the former President Miguel de la Madrid, from 1982 to 1988, but it wasn't consolidated until the imposition of Carlos Salinas de Gortari in the election of 1988.

This neoliberal regime came to power pushing a neoliberal project in terms of the economy and society, but also with a whole discourse about democracy and the end of one-party rule. However, neoliberalism isn't democratic, and that was proved here in Mexico with the imposition of Salinas through electoral fraud of 1988.

HOW DID the Salinas candidacy and then his presidency reflect these changes in the PRI?

SALINAS HIMSELF had many criticisms of his party, the PRI. He often argued that the concessions that had been made historically to the peasantry or the unions had become a burden on the state. Salinas instead emphasized "solidarity"

through a social program, called "solidaridad." He even went as far as to flirt with the idea of founding a new political party—the Solidarity Party—in order to break free from these historic concessions to the popular sectors and to corrupt union leaders.

Salinas' anti-corporatist discourse even attracted some figures from the left to his side. His whole discourse emphasized the rights of the individual over those of "special interests groups" like unions and peasant organizations. In the end, Salinas was unable to found a new party and instead relied on the PRI's anti-democratic structure and its connections to unions and peasants to pull off an electoral fraud in the election of 1988.

In fact, as soon as he came into power, Salinas jailed Joaquín Hernández Galicia, alias "La Quina," the head of the national oil workers' union, as a sign that the government would no longer tolerate corrupt union leaders. Peña Nieto did exactly this in 2013 when he jailed Elba Esther Gordillo, the corrupt boss of the teachers' union.

In the case of Salinas, however, it should be made clear that he jailed "La Quina" first of all, to punish him for supporting the candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas [the son of former Mexican President General Lázaro Cárdenas well known for nationalizing Mexico's oil industry—it is widely believed that the presidency was stolen from him in 1988 due to massive fraud engineered by the PRI].

Secondly, we're talking about the oil workers' union—the most important in the country because of the power of those workers—but also because this is the oil industry. This was the beginnings of an attempt to tame the nationalist tendencies within the union so that it wouldn't get in the way of its privatization.

HOW DID the rise of neoliberal politics in the PRI affect the political arena? How did the left react?

THIS BROUGHT about a transformation of the political regime and all of the other political forces. We often speak about the crisis of the left at the on-

set of neoliberalism, but it wasn't just the left. All the major political parties were transformed—first of all, the PRI as it left behind its nationalism and became neoliberal.

This transformation within the PRI is what provokes the break by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas [who founded the Party of the Democratic Revolution in 1989]. Cárdenas actually represents the old PRI and its revolutionary nationalist project. Cárdenas himself acknowledged this when he was running on the Democratic Front ticket against Salinas in the 1988 election. He said that the main goal was to save and defend the historic program of the PRI against Salinas and the neoliberals.

This is why it was impossible for us as the PRT to support Cárdenas' candidacy in 1988. He argued that the goal was to return to the old PRI, the regime with which we had been fighting since before the neoliberal wing took over—since the student massacre of 1968, since the student massacre of 1971 known as "El Halconazo," since the legalization of the left, since the disappearances of the "dirty war," since the aftermath of the Mexico City earthquake of 1985.

Throughout that whole period, Cárdenas and his group remained in the PRI. So when Cárdenas came out declaring he would save the old PRI, we rejected his project completely, because not only are we an alternative to the neoliberals, we are also an alternative to the old PRI.

It must be said, though, that back then, we perhaps didn't fully grasp the neoliberal transformation underway in the PRI. This shift also had consequences for the PAN, as well as for the left.

In the case of the PAN—a bourgeois party following the line of Christian democracy—there was a split, just like the split in the PRI between Cárdenas and Salinas. The split in the PAN was between the orthodox wing which followed the line of Christian democracy and which acted as the historic opposition to the PRI, and the neoliberal wing led by Diego Fernández de Cevallos, Manuel Clouthier

and a group of northern businessmen who put forward a more pragmatic view of politics.

After the 1988 presidential election, the PAN came out with a thesis arguing that a political regime that isn't democratic in origin can still legitimize itself through its actions once it is in power. This led to a historic agreement between the PAN and the PRI. The PAN effectively made peace with the PRI. At the root of this agreement was the neoliberal turn in both the PRI and the PAN.

WHAT DOES this agreement consist of and how does it benefit the PAN?

THE ALLIANCE between the PRI and the PAN resulted in the so-called "concertaciones," which were a series of secret meetings, where the Salinas administration and the PAN leadership would negotiate the PAN's rise to power in gubernatorial races. From these negotiations, the PAN "won" its first governorships in the states of Baja California and Guanajuato.

In exchange, the PAN recognized and supported Salinas' government—it had won through electoral fraud in 1988, and Salinas needed an undisputed control of government. So in effect, these two parties decided to negotiate on democratic rights—and for the first time suggest the possibility that the presidency could change hands. This provided a cover for the idea that democracy is advancing.

In fact, the PAN wanted something like the American model—a two-party system. In practice, however, both the PRI and the PAN represented the interests of the bourgeoisie, and they both competed for the support of American imperialism, seeking to prove which one was most capable to push forward those interests.

In the end, there aren't any substantial differences between the PRI and the PAN. It's therefore irrelevant if the PAN comes to power or if the PRI remains in the presidency because they serve the same interests.

For example, when Peña Nieto pushed forward the neoliberal structural reforms, the PAN was, in fact,

upset because they had wanted to push these reforms since the times of Vicente Fox [the first non-PRI president in 71 years, elected in 2000] and Felipe Calderón [Fox's successor, who won the 2006 election over Cárdenas on the basis of widespread fraud]. The PRI resisted the reforms when the PAN proposed them—not because they were against privatization but because they wanted to be the ones pushing forward the reforms.

Furthermore, the PAN claims that the shifts within the PRI are a historical cultural triumph for the PAN—meaning that privatization and the break with unions and peasants organizations had always been a centerpiece of the PAN project.

WOULD YOU say that this transition to a new political status quo had been planned beforehand? And how did the neoliberal project manifest itself when the PAN came to power in 2000?

I WOULDN'T say that this political-ideological transition was planned beforehand, in a Machiavellian way. But it was a transition that had always aimed to do away with the Bonapartist regime and was marked by the arrival of a neoliberal oligarchic power structure that pushed out the old regime.

So in the so-called transition to democracy when Fox became president in 2000, he made a famous statement that his government would be "a government of businessmen, by businessmen and for businessmen." This officially marked the point when the bourgeoisie took over from the Bonapartist regime. From this point forward, the personnel of the bourgeoisie took control of the state, arguing that politicians are corrupt and that's why they put forward Vicente Fox—someone who's not a politician, but a businessman.

The PAN promoted Fox as an individual, exalting the neoliberal principle that what matters are individuals, not parties or programs. For example, Fox was more informal, unlike the PRI. He didn't dress formally like PRI politicians—in fact, he wore cowboy boots and a big belt buckle that said "Fox" on

it. And he didn't speak like a politician. So it appeared that he was independent as an individual, rather than a representative of his party. But this was just the cover. After winning office, Fox's first act was to go to mass in the cathedral and walk into the national Congress bearing the cross.

Fox's argument was that businessmen aren't corrupt like politicians, because the wealth of their businesses was the result of their own work. This is, in fact, a mystification because as the saying goes, "Private property is theft." The PAN, however, claimed that they weren't thieves, like the PRI politicians. We argue, of course, that class exploitation is also theft.

Once the PAN was in power, however they also became vulgar thieves, like the PRI. One example was the sons of Marta Sahagún [Mexico's first lady during Fox's presidency, who reputedly used her influence to help her sons' company get large contracts with Mexico's national oil company]. Another is Zhenli Ye Gon [a Chinese businessman implicated in a drug-trafficking scandal in Mexico in 2007], who was discovered with mountains of cash in his living room and who was dealing with Javier Lozano Alarcón, the secretary of labor in the Calderón government.

Lozano Alarcón is also responsible for the destruction of a national electricity company Luz y Fuerza del Centro [dismantled by the Calderón administration in 2009—its workers, organized in the SME, have continued the struggle to get their jobs reinstated]. He basically became public enemy number one for the Mexican working class. His case clearly speaks to the complicity between the political class—the party and the government—and organized crime.

HOW DID the neoliberal turn affect the left? What became of the project of the PRD, formed by Cárdenas after the fraudulent election in 1988?

THIS TRANSITION wasn't planned beforehand, but it took place at a historic coincidence—the entire system of political parties was transformed by

the arrival of the neoliberals in the PRI, which then affected the whole opposition. So the transition to "democracy" took place at a time when the alternating rule of the two parties was irrelevant, because their neoliberal project is the same.

The Party of the Democratic Revolution came out of a crisis in the left, a crisis similar to that of the PRI and the PAN, when the entire socialist left in Mexico—be they Communists or Maoists—dissolved into a different kind of party following *cárdenismo*. The strategic goal of this party was to push the PRI out of power through elections, and to make taking their turn in power the main priority.

As these left parties abandoned their socialist programs, the goal of entering government became a goal in itself—they had become part of a party for a democratic revolution, instead of a social or socialist revolution. Therefore, these parties came to identify the democratic revolution as having a turn at leading the government.

All the shortcomings that PRD members find in their party aren't the defects of individuals lured by corruption, but rather this shift where all social demands were left by the wayside in a search for votes—since votes and posts in government are what would make the democratic revolution.

The PAN didn't like this project, because they would rather be one of two parties in a two-party system. The PRD aimed for a tri-party system, but one that excludes a political project of the left linked to the working class.

To come full circle to the first question, once Peña Nieto came into power in 2012, the PRI came back with the argument that they were better in charge of government than the other party that had taken its turn in power, because after two terms of the PAN, the country was in a state of collapse as a consequence of the drug war. So the PRI made a comeback, but it was the return of the neoliberal PRI.

What we have in power today is a new neoliberal oligarchy. It is no longer the Bonapartist regime where a political clique administered the state and

the bourgeoisie was outside of it. Today, the neoliberal oligarchy has at its service several parties that support the neoliberal project. This is best shown by the Pact for Mexico [signed in December 2012, the day after Peña Nieto took office], a treaty between the PRI and the PAN, but also the PRD.

Thus, the changes that took place in Mexico were in-depth transformations that also changed the na-

ture of the system of political parties. It's important to mention NAFTA here because it marks the rupture with the past. While the whole discourse of economic development that accompanied NAFTA was false, a historic shift did take place in the political regime of Mexico—and consequently the nature of Mexico's political parties.

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SPANISH STATE

Andalusia: a step in the process

MANUEL GARÍ ·

Teresa Rodriguez didn't claim victory because the PSOE maintained its 47 seats, while it lost 250,000 votes in comparison with the election of 2012; the PP crumbled yielding almost 200,000 votes to the PSOE (a historic landmark in Andalusia) but with its 33 deputies it was not surpassed by Podemos; and Ciudadanos appeared as an emergency replacement for the right that, with 368,000 votes, the majority from the PP, won 9 seats.

The leader of Podemos in Andalusia was not complacent about this important electoral advance for a force which is newly born, without financial means, organizational structure or previous institutional experience in a territory where the Socialist Party maintains strong clientelist networks that still have a significant weight on the electoral roll. However, it is important to highlight some positive aspects of the Podemos result. In its first electoral test after its appearance in the European elections of 2014 it won 590,011 votes, which represents 14.84% of the total in Andalusia, exactly 300,000 more than last year, or an increase of 300% in one year in Andalusia. The Podemos vote came from several sources: old PSOE voters (around 200,000), former Izquierda Unida voters (another 200,000), greens from Equo (almost 20,000) and the rest from the radical left and former left abstentionists. We should stress the positive cooperation during the campaign between green activists and the "Podemistas" which, unfortunately, did not result in seats for any of the Equo candidates. Podemos achieved the broadest popular mobilization across the campaign with more than 200 rallies and public events, and it's worth noting that the final rally in the velodrome of Dos Hermanas (Seville)

brought together 16,500 people, exactly 6,500 more than the sum of those attending the rallies held at the same time by the PSOE, PP, IU and Ciudadanos.

The offensive of the political right and the media against Podemos, fraught with lies and slanders, has been a first sample of the media battle to be waged at the coming elections on May 25 in other regions and in the municipalities and, of course, in the general elections at the end of the year. The economic powers around the big companies in the Ibex 35 have three goals at the state level that have already been embodied in Andalusia: to stop the advance of Podemos, prepare a replacement for discontented PP voters through support for Ciudadanos and press for a stable grand coalition government between the PP and the PSOE that can be translated into a shared cabinet or a cabinet of the winner supported by the other party. In the case of Andalusia capital's main option is PSOE leader Susana Díaz.

But the Andalusian elections have shown that it is difficult to curb the desire for change by an important part of the working classes who are not resigned, who have abandoned old loyalties and look to Podemos as a means of electoral struggle. The organization of the activists in the Circles, the organization of the Podemos base, is the main political capital of the new organization. Change has begun in the Spanish state. It has begun in Andalusia. And a good symbolic example of this is that Teresa Rodriguez, publicly known as a Trotskyist (environmentalist and feminist) activist in Anticapitalistas, won the most votes in her city, Cadiz, for 20 years governed by Teofila Martinez of the Partido Popular.

TUNISIA

"Normalization" underway in Tunisia

DOMINIQUE LEROUGE ·

A government to try to bury the revolution

The profile of the key members of government summarizes its function: try to "close the revolutionary parenthesis opened on January 14, 2011".

Overseeing it all, the president of the Republic Beji Caïd Essebsi, founder in 2012 of the Nidaa Tounes party: a kind of republican monarch, responsible for all the important decisions. Minister of Defence and of the Interior under Bourguiba, he embodies above all the desire to maintain the bourgeois order. A function that he particularly filled in 2011 as prime minister, from February 27 to the end of December.

Under his direct orders is the Prime Minister, Habib Essid, who participated in the Ben Ali and Essebsi regimes as well as that of the Islamists. A former magistrate, the minister of the Interior has also been a zealous servant of the regimes of Ben Ali and Ennahdha.

Symbolizing the "historic compromise" between the neoliberal "modernists" of Nidaa and the Islamists of Ennahda, a ministry has been granted to Zied Laâdhari, the spokesperson of Ennahda. He is flanked by three secretaries of state of his party.

Embodying a certain continuity with the Ben Ali regime, this government also contains three ministers from the UPL party led by the dubious operator Slim Riahi and three ministers from the ultra-neoliberal Afek Tounes party. This government has a total of 42 members, a little less than half officially representing political parties: Nidaa (19%), Ennahdha (9.5%), UPL (7.1%), Afek Tounes (7.1%) and FSN (2.4%). The other ministers are listed as "independent".

About the new government, a few comments from the Tunisian left

– The press release of the Ligue de la gauche ouvrière (Workers' Left League – LGO) of December 28, 2014: "The Ligue de la gauche ouvrière (LGO) refuses to participate in the government of the parliamentary majority, not only because of the alliance scheduled between Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes with the participation of the Islamists in the government, but especially in terms of rejection of the economic and social program hostile to the interests of the broad masses as was found in the disastrous budget recently adopted by the Assembly. The Ligue de la gauche ouvrière refused to grant its confidence in the expected governmental composition because its program and its components will only work to restore the old regime in its major choices and orientations. The LGO calls upon the members of the Front populaire to move away from the logic of the imaginary political polarization between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda within and outside of Parliament".

– Hama Hammami (Parti des travailleurs (Workers' Party) and spokesperson of the Front populaire (Popular Front)): "Some people accused in cases of terrorism and assassinations are part of the Essid government Essid. Activism continues in order to reveal the truth around the assassination of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahimi, as well as the truth concerning the affairs of terrorism and the martyrs of the revolution".

– Zied Lakhdhar (Parti des patriotes démocrates unifiés (PPDU – Party of United Democratic Patriots) and Front populaire): "In the sharing of ministries, where there is not a representative of Nidaa Tounes there is a representative of Ennahdha or of a political formation close to this

party, as if through a desire to keep closed some of the shadier files of the Troika in the areas of agriculture, equipment, industry, health and areas of the state. For this, each minister of Nida Tounes was flanked by a secretary of state from Ennahdha or close to the party, such as health, agriculture, and so on".

– Mbarka Brahimi (Courant populaire and Front populaire): "In substance and form, this government represents an alliance between the neoliberal forces, personalities from the former regime and the remnants of the Troika".

– According to Maghzaoui (Mouvement du peuple), the Tunisians are victims of a deception on the part of Ennahdha and Nidaa: "Throughout their election campaigns, they presented themselves to the voters as enemies whereas today they find themselves side by side within the same government".

– In the opinion of Fathi Chamkhi (LGO and Front populaire): "Whether they call it "modernism", Islamism or frankly neoliberalism, they are only in fact differences of facade. They know it very well! None of them truly has a program, still less a project for this Tunisia which has rejected austerity and neo-liberal restructuring, and which continues to refuse to bear the costs of it. What counts for them is to convince the real masters of Tunisia, namely foreign capital, that they represent a viable alternative to the former dictatorial regime. It goes without saying that they are pursuing its neo-liberal policy, without worrying about the right of Tunisians to dispose freely of themselves. Their differences of facade are disappearing. It's the end for Nidaa's calls for the broad alliance of democrats for the defence of "civil society" against the "Islamist threat", which have enabled it to build and then to win the elections. The end also of the discourse of the Islamist party on the need to defend the revolution against the representatives of the former Ben Ali regime. Once the election is over, the masks have fallen. It's time for the "sacred union". It is clear that the various expressions of the counter-revolution prepare themselves, by joining together,

to go on the counter-offensive against the working classes and the youth who demand a better life and a future".

The new minister of the interior is considered to be a symbol of the desire for "normalization" of the new government. For Kalthoum Kannou of the Association of Magistrates of Tunisia, the appointment of Mr. Najem Gharsalli as minister of the interior is "the worst choice that Habib Essid could make", because he "has played a role under the dictatorship in the harassment of honest judges". In the opinion of Ahmed Seddik (Baath Movement and Front populaire), "The new minister of the interior in the government of Habib Essid, Najem Gharsalli is not authorised to handle the dossier on political assassinations. Najem Gharsalli was involved, under the former regime, in serious violations of human rights, particularly with regard to the infringement of the rights of magistrates in assembly and expression as well as his attempt to overthrow the legitimate structures of the Association of Magistrates of Tunisia". Mbarka Brahimi said: "Najem Gharsalli has been designated to ensure the safety of the Tunisians, but we cannot trust him knowing that it will be difficult for him to discover the assassins of the martyrs Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahimi".

Concerning the economic and social policies of the government, Fathi Chamkhi says: "The train has already started! It continues in the same direction without outcome, while trying to go faster. Specifically, the government wants to continue the implementation of the second structural adjustment plan dictated by the IMF and the World Bank, as well as the new free trade agreements with the European Union. The social holocaust will continue, which is likely to lead again to an explosive situation".

The "historic compromise"

After having spent their time demonizing each other for nearly three years, Essebsi and Ghannouchi (respectively chairmen of Nidaa and Ennahdha) got serious in the aftermath of the second round of the

presidential elections. The premises of a final alliance between Nidaa and Ennahdha were in fact visible since summer 2013: in the aftermath of the assassination of Mohamed Brahimi the presidents of the two parties went to Paris for a secret meeting. Subsequently, other meetings had followed. A second index of this orientation was Ennahdha's failure to submit a candidate for the presidential elections against Essebsi, and its advocacy of "neutrality" during the vote. In acting thus, the Ennahdha leadership opened the door to participation in the future government.

Certainly, Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha have long been opposed on some topics such as the relationship between religion and the state, or on the rights of women and their place in society. But each of the two parties had made the observation that unable to eliminate the other as demonstrated by the results of the legislative elections: despite its unpopularity following two years in power, Ennahdha won only 7.8% fewer deputies than Nidaa. On the economic and social levels nothing fundamental differentiated them. And obviously, what united them was more important than what divided them. Such a rapprochement between the two fraternal enemies was naturally made under the benevolent eye, indeed more or less friendly pressure, of the major powers and international institutions.

The only thing that had prevented the two old foxes from implementing too quickly this project of "historic compromise" was the problems that such a policy was likely to cause in their respective parties. Both needed time to limit the damage. Simultaneously, the leaders of the two parties tended to their respective bases to reassure them and improve their reciprocal relationship of electoral forces prior to the parliamentary elections.

The choice of the king

A large part of those who had voted for Nidaa Tounes at the parliamentary elections, and then for Essebsi at the presidential election saw this choice as an effective way to "get rid once and for all of Ennahdha and its ally Marzouki". They have paid the

price. For Nidaa, the participation of Ennahdha in the government has been difficult to swallow, particularly among women. Fathi Chamkhi explains: "many, especially among those who voted for Nidaa, feel betrayed by this alliance which has returned to the government the Islamists that they wanted to remove, by voting for Nidaa. The argument for the "useful vote" against the "Islamic threat" had allowed Nidaa to siphon the votes of several parties, as well as a portion of those of the Front populaire".

According to a Nidaa leader, nearly 80% of the members of this party were in mid-January opposed to the participation of Ennahdha in government. The same was true of 90% of the Executive Bureau. But Essebsi decided to the contrary and on February 5, only one member of Nidaa opposed the vote of confidence in the government including the Islamists. In acting thus Essebsi wanted to have the votes of Ennahdha who, with 69 members, represent 32% of the Assembly. He hoped thus to shelter his parliamentary majority from the mood swings of its different components, all the more so in that:

- A majority of two-thirds will be necessary to pass certain laws to be implemented in conformity with the Constitution passed in January 2014;
- The government will have to be strong enough to face the social mobilisation aroused by the implementation of neo-liberal measures dictated by the IMF and the World Bank.

Why the Ennahdha leadership backed Essebsi

If the leaders of Ennahdha have decided to give allegiance to Essebsi, who they had previously fiercely fought, it is above all because the Islamists wanted to absolutely keep a place, however modest, inside the executive. In doing so, they intend to protect themselves against the fate suffered by their Egyptian cousins. They hope also to perpetuate the many jobs in the administrations they have provided to their clientele during the two years they have been in power. Being in government should also facilitate the stifling of at least a part of the abuses to

which they are linked: multiple assaults by Islamist militias, repression of the uprising in Siliana, the attack on the national headquarters of the UGTT, the assassinations of Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahimi and so on.

The price to pay for such a reversal is high in the ranks of Ennahda. A large part of its members and of its electorate wanted to vote for a candidate of the party at the presidential election. They rejected the position of "neutrality" and actively campaigned for Marzouki. Fathi Chamkhi commented: "Ennahdha helplessly witnesses the narrowing of its electoral base. Its ideological discourse, which had enabled it to win the elections of 2011, is falling apart. After its failure in power, its alliance with Nidaa has lost it any credibility in the eyes of broad layers of the popular classes who had fallen, three years ago, under the charm of the Islamist ideology".

Some historic figures, like the former secretary general and former Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, have left. But, finally, no member of Ennahda refused to vote confidence in the government. During the vote of confidence on February 5, the parliamentary opposition comprised 18.6% of members:

- 9.3% representing the left-wing opposition to the government: essentially the Front populaire, the Mouvement du peuple (Nasserite), the MDS deputy and the independent deputy Adnen Hajji. All voted against confidence in the government,
- 4.9% originating from the "troika" in power in 2012-2013: the CPR of Marzouki and the Courant démocratique (a split from the CPR) who voted against confidence; and the dissidents of Ennahdha who abstained.
- 2.5% of Nidaa dissidents: one of them voted against confidence, the other abstained.

The position of the Front populaire

This coalition, which operates by consensus, comprises most of the left and Arab nationalist forces. It was set up in autumn 2012 on the basis of the re-

jection of the policies of both Ennahda and Nidaa. In the wake of the assassination of Mohamed Brahimi (one of the national leaders of the Front), on July 25, 2013, the Front nevertheless participated in an ephemeral National Salvation Front alongside Nidaa Tounes. The Front has nevertheless subsequently managed to successively meet several tests:

- Refusal in January 2014 to vote confidence in the government which succeeded that of the Islamists of the CPR and the social democrats of Ettakatol;
- Reaching a consensus on the heads of list for the legislative elections of October 26;
- Increasing by 2.5 the number of its deputies in the Assembly;
- Then increasing its vote in the first round of the presidential elections by a magnitude of 2.4 in relation to the votes obtained in the parliamentary elections;
- Affirming the need to fight both Nidaa and the Ennahdha-Marzouki duo (in power in 2012 and 2013), contrary to the supporters of "anyone but Ennahdha and its ally Marzouki";
- Fighting the austerity budget and refusing to vote for it in the assembly;
- Refuse to vote confidence in a new government, or participate in it.

Reaching a consensus on these various points was not inevitable in advance given the heterogeneity of the Front, the different political trajectories of its components, some mistrust inherited from the past and the memories of the explosion of the first experience of regrouping following January 14, 2011. Politically, the challenge to the Front was simultaneously to:

- Not become a satellite of Nidaa;
- Defeat the manoeuvres of Nidaa who wanted to justify their reversal by claiming falsely that it was the refusal of the Front populaire to be allied with them which forced them to turn toward the Islamists to constitute a majority in Parliament;

– Adopt a discourse understandable to that part of the electorate and those militants of the Front that supported a vote for Essebsi in the second round of the presidential election, as well as for abstention - or even a yes vote - during the vote of confidence in the future government. After a long internal debate, the Front's refusal to participate in the government and vote for confidence in it was based on three additional arguments:

– The rejection of the presence of representatives of Ennahdha;

– The rejection of the presence of powerful symbols of the old regime;

– The incompatibility between the program of the Front and that of the new government.

On Thursday February 5 by voting unanimously against confidence in the new government, the Front populaire asserted itself as the pivot of the left political opposition to the government.

An assessment of the first phase of the Front populaire

In an interview on February 8, Fathi Chamkhi said: "In a situation of serious social crisis, having 15 members out of 217 (or less than 7%) is not enough. I regard this as a defeat. We are well behind Nidaa (86 members) and Ennahdha (69 members). The Front populaire is even behind the UPL (16 members)... Certainly, the score of the Front populaire could have been worse given its organizational shortcomings, its weaknesses of analysis of the concrete situation, its wavering policies and its repeated hesitancy. The fact of being trapped by Nidaa, after the assassination of Mohamed Brahimi in July 2013, into the National Salvation Front (FSN) was an error. This is very clear today. Nidaa has derived great political benefit, thanks to its manoeuvres within the FSN, and then the way the eviction of Ennahdha from power took place in January 2014.

"The negative impact of the tactical errors of the Front populaire and its lack of strategic clarity have been mitigated by the attitude of its political opponents. In a certain way, the Front populaire was

saved by them on several occasions. There has been, for example, an intense debate within the Front around the question of electoral alliances: a part of the Front favoured a "useful vote" and a broad electoral alliance against Ennahdha. Nidaa finally helped to resolve that debate by deciding to run alone in the elections. The same thing took place concerning the vote of confidence in the new government where the Front gave the impression of hesitating about its participation in the government alongside Nidaa. At the same time, Nidaa was much more tempted by an alliance with Ennahdha. It is true that a minority current, within Nidaa, was opposed to this alliance with the Islamists and wanted to reinforce its position by seeking a rapprochement with the Front. But, in the end, Nidaa opted for the alliance with Ennahdha".

"What is positive is that even if the Front populaire has made mistakes, it has managed to overcome them. Now, all the forces having voted confidence in government will try to isolate the FP. But the FP has sufficient resources to tighten ranks, improve its organization, deepen its ideas and advance its own solutions. I remain optimistic about its future, even if it is not decided in advance. The situation is difficult, but the FP showed that it could manage its tensions and correct its mistakes. It has gained in maturity, even if weaknesses still remain at the level of its analyses. The Front has in its ranks activists with the skills and experience necessary to formulate a coherent and understandable project. It should not limit itself to acting at the level of Parliament, but take its full place in the mobilisations against the social and economic crisis that the country is going through".

The projects of the new government

The government headed by Nidaa Tounes wants Tunisia to fully resume its place in the policies desired by the foreign and Tunisian investors, the European Union, the United States, the World Bank, the IMF, and so on. In continuity with previous governments, the new regime intends to:

- Continue the repayment of the foreign debt, accompanied by drastic cuts in social spending (for example on health, education and so on);
- Develop free trade in the agricultural sector, services and public contracts, which has impoverished millions of Tunisians, in particular in the deprived areas of the interior;
- Lower taxes on company profits, leaving a gaping hole in state revenues;
- Privatize companies confiscated from the Ben Ali clan;
- Continue the compression of social expenditure by reducing subsidies to staple goods;
- Impose "social order" in the major workers' centres, in particular the mining basin as well as in private sector firms where trade union structures were created in the wake of the revolution.

A new cycle of struggles?

After having been in part overshadowed for a long time by the bipolarization between neoliberal "modernists" and neoliberal Islamists, the social question has returned to the first level. Workers in stable employment are today "very affected by the deterioration of their purchasing power. They are really in the process of becoming poorer. Their priority is purchasing power, the cost of the schooling of children and then of the aid to provide them with then when they are unemployed graduates, and so on", says Abderrahmane Hedhili. He continues: "It is manifest at the level of the rate of participation in strikes. Previously, we reached figures between 60% and 90%. Now, it is often 100%, such as for example among teachers or in transport. Never has the rate of strikers have been so high".

For 2014, at the end of October the total number of strike days had already exceeded the record figure of 2011. Since then, numerous strikes have taken place; the level of mobilization is such that some have been triggered without respecting the obligation of filing of notice provided for in the legisla-

tion. This has for example been the case in public transport in Tunis and in some regions.

Also "the most precarious are those who work in the shipyards, many of whom earn less than the minimum wage, or again the unemployed graduates, and the unemployed non-graduates that we seldom talk about but which are much more numerous. This category will not sit idly by. They have waited for four years in the hope of a roadmap taking into consideration their situation. But there has been nothing".

Evidence of this is the effect of the strikes of precarious workers in the mining basin. Symbolizing the convergence between these two sectors of the population, significant mobilizations were held, particularly in the deprived areas of the south of the country, including local general strikes. In this area, the attitude of the UGTT will play a decisive role. In 2012 and 2013, its national directorate had been mainly absorbed by its desire to ensure a smooth departure for the Ennahda government. Hence its motor role in the establishment of the consensual framework leading in January 2014 to the adoption of the Constitution and the establishment of the provisional government of "technocrats", charged notably with preparing for the elections. This policy was accompanied by good neighbourly relations between the UGTT and the employers' federation, UTICA.

Now that the political objectives that the UGTT leadership laid down have been for the most part achieved, it remains to be seen how its internal relationship of forces will evolve, between those who do not want to "obstruct" the new government in the name of the "national interest" and those who consider that the resolute defence of workers' interests remains the basis of trade union action.

It also remains to be seen how the political, associative and trade union left will insert itself in the struggles and meet the expectations of those who have been among the main engines of the revolution: the youth, the unemployed, workers, women and the poor of the interior of the country. The

same is true concerning the defence of liberties (which are to this day the only real achievements of the revolution) and the environment. The essential remains today to work among the masses to stimu-

late their organization and awareness, in order to meet the needs of the new cycle of struggles that will be played out above all at the social level.

SOUTH AFRICA

We are Steaming Ahead: NUMSA's Road to the Left

SA / NPV: Those who are not in South Africa may think that NUMSA is responsible for undermining COSATU and working class unity. How would you respond to this?

KC: When COSATU was established in 1985, NUMSA was in the centre of the unity talks. COSATU was a product of collective struggle and the federation shook the South African landscape under apartheid and played an important part in the 1994 democratic breakthrough. But COSATU, particularly over the last eight years, has almost totally shed its independence. It has become embroiled in factional politics within the ANC and the SACP. The COSATU that used to be a campaigning formation has become an organisation unable to take forward critical struggles – around precarious work, unemployment, the privatisation and commodification of services. We are challenging legally our expulsion and we have appealed for the convening of a COSATU Special National Congress (SNC). COSATU's history is not something you walk away from easily.

SA / NPV: How has COSATU got into such a situation, given this history?

KC: Today COSATU is limited to forming part of the ANC's election machinery. Beyond that, it has a real struggle to influence policy. That has been the case over the last 20 years, since what happened to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). [2] It was a COSATU sponsored idea which originated within NUMSA. We felt the new government should do certain things to reconstruct our country, to move away from white minority rule at the expense of the black majority and to have redistributive policies to address the skewed ownership and control of the economy. The RDP became a compromise between the alliance partners but even

after the compromises the RDP office in the government was closed down, without consultation. A new economic framework was introduced in 1996 and since then the ANC government has followed a neoliberal path. Today the National Development Plan follows exactly the same pattern. COSATU is a mere rubber stamp for neoliberal policies. It is useful for the ANC government to have a labour federation allied to itself, but one which will not make too many noises.

Secondly, there is the old question of wearing too many hats. You have several members of the Central Executive Committee who have multiple leadership roles. The President of COSATU is also a member of the SACP Central Committee, a member of the SACP Politburo, and a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee. So COSATU can today take a position, but then you leave COSATU and you go and sit in the ANC NEC, and you are persuaded differently. And what happens invariably is that you compromise COSATU's position.

The third problem is that the ANC and the Party have started to say to COSATU that its outlook has become 'oppositionist', that we speak a language which is anti-ANC and anti-Alliance, and that as a trade union movement we have become 'too political'. That contestation has become factionalised – with one faction supporting the status quo coming from the ANC and SACP, and the other faction saying that our loyalty is to the membership, and to our resolutions, campaigns and programmes.

SA / NPV: Do you think the unity of COSATU still can be saved? Or has the time come for NUMSA, and the unions supporting it, to build a new independent federation?

KC: A couple of things need to be mentioned here. Firstly the dominant faction within the 'voice of reason' brigade is constituted by the public sector

unions. That is interesting for a number of reasons. In June 2013 at the SACP 13th National Congress there was a paper delivered that called for a different way of organising in the public sector, along the lines of 'take responsibility for the revolution' – i.e. unions must not be in opposition to government programmes. They must be for better public service delivery, even if it is under austerity measures. So your role must be different to those in the industrial sectors or mining. And that perspective plays itself out within COSATU and it relates to my earlier point about the president of COSATU being a senior member of the SACP. A divide has developed between private sector unions like NUMSA and the public sector unions where there is no tolerance of dissent. This has brought many in the public sector to realise that the leaders have turned against their own constitutions and members. Democratic practices are thrown out of the window. People have decided it is time to challenge the dominance of a conservative, right-wing and corrupt leadership in these unions who behave as though they are shop stewards of the ANC and the SACP.

This is the reason behind the call for the formation of a new public sector union. This has nothing to do with NUMSA, it would be wrong for us to call for this, but I do think that people were inspired by the resolutions taken at the December 2013 NUMSA Special Congress.

In COSATU at the moment you have eight other unions against the NUMSA expulsion. They decided to demand the unconditional reinstatement of NUMSA back into COSATU and said they will not participate in any of COSATU's structures unless that happens. COSATU's President says over and over again that NUMSA is expelled but metal workers must remain within the federation; some have gone to the extent of building a rival to NUMSA that has applied for membership.

We decided to go to court to expose the deliberate project to get NUMSA expelled and because we want to ensure there is respect for the rules of the federation. NUMSA's view is to fight to reclaim COSATU even if you need to use the courts, but if

all else fails we must begin the process of building a new labour federation. It is painful, when you give birth to something and you are no longer a part of it, but you have to move on. The reality is that only 30% of workers in South Africa are organised into unions.

SA / NPV: Why do you see a need to return to the mass democratic politics of the 1980s, and how do you see the United Front going forward?

KC: South Africa is the service delivery protest capital in the world; the neoliberal policies imposed on our people are resisted, but that is a leaderless resistance. It has no direction. Sometimes the protests get violent and the anger is not properly directed. We need a new United Front [after the United Democratic Front of the 1980s] to bring together workplace and community struggles.

One day the SACP says that NUMSA is a 'workerist' formation, the next day they say we are too political, go back to the workplace. But we have always believed in community and workplace struggles coming together. We should bring communities into worker action and worker action into communities. This is a re-awakening; we have got to take our power back. We have been hijacked by a small, black elite who feast on the state through corrupt means. If we don't get onto the streets, we are not likely to change things.

SA / NPV: We have already seen an aggressive response to developments in NUMSA. Phones have been tapped, cars and offices broken into, and three shop stewards were murdered in 2014. How do plan to take on this very clear opposition?

KC: It will never be easy to build an alternative to the ANC, a 103-year-old national liberation movement. In Africa and Third World countries you find huge sentimental attachment to the party that liberated the people. We have no illusions that it will be hard work. But it is necessary work politically to get people to regain confidence. Many who have remained loyal to the ANC this time around decided

not to vote. If you hone into some of the metros [large municipalities], the ANC has lost its grip. This is what we must discuss at the launch of the United Front: are we ready to field candidates for local government elections in 2016, and on what platform, or would a Workers' Party have to contest elections?

SA / NPV: How do you see NUMSA going forward as a trade union of metal workers? How far should NUMSA try to steer all these different struggles?

KC: NUMSA will remain a trade union and not transform into a political party. We see de-industrialisation and we think there is no better time to re-industrialise. Beneficiation [of mineral resources] is all talk but there is no action. NUMSA has a task. We have bargaining in all the metal and engineering sectors and autos. We have a plan up to our national congress in 2016 that requires internal union work to service the membership but also to speak to broader socio-economic issues.

On all fronts an alternative is necessary, but NUMSA must never change the foundation on which it rests – fighting oppression, discrimination and exploitation wherever it is in society and ensuring working-class control in the economy, dealing with gender inequality, taking up shop floor issues. NUMSA is probably the only growing union in South Africa. We said in 2012 that by 2016 we ought to be 400,000 and we are getting closer. In

July 2014 we had 346,000 members. You can't feed workers with political slogans. This is why we insist that being a union, responding to the needs of workers, is central and nonnegotiable.

SA / NPV: How do you situate NUMSA in relation to other international attempts to resist neo-liberalism?

KC: We do international work on the basis of respect for others' independence and political views, and their respect for ours, but realising we are fighting a common enemy. We have links with many countries. In Brazil, we have relationships with the MST and CONLUTAS, but we are not walking away from CUT or PT. Old friends and new friends must appreciate that we will work with anyone who shares our perspective. We are not going to shed our relationship with IG Metall in Germany but we are making new friends in Die Linke. We are working with comrades in Bolivia and excited about the return of Morales; in the US we have many connections, and we recently received a big delegation from UNITE in the UK. In particular countries there may be tensions; we will not interfere but nobody must choose for us who we will work with. We are doing an international study tour in as part of exploring the new Movement for Socialism; and will be convening a national conference on socialism. We are steaming ahead

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INDIA

Of rape, censorship and national honour

PRAFUL BIDWAI ·

The film powerfully depicts, mainly through her parents' narration, the life and aspirations of the 23-year-old paramedical student who was barbarically raped, grievously assaulted and left to die. It's also a quietly celebratory story of the tidal wave of anti-rape protests that followed. Not least, it's an account of how the rapists, their lawyers, and many others, justify brutal violence against women.

India's Daughter isn't a voyeuristic film, nor does it glamorise rape even indirectly, the way many Bollywood films do. It impels the viewer to reflect on the pathologies that afflict Indian society, which viciously discriminates against women and finds a hundred rationalisations for doing so.

That's why the hysterical reaction to the film from the government and the Bharatiya Janata Party is so deplorable, indeed revolting. So is the charge that film-maker Leslee Udwin violated the conditions set for interviewing Mukesh Singh, the convicted rapist, and other prisoners.

BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi claimed the film would affect tourist arrivals. Urban development minister M Venkaiah Naidu smelt an anti-India "conspiracy" in it. And home minister Rajnath Singh muscularly declared that his government wouldn't allow anyone to single out India for an anti-national attack related to rapes.

However, Udwin didn't violate any conditions. She showed the full raw footage to the prison authorities, and also the 15 minutes-long edited material used. They raised no objections. Besides, the film doesn't single out India as uniquely rape-prone. Rape, like wife-beating, is prevalent in all countries. This is a testimony to the power of patriarchy everywhere. Rape is grossly under-reported in

India because of the stigma that's perversely attached to its victims, rather than to its perpetrators.

Yet, India has recently witnessed a large number of rapes, in particular extremely violent gang-rapes. These have caught the world's attention, not least because of attempts by India's police and political leaders to minimise their incidence and to proffer advice on how women should dress and conduct themselves, or how they should avoid strangers.

But rape has nothing to do with how a woman looks or how "provocatively" she dresses. That's why 82-year-olds or disabled women are raped, as are six-year-olds. Most rapists aren't strangers, but men known to the victims. Rape isn't about sexual attraction; it's about male power, violently exercised to subjugate women. The official responses to the film solely focus on the image it supposedly conveys, and ignore the object—the reality of India, with mass killings of female foetuses, which have left more than 40 million women "missing" over a century. In India, sex-based discrimination begins in infancy with deprivation of food, and carries over into adulthood in countless ways.

Such extreme forms of patriarchy and male-supremacism set the context in which women are pervasively viewed in society as inferior. The dominant view oscillates between seeing women as worthy of worship (an epic hypocrisy this, based on a glorified but mythical notion of motherhood!), and regarding them as sources of temptation and objects of carnal desire, who deserve to be mercilessly exploited: that's their karma.

Common to both is the notion that women are inherently weak and inferior. They must either be sexually used and enslaved, or be protected and defended by men. But they must never have equal status, independent agency or human dignity.

Thus, ML Sharma, a convict's lawyer, told Udwin: "A female is just like a flower... But on the other hand, a man is like a thorn... The flower always needs protection..." He also said: "In our society we never allow our girls to come out... after 6:30 or 7:30 or 8:30 in the evening with any unknown person... We have the best culture. In our culture, there is no place for a woman."

Another lawyer, A P Singh, declared: "If my daughter or sister engaged in pre-marital activities and disgraced herself... I would most certainly take her to my farmhouse, and in front of my entire family, I would put petrol on her and set her alight." Rapist Mukesh Singh said: "It takes two to clap"; since the victim was not a "decent" girl and was out in the streets late at night, she "asked for it"; had she not resisted, she wouldn't have been killed.

These views are shocking, but by no means confined to these men. They are aired day in and day out by khap panchayats, police officials, Sangh Parivar luminaries, judges and ministers, including most recently, Haryana Chief Minister and long-standing RSS functionary ML Khattar.

These same people now see India's Daughter as an attempt to malign India, and a "conspiracy" to tarnish the rising nation's image and prevent it from developing and equalling the West in wealth, stature and prestige. This speaks to a sick kind of nationalism.

The same nationalist argument was used by the Intelligence Bureau and the home ministry to justify the offloading of Greenpeace activist Priya Pillai from a plane to London where she was going to testify before an all-party committee of MPs on the violations of environmental regulations and poor tribals' rights in Central India by Essar, a corporation headquartered in the UK.

Pillai, they told a court, would indulge in "anti-India" propaganda aimed at hindering India's "development" and prosperity by prejudicing Western investors. They stooped to trying to drive a wedge between Pillai, and other activists such as Aruna

Roy, Medha Patkar, PV Rajagopal, Admiral Ramdas, Nandini Sundar and myself.

They claimed we never testified before a foreign/international committee, but "relied on all the institutions of India's vibrant democracy...", using methods like dharnas, fasts and marches, litigation, and the print and electronic media. This is an invidious distinction, which some of us refuted (scroll.in/article/707224). We pointed out that many good activists like Dalit anti-caste campaigners have used UN and even European Union and US forums, as is legitimate. However, the official argument shamelessly justifies and invites the exploitation of India's vulnerable Adivasis and mineral resources by foreign corporations. So much for "nationalism"! It also victimises those who try to enforce India's own environmental laws and fundamental rights. Mercifully, the Delhi High Court has just quashed the ministry's order.

The Indian state since colonial times has used its "sovereign" power not to defend and extend the rights of the people in whom real sovereignty lies, but to limit, circumvent and violate these rights, whether by banning publications and activities, by refusing visas to progressive scholars and activists, or by shielding corporate criminals and communal thugs.

This is true with a vengeance of the Bhopal disaster, in which the government imposed an unethically paltry settlement on the victims and betrayed them. It also applies to the deportation of Japanese activists who wanted to share the experience of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe with the protesters at the Koodankulam atomic project. It holds true of scores of people's movements and NGOs now being harassed under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

The Indian government's international conduct often shows an admixture of hubris, insecurity and paranoia. It dishonestly but selectively presents much of what it fears, or what it's uncomfortable with, as a "trap" or "conspiracy" designed to pre-

vent India from exercising its sovereign options and advancing its legitimate interests.

Take the nuclear issue. India in the 1960s opposed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on the ground that it created "Atomic Apartheid", or a division between nuclear and non-nuclear-weapons-states. Beneath the lofty moral stand was the crass intention to keep open the option of acquiring nuclear weapons, revealed in India's 1974 test.

In the mid-1990s, India similarly demonised the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which Nehru had pioneered in 1954. New Delhi denounced it as a "trap" to eliminate its sovereign security options—after arguing for decades, including in a case before the International Court of Justice, that nuclear weapons never give security and nuclear deterrence is "morally repugnant".

Two years after rejecting the CTBT, India brazenly embraced deterrence with five nuclear blasts—and joined the "Apartheid" system, on the side of its masters!

This reflects, and in turn reinforces, a toxic, bellicose, blind nationalism. This is disseminated through textbooks, school prayers, soap operas, newspaper articles, TV debates, and 'Mera Bharat Mahan' slogans painted on trucks and autorickshaws.

Such toxic nationalism holds that it's India's unique destiny to be the world's greatest nation—never mind persistent mass poverty, malnourishment of half its children, and hideous inequalities. This is exactly the kind of hubris that inspired Hitler's and Mussolini's fascism and brought disaster upon their peoples. We must fight it resolutely.

Republished from the autor's blog.

GREECE

In case of illegitimate debts creditors can be contravened

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

KB: Most of the arguments against debt restructuring and cancellation are based on the conviction that agreements and laws have to be respected. You claim that debts can be illegitimate and their cancellation necessary to ensure the rule of law and respect of constitutions. What are legal frameworks and arguments do you base your arguments on?

ET: The first lesson of history should be that debts have often been written off. The major debt cancellation in the 20th century was the London agreement about the German debt in 1953, when 62 per cent of the German debt was written off [4]. The creditors furthermore agreed to give up their demands for German reparations for the occupation and destruction of the Nazi regime during the Second World War. This was a very important debt write-off agreed on by the creditors. Later the Polish debt was written off when Poland decided to leave the Warsaw Pact under the presidency of Lech Walesa. In 2004 creditors canceled 80 per cent of the Iraqi debt. There are numerous examples of debt cancellation.

The legal basis for the debtor country to decide as a sovereign state not to pay back the debt is its constitution or the fact that there are priority obligations a State has to meet. These are mostly connected to its duty to guarantee the human rights of its population. This obligation has priority over any obligation to repay a debt and therefore, if repaying debts impedes the possibility for the government to guarantee public healthcare, public education, peace and security for its population, the said government can decide not to repay the debt.

Moreover, if the debt claimed by creditors is an illegal debt then the contract of indebtedness is null and void. In this case it is possible for the sovereign state to tell its creditors that what they are demanding to be paid back is in fact illegal. In the case of the Eurozone we can claim that at least parts of the loans given by the Troika of the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund in 2010 to Greece and Ireland, in 2011 to Portugal and in 2013 to Cyprus, are illegal. In the case of Greece I would claim that the loans are illegal in their entirety.

But the majority would say that the Greek government agreed to the conditions of the debt and even requested the loans. Why do these arguments not convince you?

In 2010 the Greek government did not abide by the Greek constitution. They accepted the loans given by the Troika without consulting the Greek parliament. Besides, as a party to the contract, the Troika had an obligation to oversee and control that the constitution of the debtor country be respected; that is, that the other party of the contract abides by the law.

Furthermore, we can consider the actions of the states that are the creditors. In 2010 fourteen states, all members of the Eurozone, gave bilateral loans to Greece for an amount of €53 billion. However, article 125 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that no state can engage its finances to support the finances of another member state of the EU. This Article, i.e. the constitutional basis of the EU, was breached.

Therefore we have a situation in which the Greek government did not respect the Greek constitution

while these fourteen states of the EU did not respect the constitution of the EU.

This is important because the new government brought to power by democratic elections in Greece can now say that neither the constitutions of Greece nor the EU constitution has been respected. Moreover, the Statute and the rules of the IMF have not been respected during the bailout of Greece, in which the IMF participated, thus there is a legal basis to claim that the debt is illegal and should not be paid back.

But are there legal tools to enforce such legal arguments? The Council of Europe has found that the effects of austerity measures breach the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights yet nothing has changed. The European Parliament has concluded that the acts of the Troika were outside of any legal framework. Yet, in February we saw pure force used to ensure that such illegal situations continue.

There is no European institution which could intervene and give support to and reasons for the SYRIZA government not to repay the debt. There is no one with the authority to say that they authorize the new Greek government not to pay back their public debt. However, what a democratic government could and should do in such a situation is take a sovereign act based on legal arguments. A sovereign act is an acceptable and recognized action inside the international community. However, the government has to take responsibility for its sovereign act and be aware of the consequences. This is a viable option. Especially, since such government could not be expelled from the Eurozone because there are no legal definition or mechanisms to expel a Euro-member state.

But the sovereign act would mean a one-sided decision to stop repaying the debt, followed by a default, and not an agreed debt cancellation as happened with Germany after the Second World War?

But if we look more closely at the London agreement about the German debt we see that Germany had been in default since 1932. Consequently it was in the interest of the creditors to agree to the write-off of the debt in 1953. On the other hand, if defaulting is based on good and sound reasons and is done to defend the international law and the state's priority obligations, to guarantee human rights of all its inhabitants, then defaulting creates a new correlation of power with the creditors. Their power exists only as long as debt is paid back to them. When one decides to suspend payment, creditors have a problem. It sounds trivial but it is real. John Maynard Keynes said, that if you have a debt of £1,000 to your bank, which you cannot repay, then you have a problem. However, if your debt to your bank is 10 million, which you cannot repay, then this is no longer just your problem. If you suspend payment, it becomes the bank's problem. This is the fact of life and this reality should be used so as to meet human rights.

I do not advocate suspension of debt payment in situations when this is not done in the name of international law and in defense of human rights. However, as shown in the book AAA that we coauthored with Damien Millet, Greece was trapped inside the EU and the Eurozone. I have shown in my works that the Troika gave loans to Greece during the first bailout between 2010 and 2012, demanding that this money be used to repay the French, German, Belgian, Italian and other private banks that had lent money to Greece. The Troika loans were not given to boost the Greek economy to benefit the Greek people. The money given by the Troika to Greece had only one aim: to immediately repay the private banks that were responsible for lending Greece money before 2010 without controlling Greece's capacity to repay. This is something that is very important for European citizens to know and understand. There are many lies, constructed and spread to falsify what really happened in Greece and to present the Greek as lazy, corrupt... We witness this totally unjust stigmatization of Greece.

It is crucial for people to understand that the construction of the EU and of the Eurozone actually aims at the satisfaction of the particular interests of the very few and of a privileged minority in the EU, represented by big, private corporations. They do not aim at a real integration that would be in favor of the people of Europe. We need to be conscious of what the EU and the Eurozone really are because this is the precondition if we wish to make any proposal for a real change of the situation.

But do you see the possibility that the EU and the Eurozone could be reformed and changed, as they are constructed and as they operate today?

With the victory of the neoliberal ideology and policies in the 1980s, the definition of the EU, its framework, and with the elaboration of the new EU treaties, the construction of the EU integration has been totally taken over and defined by the private interests of big corporations and major economies of the EU. However, people at the time were not conscious of this shift. The official discourse did not say that they, the leaders of the EU, were giving priority to satisfy the private interests of the small minority. The official discourse talked about the creation of an immense zone of prosperity, where many jobs would be created, that would be a space of peace and democracy. If only the countries of former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe enter the EU and the Eurozone they will be given a guarantee to have prosperity and peace.

Now people see that this official discourse was a lie and they are ever more conscious of the reality and of what is in fact happening. We could see this in the results of the last European elections, where participation was low while at the same time among those who voted there was a high support for a critical stance towards the EU.

We continue to face the question of how to change this EU and it is a very complex question. However, in some ways the answer is simple. We cannot change the EU from inside the imprisoned EU institutions. These are based on a certain model:

therefore, the European parliament has no real power. The power is given to the Euro-group, to the Commission and to the major powers inside the EU. If Germany, France, Italy and Benelux agree on a position, they will succeed on imposing it on others as well. Therefore, we need a refunding of Europe. We need a government capable to disobey what the Commission is asking it to do, if this implies that the human rights of the people in this country will not be respected and guaranteed.

A change could thus come from a democratic government taking the initiative to say that they want to stay inside the EU or the Eurozone but they do not accept the continuation of the same, undemocratic policies imposed by the European Commission. They should enact and demand respect of their sovereign decisions that would be in favor of respecting the human rights of their population.

Are you disappointed in the new Greek government in this respect?

I still have great expectations of what the Greek government could do. The story continues and we will see what happens in the next months. There might still be a chance that they take a stronger stand with the massive support of citizens across Europe. However, it is clear that this is not easy. It clearly implies confrontation with the current centers of power.

How destructive though are the centers of power inside the EU? The arrogance in February seemed immense. At the same time many warn that default opens up a totally uncharted territory.

There is a fear to take sovereign decision. The fear is based on the fact that nobody knows what the next step will be. All the consequences are not and cannot be known. However, the lesson of history is that when certain opportunities appear one should take the risk. Big changes and progress in the world have been the results of strong and confident decisions.

Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, for example, closed the US banks for ten days to redesign the functioning of the banks and to relaunch the US economy. It took a strong decision and he was not even a leftist. He took this decision because he was confronted with a desperate situation. If at certain times in history this kind of a brave decision is not taken, you lose a historical opportunity. Undoubtedly there is the fear of what will happen if a government takes a strong decision of suspending the repayment of its debt but I am sure that if it has a coherent plan of what it will do, then it can face even such a situation. The first step would be to take control of the banks and guarantee the deposits, then to control capital flow, stop its evasion. This is possible and it has been done already. In March 2013, when the crisis hit Cyprus, provoked also by the policies of the EU and Eurozone leadership, the government in Cyprus decided, with the support of the Eurozone countries, to control the movement of capital. In Iceland since 2008 there have been such controls of capital and it is considered a success story.

Therefore, there are examples in the 20th century and in the last decade of strong decisions taken by governments in Europe and the USA. If we look further afield, examples multiply. In 2007 and 2008 I was the adviser to the Ecuadorian government when they decided to make an audit and suspend the payment of their debt. There is also a story of a great success. The situation of their economy today is good, the level of unemployment is low, living conditions of the population have improved. They had confronted their creditors with good reasons.

One of the aims of my works is to make such examples of successful disobedience, alternatives and resistance more broadly known. They prove that alternatives can and do exist. People who say there are no alternatives are wrong. What is needed is only to be brave enough and able to implement them.

Let's return to your argument that debts should be canceled on the basis of constitutions and human

rights. However, constitutional courts have frequently defended austerity and European fiscal treaties in the name of protecting human rights in the long run. In their interpretation keeping financial markets happy is a precondition for the fulfillment of the state's obligation to meet human rights. How do you respond to such argumentation?

In many countries the constitutional court is controlled by conservative forces. The constitutional court can thus give reasons and arguments for the actions of the executive power while the parliament is similarly under the government's executive control. The situation is similar on the EU level, where the Commission has control over the European Parliament and the member states.

If we again turn to the American experience with the New Deal in the 1930s we see that several decisions taken by Franklin Roosevelt were at first considered unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the USA. When Roosevelt enforced a minimum wage, based on a federal law, the Supreme Court abrogated his decision. Roosevelt however, persisted and for several years struggled against the Supreme Court. In the end, he succeeded in imposing the New Deal thanks also to the great support of the population.

This proves that Supreme and Constitutional Courts can and often give interpretations of the constitution, accepting and confirming some laws, which are in contradiction with the spirit and the letter of the constitution. They submit their decision and adjust their final judgments to what the executive power is asking of them. Therefore the participation and mobilization of the citizens, to create pressure and support the democratically elected government, which wants to change the situation, can make the difference and contribute to the needed change.

If we turn back to Iceland, we can see that between 2008 and 2012 this was exactly what happened. People were mobilized; they stayed on the streets and put the institutions under immense pressure. Only so could they succeed. Today, Iceland remains

the only country that put in jail private bankers following the financial crisis. No other European country did this. It happened because of people's mobilization. Therefore, this combination of peoples' mobilization and democratically elected government, which wants to change the situation and has for this the support of the people, is crucial. Citizens need to remain active and they must truly want to change the situation, otherwise the conservative institutions and powers will only continue with the same conservative, neoliberal and undemocratic policies.

Do you see that this peoples' support and mobilization can still grow or are we already at the point of normalization, with people embracing stability?

I think there is still at a very good momentum. Especially, if we look at the increase in the consciousness of the populations about what is happening. I expressed my disappointment about some actions of the Greek government. However, the majority of Greek people did not have this reaction. They believe that Alexis Tsipras and his government succeeded in imposing a ceasefire with the Eurogroup. The Greek people see this as a first victory. What happens in the next months has not yet been written. We will see... what happens in Greece, in Spain... There is a growing support for the fundamental change of the situation. It will take time, years and it is not easy but I remain confident. There is still a possibility for a positive change.

Translation by Éric Toussaint, in collaboration with Christine Pagnouille

NUCLEAR POWER

Four years after Fukushima, India is flogging a nuclear dead horse

PRAFUL BIDWAI ·

In reality, there was no breakthrough—only sleights-of-hand to substitute administrative memoranda for proper laws enacted after prolonged legislative debate. This trick, meant to please US nuclear suppliers at the expense of India's public, falls foul of Parliament's intent. But it still won't work. Westinghouse and GE, now owned by Japanese capital, are unlikely to sell reactors to India so long as an element of liability exists.

As for the projected capacity tripling, it belongs to an established pattern of extravagant promises and poor performance: if the Department of Atomic Energy's 1967 projection had materialised, India by 2000 would have had 43,500 MW in capacity; it had 2,700 MW! Tripling assumes that 19 reactors would be started and completed in six years, when average global construction time is 10 years. Eight reactors are to be imported, an unlikely prospect given that companies like "nuclear champion" Areva, for which the Jaitapur site is earmarked, are on bankruptcy's verge.

More important than all this is Indian policy-makers' and -shapers' disconnect from reality and obsession with nuclear technology, inherited from Homi Bhabha. Contrary to pet myths, nuclear power is rapidly shrinking worldwide. Its share in global power generation has declined from a peak of 17.6 percent in 1996 to 10.8 percent. Its contribution to the world's commercial primary energy production has also fallen from the 1984 trough of 4.5 percent to a new low (4.4 percent).

The number of nuclear reactors operating worldwide peaked in 2002 at 438. It now stands at 390. [1]. Nuclear has witnessed no major technological

innovation for decades: 170 reactors (44 percent of total) are 30 years old/older. But only 65 new reactors are under construction, four fewer than a year ago. Reactor capital costs have more than doubled over a decade. Operating costs have risen 16 percent in three years in some countries, just as renewable wind-power and solar photovoltaics get cheaper every month.

Fukushima, the world's worst-ever nuclear accident [2], has probably sounded the death-knell of the global nuclear industry. It brutally exposed the unaffordable nature of nuclear risks even in developed societies, and has made atomic power publicly unacceptable everywhere. In 2014, no nuclear reactor generated power in Japan—for the first time since 1963. The Fukushima clean-up will take four decades and cost \$200 billion. No bank or insurance company will back nuclear—unless crony-capitalist governments subsidise it.

India would commit a historic blunder by expanding nuclear power generation, given both its generic and domestic safety record (itself appalling), its high costs—Jaitapur power will cost Rs 15-plus a unit and bankrupt Maharashtra's consumers—and the popular opposition it faces at every site. This last is the greatest barrier to nuclear activities everywhere: it pits the nuclear establishment directly against the public and raises serious questions regarding the democratic content of decision-making about energy, people's needs and their right to veto projects they consider unsafe.

Nuclear has nothing going for it—not when wind and solar energy annually grow worldwide at 25 and 40 percent-plus, when their generation costs fall to those of gas- or coal-based power, and their

modularity and flexibility establish their unparalleled versatility.

EL SALVADOR

Feminists in El Salvador Continue Fight for Justice for Women Imprisoned for Obstetrical Complications

KATHY BOUGHER ·

With the support of the Salvadoran feminist group *La Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto* (Citizen Group for the Decriminalization of Abortion), Guadalupe was granted a pardon and freed from prison in February 2015 after serving more than seven years. They mounted a campaign on April 1, 2014 to gain pardons for 17 women ("Las 17") imprisoned under strikingly similar unjust circumstances. While Guadalupe's release is cause for great personal and political celebration, she was the only one of Las 17 to receive a pardon. The *Agrupación* is asking why and demanding justice for the other 15 still serving sentences of 15-40 years. (Another woman was released because she had completed her sentence.)

The 1997 Salvadoran law banning abortion under all circumstances is one of the most punitive in the world. One of the extreme consequences is a political climate and legal mechanisms which permit prosecutors and judges to convict poor, young women for terms of up to 50 years when they experience obstetrical complications, have unattended births resulting in the death of the neonate, and then seek emergency treatment in public hospitals. Medical personnel accuse them of abortion and turn them over to police. Then charges are amended to aggravated homicide. Against this draconian landscape the *Agrupación*, formed in 2009, works to free women who are unjustly imprisoned on abortion-related charges and to reform the laws banning abortion.

The Salvadoran Supreme Court's decision on Guadalupe's pardon noted "judicial errors." [1] Once the Supreme Court approved her request for a pardon, the matter went to the National Legislature. In a nail-biting vote that yielded just the bare minimum number of votes necessary, the 31 leftist FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional) representatives and eight centrist allies in the Salvadoran legislature voted to grant her pardon. Within weeks President Salvador Sanchez-Ceren signed the pardon and Guadalupe was freed after more than seven years in prison.

The United Nations Human Rights Office called the decision to pardon Guadalupe "ground-breaking." [2] They also urged a review of the legislation banning abortion. Rupert Collville, spokesperson for the UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights, emphasized that several human rights organizations "have regularly expressed serious concern about the total ban and criminalization of abortion in El Salvador." [3]

Systematic pattern of rights violations

The *Agrupación* has always maintained that what happened to Las 17, along with other women accused of and incarcerated for abortion-related charges, comprises part of a systematic pattern of violations of human rights based on misogyny as well as class and social prejudices. Harvard sociologist Jocelyn Viterna and Salvadoran lawyer Santos Guardado published an extensive analysis of the violations of rights in *El Faro Académico*. [4] They described how in the women's trials, prosecutors controlled the narrative in court and organized their version of the story to drive it toward a "logical" conclusion of a guilty verdict. The accused

women did not testify, and their versions of their stories, which expert reports from physicians who reviewed the 17 cases find to be credible, are never heard.

Viterna and Guardado also found that:

- The police who investigated the alleged crimes only gathered evidence that would incriminate the women, and consistently failed to gather evidence that would corroborate the women's story.
- The doctors who treated the women post-partum routinely failed to investigate likely birth complications.
- In some cases [prosecutors] did not present evidence that favored the defendants' innocence, even when they had it in their possession.

They cited the story of Teresa, one of Las 17, a factory worker and single mother. She didn't know she was pregnant until she gave birth in a latrine, passed out, and found herself in the hospital charged with the death of the infant. Viterna and Guardado document numerous contradictions in the medical and legal records. The fetal autopsy says the baby was full-term, but it was never weighed because, the records say, "there was no scale." Teresa's story, which would put the pregnancy at about six months, was never heard in court. Nor were witnesses who could have corroborated her story allowed to testify. The judge told Teresa that it was not reasonable that she did not know she was pregnant, even though during those months Teresa went to two doctors, and neither diagnosed her pregnancy.

The judge relied heavily on a "floating lung test," used as decisive evidence in eight of the 17 women's trials. Forensic medicine expert Dr. Gregory Davis reviewed the cases and emphasized that the test has been known to be highly unreliable for more than one hundred years. [5] At the same time, the judge ignored the government autopsy report's finding that the neonate died from perinatal asphyxia, "a medical condition and not a criminal act," according to Viterna and Guardado. In

Guadalupe's case, Viterna and Guardado noted that after listening to incomplete and contradictory testimony and evidence, the judge provided this description of the unspecified "action" that he alleges Guadalupe took to cause the death of her son:

"In accordance with the evidence obtained in the present case it is determined that the defendant, CARMEN, [Guadalupe], performed an action that affected a legally protected life, given that the defendant actively produced the death of a NEWBORN, who was her son...". [emphasis added]

Abortion rights in El Salvador

El Salvador's twelve-year civil war between the U.S. backed Salvadoran rightwing government and military and the leftist FMLN guerrillas ended in 1992 with the signing of the Peace Accords, and the FMLN became a political party. However, the rightwing ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista) party maintained control of the government, dominating from the last few years of the war until 2009.

The fight for abortion rights in El Salvador has complex roots, tightly interwoven with the profound religious and social stigma around abortion and the reluctance of the traditional male-dominated left to take on the issue. The struggle for abortion rights has been included in the feminist agenda since the early days of the movement in the late 1980s, but not always as an action item. The tremendous social stigma, varying relationships with the left, and differences in visions around strategies play into the political complexities.

In 1997 feminists went to the Legislature to attempt to decriminalize all abortions. [6] At that time abortions were permitted only under three circumstances: when the life or health of the woman was at risk, when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest; and when the fetus had abnormalities incompatible with life outside the uterus. However, rightwing politicians, the Catholic Church and right-to-life groups organized a vociferous opposition to decriminalization and shocked feminists by

managing to tighten the criminal code so that abortion was completely criminalized under all circumstance. The law abolished those three conditions and imposed a penalty for abortion of two to eight years in prison. [7] Additionally, medical personnel who participated in an abortion could be sentenced to six to 12 years in prison.

Then, religious fundamentalism won another round in 1998 when the legislature amended the Constitution to declare that life begins at conception. The FMLN split its vote, with some voting in favor of the constitutional reform, which allowed it to pass.

As Elaine Freedman explained in the Nicaraguan publication *envio* [8], the FMLN feared having a pro-abortion vote used against the party in upcoming elections. The Constitutional change created the mechanism whereby prosecutors could amend abortion charges to aggravated homicide, which carries a prison term of 30-50 years. More recently, when the *Agrupación* asked medical personnel why they reported women to police, several replied "off-the-record" that they felt strongly pressured to do so by prosecutors who had visited public hospitals to remind them of the law.

The vague 1997 law also includes prison terms of two to five years for those who "induced" a woman to have an abortion or who "facilitated" an abortion through economic or other means. Even many feminists feared that this meant that publicly advocating for legal changes could lead to imprisonment. However, the organizing continued over the years, sometimes more covertly than overtly.

Over time Salvadoran feminist organizations and other allies in the social movements have taken on the issue and spoken publicly. There exist diverse opinions within the feminist movement regarding strategies. Some groups favor working toward complete decriminalization right away, rather than starting with the reinstatement of the three conditions that were legal before 1997.

The Importance of Data

Reliable data concerning abortion and the application of the anti-abortion law are hard to come by in a country where the practice is criminalized, miscarriages and stillbirths fall under the umbrella term "abortion," and even saying the word aloud is stigmatized. However, the *Agrupación* took on the task of attempting to quantify and interpret data on abortion-related criminal charges. That meant visiting every courthouse in the country and manually reviewing all cases that might be relevant.

In 2015 the *Agrupación* is in the process of updating the data. According to their 2013 publication, *From the Hospital to the Jail*, during the period 2000-2011,

- 129 women were charged with abortion-related crimes, 49 were convicted, and 26 are serving prison terms—all with convictions for homicide. Most of received prison terms of three years or less, which were usually suspended.

- 68 percent of the women charged with abortion-related crimes are between 18 and 25 years old. What is particularly alarming is that 25 percent of the women are between 18 and 20 years old. Twenty-seven percent are illiterate or have no more than a third-grade education, while 52 percent have no income and the rest have minimum wages jobs. [9]

Understanding that the law has only been applied to poor, young women who rely on public hospitals means understanding that women with the economic means utilize private clinics and hospitals or travel outside the country to receive appropriate medical care.

Prejudices and myths

Just what constitutes the crime of "abortion" is not clearly defined in the statute. Additionally, the term abortion is highly stigmatized in Salvadoran society, and for many even pronouncing the word aloud is shameful. Abortion is synonymous with "assassin" and "baby-killer." The word abortion remains a catch-all to name a broad swath of possible events including miscarriage, stillbirth, precipitous birth,

or other obstetrical complications that result in termination of a pregnancy. The more precise terms and phenomena are not part of the popular lexicon in the society, nor that of most of the medical and legal personnel involved in the women's cases.

Elaine Freedman explained some of the patriarchal myths that feminists associate with criminalizing abortion. "[M]otherhood is women's most important role and therefore, since it is their 'natural' duty, all women should be mothers. Another is that every woman's duty is to sacrifice herself for her children.... Collaterally, a third is that a woman who thinks about herself is 'irresponsible.'" Therefore, says Freedman, feminists perceive anti-abortion politics not as a way to save babies' lives, but as a way to "keep women in their traditional roles." This helps clarify why so many of the judges and prosecutors justified convicting Las 17 by accusing them of not doing everything possible to save the life of the child, even when the woman was in shock or unconscious. [10]

The Case of Beatriz

The horrifying realities in El Salvador gained international attention in 2013 with Beatriz, a young mother with life-threatening illnesses who became pregnant. Her doctors determined that in addition to the medical threat to her life, the fetus was anencephalic (lacking a brain) and would not survive outside uterus. Based on her doctors' advice, Beatriz requested an abortion, which was of course illegal in the country. With the support of the *Agrupación*, she took her case to the Salvadoran Supreme Court, which ruled against her, and then to the Interamerican Human Rights Court, which eventually ruled that the Salvadoran government had the responsibility to take the necessary actions to protect her life and health.

At 26 weeks of pregnancy, doctors performed a procedure to deliver the baby, which lived five hours before dying. Beatriz survived, although her health remains precarious. Beatriz became dinner-table conversation and pushed Salvadorans to talk about a real woman and a real story and to try to

imagine what they would do if they or a family member were Beatriz. Her story helped shift the narrative from the fuzzy fundamentalist fear-mongering to the stark realities Salvadoran women confront. By then the FMLN held the presidency for the first time in history, and feminists pressured President Mauricio Funes to make a statement. At a public event feminists displayed a banner reading, "If Beatriz were your daughter, what would you do?" Funes stated that Beatriz "has the right to decide about her life." [11]

Beatriz's struggle was an uncomfortable one for the government, and most officials stayed silent, with the notable exception of the Ministry of Health. The physicians treating Beatriz and the highly respected Minister of Health at the time, Dr. Maria Isabel Rodriguez, actively advocated on Beatriz's behalf in spite of the fact that the only legal avenue for the *Agrupación* to take the case to the courts was to file suit against those same physicians for not performing an abortion. [12] The major efforts to get justice and save Beatriz's life came largely from the *Agrupación* and not from the government that is charged with protecting the life and health of its citizens.

From Beatriz to Las 17

The campaign for Las 17 has again brought the issue into the public storm, and the political landscape is evolving little by little. A few days after the *Agrupación* filed the pardon requests, the FMLN legislative block sent an official letter to the *Agrupación*, signed by every member, stating their support. Three months later, on July 1, the *Agrupación* convened a large demonstration in front of the National Legislature and attempted to speak directly with legislators. The date marked three months since the filing of the petitions and the end of the time frame legally specified for a response.

Despite requests for appointments two weeks earlier, not one legislator was available. However, in December 2014 Sigfrido Reyes, President of the National Legislature, took the public position that

"the cases of the women should be reviewed, and in some cases pardoned." [13] Then, when the petition reached the Legislative, the FMLN voted unanimously in support, even with legislative elections looming just six weeks later. Those 31 votes, along with 12 other independent votes, provided the bare minimum necessary for passage. The legislative plenary sessions were marked by vicious comments against Guadalupe from ARENA legislators.

The discourse from the right

The Salvadoran right is notoriously conservative, fundamentalist and misogynist, as evidenced by their actions and statements. They control mainstream media, and columnists representing groups such as Si a la Vida, an anti-abortion group, and the Catholic fundamentalist group Opus Dei, have easy access to the opinion pages. In addition, members of Opus Dei and Si a la Vida hold key positions in governmental institutions that make decisions about accused women. [14]

The right-controlled media utilize provocative and hateful rhetoric, highlighting and distorting the most sensationalist details of Las 17. They continually deny that any woman is imprisoned for abortion, and all are heartless assassins of their babies, who were all born alive. While technically none of Las 17 was imprisoned for abortion, all of their convictions grow out of the existence of and misapplication of the anti-abortion law coupled with extreme misogyny.

This writer analyzed examples of this type of inflammatory discourse in the media in RH Reality Check [15]:

"Tragic occurrences do happen, but they are not always the result of a deliberate action. [Rightwing columnists] extract from their proper context particularly lurid autopsy details. The context lacking

is not just textual, but also the social and political contexts in which the women live. The document utilizes passive constructions such as, 'In many cases asphyxia occurred,' conjuring a terrible image of a woman asphyxiating her baby without explaining how asphyxia can occur before and during birth and omitting the distinct possibility that it happened without any criminal action. Medical professionals concur that asphyxia can be the result of complicated, unassisted births, which all of Las 17 experienced. [16] This reflects extreme poverty, not criminal intent."

Moving forward

In March 2015, President Salvador Sanchez-Ceren of the FMLN, called for an end to "machismo" in the country. [17] Although he did not specifically mention abortion, *Agrupación* President Morena Herrera responded to his declaration by calling on the President to assume "public responsibility for the grave situation of violations of human rights, such as that of 15 women whom [the Supreme Court left imprisoned]." [18] Herrera affirmed the position of the *Agrupación*, that the Salvadoran State has the responsibility to correct the errors that have been made and to secure justice for women unjustly convicted and to be sure that the situation does not repeat itself.

However, with longtime partners such as Amnesty International [19], the *Agrupación* also moves forward with plans to explore other national and international strategies for freeing the rest of Las 17 and changing the law. As Guadalupe pointed out in a press conference following her release, "the world is paying attention." [20]

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IRELAND

Water: The straw that broke the camel's back

JOHN McANULTY ·

Quite simply it was the straw that broke the camel's back. It was the final imposition, after years of cuts, charges, job losses and migration, imposed at a time when the Irish government proclaimed an economic recovery to a working class struggling to survive. Yet a limited uptick in economic activity is based partly on the savage cuts in labour costs, partly by cheap money from the European Central Banks and partly on creative accounting by a government facing an election. In reality the programme of austerity will continue until 2054.

The overwhelming success of the austerity has been to make Ireland one of the most unequal societies in the world, as the local kleptocracy concentrate wealth in their hands.

Adding to popular anger was a level of corruption exceptional even by Irish standards. The Irish national pension reserve was raided to install water meters. Denis O'Brien, who became rich through the privatisation of the Irish telecommunications industry, won the contract to fit meters while his newspaper empire attacked water charge protestors. Hundreds of Millions were spent on consultancy fees. In the background was routine corruption that left the water service to decay over decades. In some areas water losses from leaks are over 60% and it was proposed that people be charged for water that was unfit to drink.

A slow rebellion

So what has to be explained is not why the Irish have rebelled, but why it took 6 years to bring about an explosion.

The answers are complex. Industrial struggles and rank and file organization in the trade unions declined sharply with the development of "Social Partnership" in the 1980s. The settlement of the struggle in the North demobilised a layer of left republicans and left as the dominant ideology a form of nationalism that stressed Irish dependence. The main concern of the Irish government since the banking bailout has been to preserve tax subsidies for transnational companies and this policy has gone largely unremarked and unopposed. An extra factor was the lack of social housing. People had to obtain mortgages to have a home, and were persuaded that they had caused the property bubble and that "we" capitalists and workers, were all equally to blame.

In fact there were demonstrations and strikes led by the trade unions, but each demonstration was followed by partnership agreements with government and employers, further austerity and further demoralisation. In fact key union leaders were centrally involved in discussions around the Irish government's decision to guarantee the banking debt. The trade union leadership managed the austerity hand in hand with government and the Troika. If workers voted against they were forced to vote again until they produced the right answer.

The majority of Irish socialists adapted to this environment and supported a Keynesian economic programme and a wealth tax within the narrow confines of the Troika programme.

However demoralisation did not lead to a break with the union leadership, but rather to workers clinging on with greater desperation to traditional organizations.

right2water

For that reason the revolt against water charges came through existing leaderships and was subject to their weaknesses. The first force to react to the gathering storm was the left trade unions, who sat up "right2water".

The unions had the authority to bring together the spontaneous movement of over 100,000 that sparked off the revolt. However they remained within the social partnership structures of the trade unions. It was revealed that they had collaborated in the establishment of Irish water and overseen the transfer of their members from public authority contracts to become employees of Irish water.

For that reason they walked a narrow ground. Their demand was for no charges but not for the abolition of Irish Water. Their only tactic was to petition the government, moving away from street protests when concessions were made and returning when they realized that the mobilization was continuing. They ignored the right wing of the union bureaucracy even when they attacked the mobilizations but joined in right wing condemnations when demonstrators harassed politicians or groups installing water meters.

The contradictory nature of the movement meant that no democratic national structures were built. A loose alliance left the unions with a free hand. The socialist groups accepted this as they themselves had a sectional perspective focusing on elections - the Socialist party staged a silent split to focus on a non-payment campaign. Sinn Féin allied itself to the campaign but its main contribution was to project itself in government, with a promise to repeal water charges.

Carrot and stick

The government strategy has been to try to demobilise the movement through a combination of carrot and stick. . In this case the government response was avoid the immediate use of water meters, promise a low flat charge, offer a bribe to those who registered and offer assurances that water would not be privatised.

The purpose of the changes was to save Irish Water. If it could be preserved as a commercial government company the Troika programme would be maintained and in the long term privatisation would be assured - Irish water is tasked with a €6 billion renovation of infrastructure to be raised in loans. Once in hock to banks and bondholders there will be no turning back.

Alongside the carrot of reduced charges a programme of repression was unleashed by the government. In working-class areas residents came out to confront gangs installing water meters. Local groups would also picket and harass government politicians when they attended events. The government used the Garda to escort the water meter gangs and the courts to serve injunctions on protestors and form a 20 meter exclusion zone around meter installation gangs. The garda then staged a series of dawn raids. Those who had broken injunctions were swiftly jailed.

The arrests included elected representatives of the Socialist Party and the republican group eirigi. The state indicated that the protests could be reclassified as major crimes – blocking a government limo was described as kidnap and unlawful imprisonment!

The only viable response would have been to build a campaign of civil disobedience focusing on disrupting government, judiciary and the police.

A loose network

Unfortunately, despite a significant mobilization when militants were jailed, the movement remains a loose network pursuing different policies. The trade union left have organized a new demonstration, but it remains focused on a strategy of lobbying. The left focus on a non-payment campaign. Both groups focus on electoral intervention.

Of course the campaign should have an electoral intervention. However at issue is the old dilemma facing socialists. Is the campaign to service electoral campaigns or are the elections to be used to build the mobilisations?

Popular discontent has seen a sharp fall in support for government parties and a rise in support for socialist and republican groups. Around a third of the electorate would vote for independent candidates. However much of the discontent is won by populist or right wing groups. A viable electoralist project would need to include Sinn Fein. They are now in crisis over a history of supporting austerity in government in the North of Ireland and the threat of political collapse if they do not agree to more sweeping cuts.

The overwhelming need is for a national conference of the resistance to set up democratic structures and a series of strategic goals. The immediate aim must be to force the closure of Irish water. If it sur-

vives as a commercial company then privatisation will follow.

In a more democratic structure we could interrogate the union leaders and seek to directly approach the majority of workers in Irish water who are in fact seconded from local government contracts and who could close the company tomorrow by returning to their original contracts.

In many ways the Irish working class are now in the mainstream of the European workers' movements. There is now no choice but to fight back. There is a widespread understanding than traditional leaderships have failed. Now the class is experimenting with various forms of resistance, seeking an effective weapon against capitalist oppression.

CATALONIA

Tribulations and quagmires of the independence process

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

In reality, the Catalan political system has imploded under the dual impact of 15M and the rise of the pro-independence movement, causing an unparalleled crisis of the CiU, PSC and PP. A particular political architecture has disappeared and another is in the process of consolidation. The moment of truth, 2015 promises to be a momentous year for the outcome of the prolonged political crisis in the Spanish state and for the Catalan independence process. The succession of electoral consultations will be a test, at the Spanish level, of the ability of the PP and PSOE to withstand the impact of Podemos and, at the Catalan level, to determine the relative strength of Mas and the ERC in the fight for internal hegemony over the independence process, as well as the strength or weakness of the latter.

Throughout this long election cycle, the 27S and the succeeding general elections have condensed popular hopes in Catalonia. For some, all depended on a majority in the key independence plebiscite on the first date. For others, it is the victory of Podemos in the second which opens the door to the future. Clearly, there is a bifurcation of possible futures. But are they simply parallel paths, or is it possible to envisage a convergence?

This is nowadays the strategic debate, surprisingly virtually nonexistent, that must be addressed from any perspective that wants to build a popular majority for change in Catalonia and which facilitates the achievement of democratic scenarios and rupture in the Spanish state as a whole.

The current impasse of the independence process is the result of the weaknesses of its foundational discourse, based on the disconnection of the demand for independence from any substantive social content and specific measures for social improvements for the popular classes. The strategic mistake committed by the Asamblea Nacional Catalana (ANC Catalan National Assembly), and long signaled by the political sectors, like the Procés Constituent or the Candidaturas de Unitat Popular (CUP), has been the construction of a broad majority and a transversal movement of "national unity" without a specific social dimension, considering that the mere demand for "independence" was already enough for an aggregate majority. The approach of "national unity" puts the abstract nation above the concrete, but providing the independence process with a citizen rescue plan does not divide or fragment it -on the contrary, it strengthens it. Catalan society is profoundly divided, torn by reality, by four years of austerity policies and more than three long decades of neoliberalism. There is no possible unity for what is fractured internally if you obviate the causes of failure, and even more if those who must steer unity they are perceived by many citizens as being responsible for the social debacle.

To obviate the immediate social emergencies and uncritically accept the leadership of Artur Mas is what divides and confronts the social and the national, giving oxygen to the Catalan right and leading to apathy toward the pro-sovereignty process among those segments of the people of Catalonia with less political-cultural identification with Catalanism. A unity that artificially tries to eliminate the contradictions of all sorts that permeate Catalan society ends up shooting itself in the foot. The combination of a national demand emptied of

express social dimension and Artur Mas as political head of the independence process has been lethal to any expansion of the latter's social basis beyond its initial momentum.

How would things have been if the slogan of independence of 11S in 2012 had been accompanied by a basic social emergency program? What would it have been like if the "V" of 11S in 2013 had, apart from the demand for independence, expressed the desire for an emergency anti-crisis package? What would have happened if next to the "President, to the polls" of Carme Forcadell there had been a "President, apply a social emergency program!"? Where would we be if the signing of the decree calling the 9N on 27 September 2014 had been accompanied by a battery of basic measures of citizen respect?

The answer is clear: the forces of the left or centre left present in the independence process, such as the ERC or CUP, would have operated in a more favorable context, and all the social and political organizations outside the independence process (from the major trade unions to the alternative social movements), and their social bases, would to a greater or lesser extent have become involved in it. The social support for the process would have been widened in its popular and working class aspect. Of course the operations behind the scenes of the

Catalan financial oligarchy to slow down the sovereignty process would have been even more intense, as would the contradictions that the CDC would have to support. But it would have been very difficult for the latter to climb down and, if so, it would have self-destructed.

The discussion on the enlargement of a popular sovereignty process could appear (erroneously) abstract in the first stage of the process, from the 11S of 2012 up to the 9N of 2014. But the current impasse and, above all, the consolidation of Podemos and Podem make it very specific and tangible. Those who defend only independence (or at least over-determine everything else from this) and are not in sympathy with 15M or the citizen mareas, are forced to confront a quite unequivocal reality: the urgent strategic need to expand the social base of the sovereignty process. This is the challenge that the ANC must openly address if it wants the process to be strengthened.

And, in parallel, those of us situated in the camp of the emancipation of the people at the bottom, in the synthesis between the social and national, in the fight against all kinds of oppression and inequality, face a challenge that, at the same time, points to unprecedented opportunities and a thrilling risk.

BRAZIL

"Neither the 13th nor the 15th represent us"

INSURGENCIA ·

Both dates called by the government and the right are set-backs and represent cul-de-sacs for the working class

The 8 March, International Women's Day, began well, with thousands of women taking to the streets to demand their rights, reaffirm the struggle for equality and denounce the machismo that is deeply rooted in society. These were demonstrations of courage and hope. Very different from what would follow that night, when 8 March came to a sorry end.

In an attempt to capture the moment, President Dilma made a disastrous announcement, whose main aim was to defend the fiscal adjustment already underway and ask the people to show even more patience. A contradiction in itself, because these measures roll back the rights of all the working class, and affect women even more profoundly.

As the president was speaking, saucepans were banged loudly in middle-class neighbourhoods and condos in at least 12 states. Organised on social media, the protest called for her impeachment and shouts of "Dilma Out!" rang from the balconies, some of them quite luxurious, along with much ruder terms and often overtly sexist language. But even if its epicentre was in the upscale neighbourhoods of some regional capitals, it had a political impact and raised expectations ahead of the demonstrations called for the 13 and 15 March.

But this return towards reaction, with a strong dose of class hatred, which is probably what an impeachment would mean, with the PSDB (the main party of the neoliberal right in Brazil) being the one to benefit, does not mean that it is possible to defend the Dilma government. On the contrary, it is increasingly impossible, because that very announce-

ment by Dilma was to defend precisely what has been distancing the government more and more from the working class, youth and women.

The two dates that mark the polarization between government supporters and the right are both cul-de-sacs for the working class. Each represents its own kind of set-back.

The government has undertaken a brutal attack on workers' rights with its neoliberal adjustment measures. It used the increase in electricity and gas prices to make the population pay for the crisis in the existing energy system. It raised interest rates and cut public spending, putting the country on the verge of recession and pushing household budgets to the brink of bankruptcy. And at the same time people see important party leaders and public figures up to their necks in plundering millions of dollars at Petrobras.

On the other hand, the demonstrations in posh districts are strengthening Brazil's traditional right, with strong overtones of class hatred. The move is, moreover a cynical one, because they say nothing about other cases of electoral manipulation, like that of Alckmin in Sao Paulo (Geraldo Alckmin of the PSDB was elected in 2014 for the fourth time as Governor of Sao Paulo state), they bang no pans against the big cuts programme of Governor Beto Richa in Parana state, and they are certainly not arguing for any extension of rights and progressive reforms in the country.

But it is a strategic mistake to imagine that indignation is limited to the elite. A mistake that is only too common among the most alienated government supporters. In fact, there is a process of corrosion underway at the very base of society, driven by a combination of austerity, cuts, price increases for energy and for food, rising interest rates and the

choking off of credit for most people. No government can remain popular with all this going on. And while the government and its defenders underestimate the impact of their unpopular measures, they cede more and more space for the traditional right to win support among broad layers of the population.

The central problem here is this: the socialist left, and all of the left that wants to fight, cannot allow itself to be imprisoned by this polarization.

The political challenge is a strategic one: to build, starting now, a third camp, of political and programmatic opposition from the left, that points towards a different solution for the country, one rooted in the struggle against cuts, in defence of rights, and for popular and structural reforms. We have to

create the conditions for another vision of the country to be able to occupy the streets, one that is not hostage to either the Dilma government's neoliberal adjustment policies, nor to the reactionary alternatives promoted by the right-wing opposition.

Our place is in the streets. Firstly to fight for an end to neoliberal austerity measures – wherever they come from – and to support all social struggles in defence of people's rights; and in the process to raise high a programme of changes and reforms that point to another kind of future for the country. This is the basic minimum that allows us to explain that we will not be taking part in the marches of a reactionary, white elite, but nor will we march to defend a government that has again shown it is simply indefensible.

OBITUARY

Frank Fried (1927-2015)

Frank was attracted to the political views of the Socialist Workers Party in Chicago as a teenager. He joined the SWP in 1944 just before he entered the U.S. Navy. It was not a propitious time to be joining the party. Its leaders, including those who led the famed 1934 Teamsters strike in Minneapolis and the SWP's founder, James P. Cannon, were in the federal prison in Sandstone, MN having been unjustly convicted in 1941 of "violating" the Smith Act.

After the end of World War II and his discharge from the Navy, Frank became an active member of the party's Chicago branch. His mentor was Milt Zaslow (publicly known as Mike Bartell), its organizer, and under Milt's guidance Frank became one of the party's youngest leaders.

Frank and the other party members became active in various progressive struggles in Chicago, including the effort to end segregation at the "White City" amusement park on the city's South Side. They played a central role in the "Hickman case," a long-forgotten struggle that only recently was rescued from the mists of history by Joe Allen in his book *People Wasn't Made to Burn* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

Along with Milt Zaslow, SWP members Leon Despres (later a famous member of the Chicago City County), Mike Myer, Carl Schier, the novelist Willard Motley and the actress Tallulah Bankhead, Frank played a key role in the fight to free James Hickman, an African American who had been convicted of murdering his landlord after Hickman's family had been burned to death in 1947 when his apartment was destroyed in a fire started by the landlord.

Joe Allen begins: "I want you to write about the Hickman case," Frank Fried told me, gripping his cane with one hand and gesturing with the other. 'It was the best thing we ever did and nobody knows about it.'

Frank was indeed right about the central role that the SWP played in the Hickman case, but, characteristically, in the account of the case that he provided to Joe Allen, he underplayed his own role in the struggle to gain Hickman's release.

Between 1947 and 1953, Frank played a role in other activities that the Chicago SWP was involved in. However in the early 1950s he joined a minority current led by Bert Cochran, Harry Braverman, George Clarke and Milt Zaslow that had developed political differences with the leadership and James P. Cannon about strategy and tactics in the trade union movement and the best means of building the party.

In 1954, after several years of intense internal debate, the minority, which became known as the Cochran group (named after its leader Bert Cochran), including Frank, left the SWP. The group founded the magazine *American Socialist* and Frank became an active supporter of the publication.

Music and Political Activism

During this period, Frank was fired from his industrial job at the U.S. Steel Works in Chicago after the FBI pressured his employer to discharge him — a widespread FBI practice against militant socialists in the 1950s. And subsequently, as with other socialist militants, the FBI made it difficult for Frank to obtain another job.

Interested in music, especially folk music, Frank began assisting folk music clubs in Chicago, including the "Gate of Horn," by doing their publicity

work. At first he provided assistance gratis and eventually for a small fee. While involved in such activities in the late 1950s, he acquired an intimate knowledge of the music promotion business.

In the early 1960s he formed a partnership, Triangle Productions, with Fred Fine, a former member of the Communist Party. And when the Beatles first came to the United States in 1963, Frank and Fred organized a concert by them at Comiskey Park.

The concert was an enormous success, exceeding all expectations, and Frank and Fred made a small fortune, which launched Frank's career as a music impresario. Triangle Productions went on to organize concerts for performers such as Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Pete Seeger and Frank Zappa.

Frank became one of the most successful and well-known music promoters in the country. But in defiance of Marx's observation that "being determines consciousness," Frank never lost his commitment to revolutionary socialism.

He maintained contacts with revolutionary socialists who had been members of the Cochran group and with those who had been his comrades in the SWP. He also developed relationships with younger socialists, myself included. I got to know him in 1974 when he lived in Evanston, a few blocks away from where I was living. We had many political discussions that eventually cemented a friendship that would continue for the next 41 years.

It was shortly after his very successful Beatles concert that Frank began sharing the wealth that he had accumulated (and would continue to accumulate) with various socialist and progressive organizations, a process that would last until the end of his life.

One of his initial major financial contributions was to Ed Sadlowski, who ran for president of the United Steelworkers as an integral part of an effort to democratize the Steelworkers union. Over the course of the campaign, Frank developed a close friendship with Sadlowski.

Frank financially supported many other socialist endeavors, including Solidarity after it was founded in 1986, and became a sympathetic supporter of the organization for almost 30 years, eventually joining Solidarity shortly before he died. He also supported the Fourth International and the political work of the late Peter Camejo's Green Party candidacy for Governor of California, and his North Star Network.

During the 1980s, he broadened his role as a music impresario and developed the Rosemont Horizon in a northwest suburb of Chicago as a major venue for music performances and athletic events. Among the performers he brought to the Rosemont Horizon were the Rolling Stones.

He became associated with Madison Square Garden in New York City and eventually became the president of the famous Delta Queen Mississippi River steamboat company in New Orleans.

Preceded in death by his first wife, Francoise Nicolas, and his elder sister, Vivian Medak, Frank is survived not only by his wife Alice, but his children Pascale, Isabelle, Bruno, Troy and Teasha, and many grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

With Frank's passing, we have lost one of the very best of that generation. We salute Frank and the legacy he bequeathed to future generations of socialist militants.

JAPAN

Year-end Snap Election and Political Situation

TSUTOMU TERAMOTO ·

TERAMOTO Tsutomu

The election was called after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe abruptly decided to dissolve the House of Representatives in order to outflank the opposition parties and secure the absolute majority for four more years. DP, the main opposition party, was still in a deep crisis after its catastrophic failure during 2009 – 2012 when it was the ruling party. Other opposition parties were also hit by internal crisis and splits.

The table below shows the number of seats won by each party.

The success of LDP represents a real danger of further rightist turn and destruction of people's rights and livings. Now that LDP secured four years of its control over the parliament, they will redouble their efforts to clear off what they call "post-war regime" and revise the constitution.

In the election campaign, the ruling coalition systematically avoided debates over controversial issues like "national security", U.S. bases in Okinawa, nuclear power plants, TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement), and the revision of the Constitution. In fact, because of the total capitulation of the majority of the Democratic Party over these issues, only the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party challenged the ruling coalition over these issues.

LDP focused on the "success" or the "progress" of the dubious economic policy called "Abenomics". Although the economic situation were getting worse, most of the people had no expectation for changes. Thus the voter turnout was only 52.6%, the lowest in the postwar period.

Criticism against the policy of the coalition government was expressed mainly in two ways:

1) The Communist Party increased the number of votes and seats dramatically. CP increased its seats from 8 to 21.

2) In all of the 4 districts in Okinawa, voters supported candidates who rejected the plan to build a new U.S. base in Henoko beach area.

In order to objectively analyze the situation represented by the result of the 2014 election, we have to look into the behavior of voters carefully. The House of Representatives in Japan is composed of 295 seats representing single-seat electoral districts and 180 seats elected from 11 proportional-representation electoral districts. Each voter have two votes – one for a candidate for single-seat district and one for a political party (or one of the candidates for the political party) for proportional-representation electoral districts. The number of seats doesn't necessary represent the support for the parties. Single-seat districts are usually fought among only a few candidates. The number of votes for proportional-representation districts gives more objective and accurate picture of the political choices of voters.

Changes in political landscape from 2012 to 2014

The table below summarizes the result of three recent national elections - House of Representatives in December 2012, House of Councilors in July 2013 and House of Representatives in December 2014 - in terms of the number of votes for proportional-representation districts. Some parties were divided or absorbed into other parties during the period. The categories of the parties shown in the left-most column are based on the author's perception.

There are many political parties, only six of them ran for proportional-representation districts in all

of the three elections. The voting rates for 2013 and 2014 were almost the same.

We can observe some interesting trends from this table:

- 1) The combined total of the votes for "Liberal/Mid Left" and "Left" are stable – at around 8 million.
- 2) Failure of the far-rights to increase their presence in the parliaments.
- 3) The success of LDP is not so "overwhelming".
- 4) Collapse of the "third pole".

Forces of "Liberal/Mid Left" and "Left"

- 1) The combined total of the votes for "Liberal/Mid Left" and "Left" are stable – at around 8 million.

The definitions of "liberal/mid left" and "left" are controversial. In the context of the current political dynamics, the attitude on issues like the revision of the Constitution, nuclear power plants, environment, TPP and so on can be a touchstone to determine the orientation of political parties. So, in this analysis, the parties which oppose the government's policy on these issues are included in "liberal/mid left" and "left".

In the general election of 2012, three parties – Tomorrow Party ("Mirai"), SP and CP – represented this group and got 8.5 million votes in all. In the election for House of Councilors, five parties – People's Life Party ("Seikatsu"), Green Wind, Green Party, SP and CP got 8.2 million votes in all. In the general election of 2014, three parties – People's Life Party, SP and CP got 8.4 million votes in all.

Apparently, the combined total of the votes for liberal/mid left and left is always around 8 million regardless of the voting rate. These voters seem to have strong concerns over the aggressive policies of Abe and LDP toward the revision of Constitution, restart of the operation of nuclear power plants and so on. They are ready to express their concerns in their voting.

Further analysis of the dynamics among this support base of liberal/mid left and left is needed in order to "intervene" politically.

As regards Democratic Party, the score for 2014 election was at the same level as for 2012 if put together with the votes for New Party - The Earth ("Daichi") which allied with DP in 2014 election. Although DP is the biggest opposition party, it lacks consistent policies on critical issues because of its internal contradictions. Some of the "liberal" components of the party got out of the party and formed Tomorrow Party in 2012, and then People's Life Party in 2013. In addition, even their critical support base in trade unions has been largely undermined.

Failure of the far-right to increase their presence in the parliament

Innovation (Ishin) Party split into two groups – Osaka group led by Toru Hashimoto (Mayor of Osaka City) and a group around Shintaro Ishihara (former Governor of Tokyo). Later, Osaka group absorbed a group which came from Everyone's Party and maintained the third position with 41 seats. I will discuss the implication of this absorption later. On the other hand, Ishihara's group reorganized itself into an ultra-nationalist party, Next Generation Party.

Next Generation Party was said to be very popular among young people. Their new hero, Toshio Tamogami, former Chief of Staff at the Self Defense Forces, boast of his popularity on internet. His aggressive and anachronistic remarks over internet echo the frustration and aggressiveness among people. At the election for Governor of Tokyo last year, Tamogami got 600,000 votes.

Next Generation Party intended to establish an axis of ultra-nationalists to the right of LDP in order to pull LDP further into this direction. However, their challenge proved to be a total failure. They had 20 seats before the election but got only 2 seats. In fact, they were the biggest loser.

According to a conservative author, Tsunehira Furuya, who has been writing about young people's drift to the right, "although not all the supporters of Next Generation Party accept discriminatory remarks and hate speech by far-rights, it is obvious that those who are supportive for discriminatory remarks and hate speech actively supported the party in the election campaign". He pointed out that the failure of this party signifies that voters rejected the presence of forces to the right of LDP.

It is too early to predict the dynamism of far-right political forces. But, at this moment, some kind of balance seems to be working to contain the excessive antagonism in the society and in the region.

LDP - "overwhelming victory without fever"

The success of LDP is not so "overwhelming"

Although LDP got nearly two-thirds of seats, their victory was said to be "overwhelming victory without fever". According to an opinion poll by Yomiuri Shinbun (a conservative daily newspaper) just after the election, the cabinet support rate was 51%, 2%'s increase from the rate at just before the election. Usually, this rate would jump up after such an overwhelming victory. As regards the support rate for LDP, it decreased to 36% (5%'s decrease).

According to the same poll, in response to the question "what do you think was the reason for the victory of LDP?", 65% of responders chose "because LDP is better than other parties" (even among supporters of LDP, 64% chose it), while 14% chose "because there was high expectation to Prime Minister Abe" and only 10% chose "because its economic policy was acknowledged". In other words, only few people found positive reasons for the victory of LDP.

The findings of this poll correspond with the observation of Furuya. He says, "the verdict of Japanese people through voting was that they don't fully support Abe government nor categorically oppose it. But they would reject the excess. Two years are too short to have a definite estimation, so they gave him more time."

In this regard, it is important to notice that many of conservative leaders including high-rank officials have been expressing their concern over the right-wing shift under Abe government and increasing tensions with China, Korea and even U.S. government.

Contradictory results for the "third pole" parties

There have been a lot of talks about the "third pole" political forces. They were expected to refresh the electoral scene after the much heralded "two-party system" proved to be nonfunctional. Innovation Party and Everyone's Party, which presented themselves as the champion of the third pole, got 17.5 million votes altogether in 2012 and 11.1million votes in 2013. After a series of regrouping in 2014, these forces, which are now represented by Innovation Party and New Generation Party, got 9.8 million votes in 2014. In other words, they lost half of their votes in these two years.

As regards the third pole, we have to look at both the trend in the number of votes and the changes in their political orientation. The question is whether there are significant changes in the political orientation of Innovation Party after its split with Ishihara's group (now, Next Generation Party) and fusion with a group of former Everyone's Party.

According to the questionnaire by Mainich Shinbun, a moderate daily newspaper, the new MPs of Innovation Party are divided evenly over their attitude on the revision of the Article 9 of the Constitution (renunciation of war). It is quite interesting because most of the MPs of this party were proponents of the revision after the election of 2012.

Besides these four observations based on the overall analysis of the number of votes, we can notice some interesting development.

Effect on the time schedule for the Revision of Constitution

Prime Minister Abe, a grandson of Nobusuke Kishi, who was a controversial prime minister in late

1950s to early 1960s, has an extraordinary desire to revise the Constitution during his tenure. For this personal desire, he intended to secure enough seats (two-thirds majority in both houses) for four more years by outflanking opposition parties. In addition, he intended to secure potential allies within the third pole forces so that his unreliable ally, Komei Party, as well as moderates within LDP cannot obstruct his way.

The result was not so favorable to him. According to the same questionnaire by Mainichi, the percentage of MPs who support the revision of Article 9 decreased from 72% to 57% (on the other hand, the percentage of MPs who support the "rights to collective self-defense is 62%, while 23% of MPs oppose it).

Here is an interesting comment on the result of the election on Sankei Shinbun, a daily newspaper featuring right-wing commentators and editors. It deplores, "Although LDP won in the election, it tasted sour for Prime Minister Abe. (...) What Abe wanted in the year-end snap election were not only a victory for LDP but consolidation of the forces of revising Constitution as a whole and further marginalization of the pro-Constitution forces. Although the coalition secured the two-thirds majority, the revision of Constitution seems to have become farther. Now the question is how to reconsolidate the forces of revising Constitution".

Defeat of LDP in Okinawa

Despite the maneuver of avoiding the debates over controversial issues in the election, the issue of U.S. bases was the focal point in Okinawa. As the result, in all of the 4 districts in Okinawa, LDP was defeated. This shows the degree of anger of the people in Okinawa against the government which has been ignoring the clear will of the people expressed in a series of elections including the recent election of Governor in November 2014. Even conservative forces rejected the capitulation of the former Governor over the building of a new U.S. base in Henoko district. A coalition was formed among almost all political forces in Okinawa from CP to local

leaders of LDP. This coalition is quite important because it is based on the ongoing movements of resistance which have broad mass base in the local society.

After the election, the government renewed its attack on the movement in Okinawa and the confrontation in Henoko is now the focal point of the struggle against the aggressive policy under Abe government.

The success of a broad coalition in Okinawa encouraged progressive people in the whole country. We have to discuss what we can learn from the experience of the struggle in Okinawa and whether it is possible to apply this "model" to other part of the country.

Innovation (Ishin) Party still dominant in Osaka

The result in Osaka also contradicts with the general trend. If we focus on the results for proportional-representation electoral districts, Innovation Party of Mayor Hashimoto is still dominant. As regards 19 single-seat electoral districts in Osaka, LDP prevailed.

The number of votes for Innovation Party in Osaka Prefecture was 1.46 mil, 1.05 mil and 1.14 mil for 2012, 2013, 2014 respectively. Adding the votes for Everyone's Party in 2012 and 2013, and Next Generation Party in 2014, the number was 1.69 mil, 1.25 mil and 1.22 mil., respectively.

As regards the opposition parties in both City and Prefectural councils, the number of votes are as follows,

In other words, there were not significant changes between 2013 and 2014 (voting rates were also around the same level) for all the parties.

If we compare the result of 2014 with that of 2012, we can see some changes.

- Innovation Party (plus Everyone's Party or Next Generation Party) lost 470,000 votes in these two years.

- DP lost 80,000 votes. This is partly because DP could not run for 14 single-seat electoral districts in 2014. In addition, local governmental workers were banned to participate election campaign by bylaws introduced by Innovation Party. In the past elections, they provided resources to candidates of DP.
- Only CP increased the number of votes. An increase of 130,000 votes.
- The votes for LDP as well as Komei Party kept the same level despite the difference in voting rates.

Referendum on Osaka metropolis plan – unprecedented battle in disorder

It is obvious that Innovation Party has lost the momentum. After they won elections for Governor and Mayor of Osaka Prefecture and Osaka City, respectively, in November 2011 and made a breakthrough at the general election in 2012, of that year, conflicts within the party, increasing criticism over its ignorance of democratic processes, a series of scandals by hand-picked administrators of wards and public schools, and aggressive remarks over war-time sex slave by its leader, Hashimoto, undermined the party's support base. "Osaka metropolis plan", which has been the flagship program of Hashimoto, faces difficulty after the party's defeat in the election of Mayor of Sakai City in 2013. Both prefectural council and city council rejected the master plan for Osaka Metropolis.

"Osaka metropolis plan" is, in itself, a neo-liberalist initiative to promote competitive ability of Osaka through big projects like casino, linear motor train, advanced medical treatment and so on. In order to secure financial resources for these projects, a series of privatization and reduction of public services are planned. Osaka city will be divided into five special wards which have very limited power.

In the prefectural council and city council, all the opposition parties – LDP, Komei, DP and CP – oppose this plan but Innovation Party has been trying to bypass the resistance in the councils by calling for a referendum over this issue.

The result of the general election encouraged Innovation Party because the party managed to maintain nearly as many seats as it had before the election. Especially, the fact that Innovation Party is still the most popular party in Osaka brought about ripple effects on the LDP-Komei coalition. Abe wants to coopt Hashimoto as his potential ally in his drive for revising constitution. On the other hand, MPs of Innovation Party in Tokyo are talking of allying with DP. Komei Party is in dismay. It is said that Soka Gakkai, a religious organization which backs Komei Party, put pressure on the Osaka Headquarter of the party to support the referendum called by Hashimoto. The government confirmed that it will fully cooperate Hashimoto in facilitating the "Osaka metropolis plan" if he wins the referendum.

Grassroots resistance to Hashimoto and Innovation Party has been developing and efforts to unite the forces against the "Osaka metropolis plan" have been increasing.

The referendum to be held on May 17 will be an unprecedented battle beyond party lines. Like the continuous struggle in Okinawa, broad and united struggle is needed. It is not a choice between LP-Komei coalition and Innovation Party, What is needed is a united struggle to oppose both Abe and Hashimoto.

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Translated and supplemented by Yoshihide Kitahata.

SPANISH STATE

"What we want to socialize is the possibility that we are all happy"

MIGUEL URBÁN CRESPO ·

Miguel Urban has participated in Podemos from the beginning of its history, but has never clung to the official line of the party. Number seven on the Podemos list for the European elections, he says he feels uncomfortable when ranked as a critic, but it is certain that he has defended until the end a political and fundamentally organizational model different from that which Podemos adopted at its constituent assembly in October 2014 by an overwhelming majority of votes. The text included the prohibition of dual organizational membership, which prevented Miguel Urban from standing for the leadership of Podemos until this week, when the other organization in which he is active, Izquierda Anticapitalista, decided that it would no longer be a political party, but a movement under the name Anticapitalista. With this obstacle overcome, the candidate for the post of secretary general for the Community of Madrid with the list Podemos Ganar Madrid, made up of 32 members with a certain influence in the organization, faces more than three weeks of campaigning against Luis Alegre, a candidate very close to Pablo Iglesias. [1].

Why has there been no convergence with Luis Alegre and his team?

You would have to ask them. There never is convergence if the two forces do not want it, that is obvious, but some have more responsibilities than others. We wanted it, and we have demonstrated this,

as Luis Alegre recognized himself in several interviews. All our meetings have been open, whoever wanted could participate. But, in addition, we expressly invited them. We have begun to speak with them on January 4, 2015, and we have negotiated with Luis Alegre when we did not know yet that he was going to be the candidate. They came to the meeting of January 11 and told us that they were interested. In fact, it is curious because the people that we had proposed on that day then received calls from them. Not only did they come, but they noted the names that we proposed for the list.

But they did not give you their reasons for refusing this convergence?

They have not given their reasons. They came to the meeting and then there was silence. We have launched appeals and we have shown goodwill. But, on their side there has not been this goodwill and it is they who should provide explanations. They also said they wanted to have a list with those who are in agreement with the documents that were voted for at the Si Se Puede meeting in October 2014.

Does it bother you being ranked among the critics?

No. I am critical, but not of Podemos, I am against the policies of the PP and Ignacio Gonzalez, and I believe that Luis Alegre is also.

But you have also been critical of the Podemos formation?

Rather than being critical, I am positive. One thing does not preclude the other. Rather than criticize the other model, I would say that I have proposed one which seems to me better. When it is the first which has been chosen by vote, I have accepted it, as have between 90% and 100% of Podemos mem-

bers. When they say that I am critical, I would answer yes, but of the policies of the current government of the Community of Madrid, and not of Podemos; among other things because we must let them prove it in practice.

Is there a concentration of power in a specific sector of Podemos?

I believe that there is a concentration of functions which seems absurd given the quantity of persons of value that there are within Podemos. Absurd and not very healthy. If Luis Alegre is elected secretary general of Podemos Madrid, I think he will hold about eight positions within the formation.

What differentiates your project from that of Luis Alegre?

I do not know, I told you a moment ago. We will have to see what he proposes, but I do not think that there will be a lot of differences. The only thing I know from day to day is that we have done everything publicly, in a transparent way. They have been able to see our political and organizational documents. They could propose amendments and participate in the drafting of these documents. I do not know the text that they are preparing, I do not know who prepared it or how they have done it, or even if they are going to submit under the name of Claro Que Podemos, although everything indicates that this is what they are going to do. In any event, we are moving in a similar framework, a more or less common way of doing things, although perhaps we should pay more attention to some things.

Which?

Rank and file participation is fundamental for us, as is the participation of organized civil society and social movements, within the specific structure of Podemos, but without having to integrate into it. I think that is a question of respect for the social movements and therefore an element of difference. On another point, I am adventurous perhaps, but we give a lot of importance to advancing programmatic proposals for Madrid. We want to obtain a regional parliament which, after the election, works

immediately to bring down Ignacio Gonzales with clear proposals and throughout the next three weeks, we are going to move in this direction.

Does your list reflect more the left within Podemos?

No, because we are all involved in Podemos. I am on the left, but I agree with the position that exists in Podemos according to which we are not interested to talk so much of left and right because that would lock us into a political space which does not correspond to the social majorities who are suffering from the crisis. By this I do not mean that we are embarking on a journey to the centre, or that the social majorities are in the centre: there are political proposals at the centre of the political debate. We want restructuring of the debt to be at the centre of the political debate because this will be the only way to get out of the crisis. Joseph Stiglitz himself has said this, a Nobel Prize Laureate for Economics who is not exactly on the left. Thomas Piketty also says this. That means that our proposals are not only realistic, but also essential to emerge from the crisis.

How does the Podemos of today differ from the organization that you wish to build?

I have been involved in the construction of an alternative organizational model which clearly establishes my position and I think that all this must pass the test of practice. The majority of people are not in agreement with the complete lists (*Listas planchas*, that is, lists that have as many names as there are positions to be filled). This is seen in Plaza Podemos or in the fact that many lists of Claro Podemos have not been completed, as has happened in Murcia, in Malaga and Seville. I am against complete lists with a list template already filled in because this eliminates plurality within the Citizen's Council. In Barcelona, all the lists that did not emanate from Claro Que Podemos obtained 49% of the votes, but because of the majority they had not a single seat on the Council. This seems to me to be a little schizophrenic. I think it will be nec-

essary to revise this in the next national assembly, because it is vital to respect plurality.

Do you see chances of winning? If so, will you be presenting your candidacy in the primaries to select the Podemos candidate for the elections in the Community of Madrid?

I believe that we have every chance of winning and people see it, because here it is possible to follow the debate in a public manner. I do not want to beat Luis Alegre, but Ignacio Gonzalez, and if I am the secretary general, the first thing I will do is see how I could integrate Luis Alegre and his team to bring down Ignacio Gonzales. But I have not yet taken any decision about the regional elections.

There have been three successive PP leaders at the head of the Community of Madrid with their grandiose projects and their privatization of public health - where to begin?

The first thing we will do is talk with the civil society and the social movements which have withstood the various neo-liberal policies applied here, in order to know what emergency program is needed for the first 100 days of government. There will be a proposal to develop the program which we will present at the elections to unseat the mafia of the PP and Ignacio Gonzalez. We have a proposal regarding a citizen rescue (as against the "rescue" of the banks] and throughout the campaign we will have the opportunity to be even more concrete. We will speak of realities such as hidden privatizations and those who have been only too visible. In any event, there are the national bodies and those of the region, but I believe that we will win the elections, both in Madrid and at the level of the Spanish state, which will allow us to develop, little by little, the policies that we are proposing. We must defend what we consider as something more than public services, what we can consider as common rights, such as water.

The autonomous community must also have the competence to fight energy poverty for the people of Madrid. We can no longer count the number of people who can afford neither electricity nor heat-

ing. We must encourage more the development of a productive fabric different from that we have known it up to today, through a green economy, which creates more jobs and is more profitable from an economic point of view. We have to finish with the brutal wage differentiation that we are experiencing in the Community of Madrid, the worst in all the country. 52% of the population of the capital earns less than 900 Euros per month. It is barbaric and we must find solutions. Sometimes, I am told that in Podemos we want to nationalize and socialize. But what we want to socialize is the possibility that we are all happy and this is not without importance. For this, it is necessary to settle a series of essential material questions.

What about the air? The pollution measurements in January in Madrid have triggered all the alarms

There are two questions here, that of the productive system and the system of transport. Madrid does not have only three million inhabitants because there are a lot more people who use the transport system of Madrid than those who live there. In reality, it is more than double. In the planning of Madrid private transportation has been promoted to the detriment of public transport. The M30 motorway is an example. We must address these issues through a reflection and a collective participation. There is a need to develop public transport, it is fundamental. See how the metro has degraded, because the municipal councillors never use it.

And how do you propose to redistribute wealth?

There are studies that show that in 150 years the income scale in Madrid has not changed, nor its geographical distribution in the city. This also applies to the entire Community of Madrid. It isn't the same thing to live in Móstoles, in Pozuelo or in Las Rozas, there are major differences. The greatest increase in income in the east of Madrid has occurred in Rivas-Vaciamadrid, one of the six cities of the Community where the per capita income is the highest. This demonstrates that the public policy

that is applied, in this case that of Izquierda Unida, also has a social influence.

The public policies that Izquierda Unida has applied in the Rivas municipality so are positive?

There have been some positive elements and negative elements. Are there more positive elements than negative? Of course, if we are talking about the PP you find more negative elements than positive in its management.

It would be necessary to analyze the whole of the policies that have been applied over the last fifteen years, which is a big task. For example, I believe that the policy on public housing in Rivas was very interesting, because this is the Spanish municipality which has built the most public social housing, in absolute figures, not in relative figures. But it has also privatized the public housing enterprise which is now bankrupt, which seems to me to be bad. I believe that in Rivas there are a lot of things that can be improved, but this does not detract from that was very good.

Returning to Podemos, you are number seven on the party list for the European elections. Will you sit this year?

I do not know, it will not depend on me. I do not know if I should go to Brussels as a European member.

At the time Pablo Iglesias, Teresa Rodriguez or Pablo Echenique return, it will be your turn to sit. Has the leadership of the party said anything to you about this?

Nobody has said anything to me.

If you are offered the chance to sit in the European Parliament and you must choose: Madrid or Brussels?

I will speak first with Pablo Iglesias to see where he thinks I am the most useful. I have not thought about it yet, I will have to think about this with my comrades of my party.

Madrid is one of the key locations for Podemos, and as Iglesias pointed out on Saturday Andalusia is another. How will the early elections there affect Podemos's schedule?

First we will have to see if they finally take place or not. Anyway, Teresa Rodriguez has been saying for three months that we are ready with the best list and the best project to transform Andalusia when the time comes. We will be ready.

MEXICO

Priests fill the political void on the left

DAN LA BOTZ ·

The Catholic Church was from the 1500s to the mid-twentieth century among the most reactionary forces in Mexico, always allied with the landlords and the government. There were famous exceptions, such as Father Miguel Hidalgo y Castillo and Father José Manuel Morelos y Robles, both of whom led the radical wing of the Mexican Independence movement of the early 1800s, still by and large the Church and the priests were arch-reactionaries. But after John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s, some Mexican prelates and priests moved to the left, embracing not only church reform but also the Theology of Liberation. Today one finds Bishop Raúl Vera calling for overturning and replacing the Mexican government with a new democratic government to be built from the grassroots up.

One might expect such demands to come from the left—and sometimes one does—but the largest left party, National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, is focused on winning elections and raising him to the presidency in 2018, and while it has criticized presidential corruption in the "white house" affair, has not attempted to lead the most recent wave of protests over the killing and kidnapping of the Ayotzinapa Teachers College Students on September 26. Though small left political parties, clandestine guerrilla groups, and armed self-defense forces appear to abound in Mexico, none of them has the credibility or the mass following to put itself forward as the leader in the current prolonged political crisis. The National Coordinating Committee (la CNTE) of the Mexican Teachers

Union (el SNTE), strong in the southern and western states, has played some role in organizing a mass opposition to government policies, but it is not a political party capable of putting forward a genuine political alternative. Many Mexicans, especially young people, don't believe in Congress, don't believe in the election authorities [1], simply do not trust any political party [2]. So, now the Catholic Church has taken up the task of social and political criticism as well as the proposal of alternatives.

Padre Goyo

Each of the Catholic priests who have taken on the role of defender of the people has his own political roles and has carved out his own political space. The nearly 50-year old Padre Gregorio López [3], better known as Padre Goyo, heads a parish in Apatzingán, Michoacán, a territory controlled by the Knights Templar drug cartel. (He is not to be confused with another Padre Padre Goyo, Gregorio López Gorostieta [4], who was found murdered, presumably by one of the cartels in the town of Tlapehuala, Guerrero on December 26, 2014.) Padre Goyo, who at home wears both a clerical collar and a bullet proof vest, has become famous in Mexico for fingering drug cartel figures to the Mexican police, among them the mayor of Apatzingán who was subsequently removed from office. An erstwhile defender of the region's armed self-defense organizations and of their most prominent leader, Dr. José Manuel Mireles Valverde the community of Tepalcatepec, Goyo also criticizes other self-defense organizations that he believes are fronts for the cartels.

Goyo has also created the Citizens Council Responsible for Promoting a Healthy Fabric of the Social Order or CCRISTOS, made up of local businesspeople and professionals; with that group and

the Federal Police has carried out raids on Knights Templar center in Apatzingán. His method had been to organize the middle class and to seek an alliance with the government and the police authorities. His flamboyant behavior and outspoken manner led the Church to send him to Rome where he is supposed to have met with the Pope who reportedly set limits to his activities, though he continues to be kept at arm's length by Mexican church authorities.

Padre Goyo recently traveled to the United States speaking in Mexican communities from Los Angeles to Chicago to New York. When I heard him speak in Queens, a tireless if sometimes rambling speaker whose discourse was filled with anecdotes about the drug lords' many murder victims and tales of his own struggle for justice; he lashed out against the cartels, promoted his own strategy of organizing middle class reform organizations such as CCRISTOS, and insisted that people had to demand that the political authorities and the police do their job and end corruption. He denied that he had sold out the movement or Dr. Mireles while meeting with the Mexican Minister of the Interior, presenting himself as a necessary broker between society and government. Goyo ended his talk by explaining that he was heading off to South America to speak with prominent leaders, seeking to join forces with others fighting against such violence.

Padre Solalinde

Altogether different is Padre Alejanro Solalinde [5], a 69-year old priest with a calm manner who runs the Brothers on the Road migrant shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, and who has become a leading human rights spokesperson in the last few years. While still a seminarian in the Carmelite order [6], Solalinde and a group of fellow students left the order over ideological differences and disappointment in their education. Solalinde went off to earn bachelor's degrees in history and another psychology as well as a master's in family therapy at the Ecclesiastical Studies Institute of Higher Learning. He subsequently spent 30 years as a parish priest

before being asked by the Mexican Bishops' Council to undertake work as the pastor for migrants in the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero. Now a monsignor, he has been awarded the prize for Peace and Democracy and the Pagés Llergo prize for Democracy and Human Rights. He left Mexico in 2012 because of death threats, but subsequently returned to continue his work.

Thoroughly disgusted with the Mexican authorities, Padre Solalinde recently said [7], "Peña Nieto, you should know that your government has reached the point that it is only a question of time, before we carry out a peaceful change, we are going to do what you and the three levels of government—and especially the legislators who represent no one—have failed to do." In the struggle for peaceful change in Mexico, Monsignor Solalinde has been cooperating with Bishop Raúl Vera López in working to bring about a Citizens Constituent Assembly.

Bishop Raúl Vera López

Bishop Raúl Vera López [8], today organizing to replace the Mexican government with a better one, has had a distinguished career. Born in 1945, he studied chemistry at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and after graduating in 1968 went off to join the Dominican order, taking his vows in León, Guanajuato in November 1969. From there he went to Bologna, Italy to study theology, later graduating summa cum laude with a degree in theology from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He was ordained in the priesthood in June of 1975 by Pope Paul VI. He served in the most important leadership councils of the Dominican order in Mexico until he was named bishop by John Paul II, serving for a while as auxiliary bishop to Bishop Samuel Ruiz García in Chiapas during the Mexican government's peace talks with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in 1995.

In 2000 he became the Bishop of the city of Saltillo in the State of Coahuila on the U.S.-Mexican border where he put much of his emphasis on human rights work. He has spoken out frequently on the

situation of the state's miners, as well as that of other workers, and established the Border with Justice project to deal with the many human rights issues on the Coahuila-Texas border. He also established the Fray Juan de Larios Human Rights Center to monitor and to denounce human rights problems in the region. He has won many awards for his work and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Now he has taken on the struggle to create a new government in Mexico.

Vera has called for a Citizens Constituent Assembly. A constituent congress is the term used for a national representative assembly that undertakes to create a new government and to write a new constitution. The two most famous such assemblies, also called constituent congresses or constitutional conventions, were the American Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787 following the War of Independence and the National Constituent Assembly of France created at the time of the revolution of 1789. Mexico has had several constitutions and governments created over the years [9], the most recent adopted in 1917 in the midst of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920. While that constitution was in many respects one of the most democratic in the world at the time—at least in theory—the government that it established evolved into an authoritarian one-party state, the rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that held power from 1928 to 2000, followed by a brief conservative government interregnum and the a return to the rule of the PRI, which is where we are today.

At the time of the Chiapas Rebellion of January 1, 1994, the EZLN [10] , Twenty Years Since the Chiapas Rebellion: The Zapatistas, Their Politics, and Their Impact.] also called for a constituent assembly and in August of that year held a so-called National Democratic Convention in the jungle, though it was neither really a convention or democratic. While left parties have also suggested a constituent assembly, none of them has the authority of Bishop Vera whose recent call has eclipsed the proposals of the far left.

Taking advantage of the February 5 anniversary of the adoption of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, Vera and his supporters, many of them leading advocates of human rights in Mexico, presented their Citizens' and Peoples' Constituent Assembly project to the public [11]. Speaking at the Fray Angélico University Cultural Center near the UNAM in Mexico City, Vera argued that the country's executive, legislative, and judicial branches had "usurped power," and he called upon the Mexican people to organize and take it back. The group also published a manifesto [12] (see translation below), together with a similar effort called the National Popular Convention [13], declaring that they were not any sort of political vanguard but rather that it, "It will be the people of Mexico who together, free and conscious, will achieve the transformation of our country."

February 18, 2015

New Politics

ECOLOGY

Jobs, Ecology, and Survival

LARS HENRIKSSON ·

I don't have any great success story to present, just a few thoughts about solving the old contradiction between jobs and the environment, in the special case of the auto industry, which I came up with as we were facing the dual crisis of economy and ecology.

It began in 2008, the year after Al Gore and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and climate change had been a worldwide top story. But with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and the auto industry in free fall, the climate crisis quickly disappeared from the general discussion and even more so among us who work in the auto industry.

In the debate about the crisis ridden auto industry, two positions crystallized:

"Let it die!" Represented by the remnant of true believers of the invisible hand and creative destruction — a rapidly shrinking flock at the time.

"Support the industry!" Unions, Social Democrats, many governments — and naturally, the industry itself. They advocated subsidies of various kinds, from "Cash for clunkers" to the involuntary quasi-nationalization of GM and Chrysler. (And of course, sacrifices from us who work in the industry.)

Of course the "Let it die" position — notoriously articulated in the United States by Mitt Romney — was no alternative for us in the auto industry. It would have huge social implications in an economy where unemployment was rocketing, and especially in a auto dependent city like Gothenburg.

It would also be an enormous social waste. The auto industry is not just some buildings, robots and assembly lines. It's first and foremost an organization of people, who together make up an industrial

machine built and perfected for nearly 100 years. If you take it apart it's no more an industrial machine than a car that's taken apart is a car.

Most important for us, of course, it would dissolve auto workers as a collective. I'll be back to this aspect.

If cars were a social necessity, I wouldn't per se be against the second position. Governments support all sorts of things like education, health care, culture, etc. The problem is that cars are not necessary. On the contrary the present transportation system, based on mass auto transit, is completely unsustainable. It's a threat.

Transports, and primarily road transport, stand for a large and increasing share of the CO₂ emissions that threaten to push the globe over extremely dangerous thresholds. Transport is also a sector that is growing faster than the rest of the economy with globalization and just-in-time production.

The talk of the green, fuel-efficient car running on renewables is an illusion. I won't go into the details here. You can find them in my book if you know Swedish, and in a short version in my chapter "Cars, Crisis, Climate Change and Class Struggle" (in *Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the Environment*, eds. Nora Rathzel and David Uzzell, foreword by Tim Jackson. Routledge: Earthscan 2013 — ed).

Basically, there is no way to substitute biofuels for fossil fuels at the present scale of consumption. And since two-thirds of electrical power comes from burning coal, oil or natural gas, the electric car is in most cases just a slightly more efficient fossil car.

The transportation system has to change in three ways:

- It has to change from private to public.
- It has to change from roads to rail.
- It has to be drastically reduced.

This of course has huge implications for the auto industry. It's not possible to keep pumping out 70 million units a year. Basically it's the end of the industry as we know it.

So facing the choice of seeing the jobs of my co-workers and myself go down the drain or demanding subsidies for pushing the earth further down the highway to hell, I opted for a "none of the above" alternative. Instead I've been trying to argue for conversion of the auto industrial complex as a way of saving both jobs and the planet.

At first it was more of a quick one-liner when journalists called and wanted me to comment on the crisis, but as I dug deeper I found that the case for conversion was very strong — that it's actually a viable strategy against both unemployment and climate change, both practically and politically.

The Practical Perspective

In the first place, to break free from the fossil economy it won't be enough to decide so (even though this decision itself is deplorably absent). It would also be necessary to replace material things that constitute the fossil fuel society, like the present means of transportation and energy production. This has to be done quickly and on a large scale.

Secondly, conversion of the auto industry is technically feasible. The auto industry is what comes to mind for most people when you say "mass production." They're almost synonymous. The assembly line was perfected there and it was mass production that changed the car from a luxury item into the main means of transportation in industrialized countries and the foremost symbol for mass consumption.

If mass production is the auto industry's first basic feature, conversion is the second. Ever since GM challenged and overtook Ford using a never-ending

flow of new models as a method to market cars, the constant change of products has been a hallmark of the industry.

This has made the industry extremely versatile. It was no coincidence that the auto industry was the only branch of U.S. industry that was completely converted to the World War II effort. Only months after Pearl Harbor, the assembly lines of Detroit stopped producing private cars and started churning out tanks, planes and guns.

This knowledge, both of mass production and conversion, permeates the auto industry. Even at the lowest level, where I work, there is a deep but often tacit knowledge of the art of mass production and the methods that are used. And of no less importance, we are accustomed to change.

In short: The auto industry is not a coal mine. It's a flexible production machinery that society could use to produce almost any kind of technical equipment on a large scale. Send us the blueprints of socially useful stuff and we'll make it!

The Politics of Climate

But if these two practical reasons are good enough reasons in their own right not to let the auto industry die, but to use that amazing machine for the best of society, they are not even the most important reasons for why I think conversion is an important demand.

It's because the climate question is not about technology. At bottom it's about politics, relationship of forces, class struggle.

As the IPCC keeps rubbing in, the climate issue is not on its way to being resolved. Despite the increasingly alarming reports and the scientific consensus that we have to drastically cut CO₂ emissions, this isn't happening. On the contrary, in the 22 years since 192 governments signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, there has been a tremendous increase in greenhouse gas emissions that threatens the existence of mankind.

The reason is, of course, that reason isn't enough. The interests tied to the fossil fuel economy are so gigantic that the only possible solution, "keep the oil in the soil," would mean not only opposing the fundamental logic of the capitalist system, but also a head-on confrontation with the most powerful corporations of the world — telling them that they no longer can access the assets they build their value on, thus rendering them worthless.

However reasonable this may be from humanity's point of view, there's no way they're going to accept this. When it comes to the climate issue, as in so many other cases, reason stands against the power of mighty interests. And in a struggle between reason and power, power wins 100 times out of 100.

To stand a chance, reason has to be armed — armed with social power. And I think that auto workers' fight for jobs could be a part of arming reason, if we connect it to a conversion of the industry.

Instead of accepting the usual contradiction between jobs and environment, voluntarily delivering ourselves as hostages of the corporations, to fight for our jobs with a conversion strategy could create a focus point for a broad social movement for conversion of the whole society.

There are several arguments for this strategy. If we are to win anything at all we have to keep the collective together as much as we can. More traditional demands of replacement jobs and job training tend to move the initiative away from the shop floor and make it an issue between the individual workers and the government or some employer.

Conversion of an existing industry or plant, on the other hand, is something we can fight for together, as a solution for all, through our unions and together with other social movements. This is essential, both to be able to win and keep the momentum if we make progress in the fight, not leaving the initiative to state bureaucrats or the like. Think Lucas! (The British Lucas Aerospace unions' alternative energy plan (1976) is described here:)

I don't think that this kind of process is possible on a local level alone. The auto-industrial complex is too big, and the things we could replace the present production with — like wind turbines or equipment for rail traffic — would need decisions and investments on a social level to guarantee the outlet.

But I think it's necessary that the fight has strong shop floor roots, both for political and practical reasons. After all, it's we who are running the machine today. Who would be better than we to lead and oversee the conversion?

It's important to stress that I don't think that auto workers are the climate conscience of the world. In the spring of 2008, as the crisis was gaining steam, I took part in a debate on national Swedish radio, with, amongst others, the Minister for Enterprise and Energy Maud Olofsson. When I criticized the auto industry and its products and spoke in favor of conversion, the journalist asked me if I wasn't cutting off the branch I was sitting on.

We're not better or more inclined to make sacrifices for the common good than the next person.

And that's not the question. I answered the journalist that it's the other way around: If we cling to the present unsustainable production and act as a support group for the owners of the industry (as our union leaders did at the time), that's cutting off the branch we're sitting on.

What I say is actually the opposite: With a strategy for conversion, we in the auto industry can actually be a crucial part of solving the most important task of our time — not by sacrificing ourselves but by fighting for our own immediate interests.

It's Up to Us

I'll finish with two things that I came to think about at the seminar earlier this morning.

One speaker touched on the concept of "socially organized denial" that surrounds the climate issue. The problem is so immense that we tend to be unwilling to think of it at all, since we wouldn't know what to do about the whole thing.

Conversion of our jobs could be a way to put the issue inside everyday reality, within reach for workers, as opposed to looking to distant "world leaders" to fix things for us (which they won't do).

Another point that was mentioned was the idea of "the commons." And I think it's reasonable to argue that the auto industry, as any large organization, is a part of our common good. It is a part of society, it has grown out of society, and should be treated as a social asset.

What today is the corporate elite's business opportunity should be transformed into our common asset, as something that produces use values for society, not profit for private owners.

The powers that be have failed to solve the climate question. They are neither willing nor able to challenge the dominance of fossil capital and the accumulation of capital that is the driving force of both this economic system and global warming. The change has to come in confrontation with their power, from below.

Demonstrations and gatherings by activists in the streets are good, but not enough. The fight has to involve millions and millions of people in our everyday life. The case for conversion is about turning every possible workplace into a battleground against climate change.

USA

Women Under the Gun, 2015

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

According to police records, almost one-third of female homicide victims are killed by their partners. Each year an estimated 1.3 million women suffer domestic abuse; one of every four women will experience domestic violence during her lifetime. Witnessing violence between parents (or other caregivers) is the strongest risk factor in transmitting violence from one generation to another.

Breaking this epidemic of violence against women, just as breaking with cultural assumptions about race, requires reexamination of social assumptions, a rejection of power and control over others, and the capacity to be a contributive member of society. It means power and control over one's own body and life, and mutual respect for the rights of others. That's certainly a tall order in the vindictive and violent society in which we live, and in which the majority has little effective control over their own lives.

We're constantly told about horrific abuses committed against women in Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria. Yet the current atmosphere of a never-ending "war on terrorism" can only nourish the violence there as well as in our own society.

The roots of violence against women, however, run much deeper than PTSD or brain trauma resulting from war. It is a much larger social issue, arising from a socially induced need to dominate. Class societies, and capitalism as an economic and social system in particular, need hierarchies of control — and see those with a different view as deviants needing to be reined in.

We can see this also codified in a variety of legislation, including on issues of reproductive rights where they remain a major political battleground.

While regulations on banks and industries are relaxed, those on women's rights are being tightened.

Like racism, violence — and particularly violence against women — is a mechanism of control. And the left, whether in Occupy or in our own political organizations, has found that it must also deal with these issues, through education and the development of internal processes.

Legislative Obsessions

Despite the reality that most women work outside the home, have higher college and graduate education rates than men, and are certainly witness to a wider spectrum of gender, sexuality and cultural norms than their mothers and grandmothers, women find their very personhood under scrutiny. In fact, by looking at the work of the legislative and judicial systems, one could conclude that the law is obsessed with controlling women's bodies.

This is true whether we examine what kind of sex education is mandated, whether contraceptives are part of public health and insurance coverage, how legislation deals with unintended pregnancies, what coverage exists for paid parental leaves, and what social legislation is in place for women with children, including provisions for low-cost, high-quality child care.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, hundreds of laws have been written, some of which have sustained judicial scrutiny. (For a survey of the state of U.S. reproductive rights in 2015, see Dianne Feeley's article at <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/n....>)

Most importantly, the Hyde Amendment (passed annually with the budget) precludes Medicaid payment for abortion except in cases of rape, incest or where a woman's life is in danger. This amend-

ment, along with parental consent laws, targets the most vulnerable population.

Although the majority of poor women are white, public perception, reinforced by politicians and the media, portrays them as African Americans, Native Americans or Latinas — the undeserving "other." In our society poor women who are sexually active and become pregnant are fair game for demonization as irresponsible and lazy. That is also true for young women who become pregnant.

In 1992 the U.S. Supreme Court, in its *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision, ruled a variety of restrictions constitutional as long as they did not place an "undue burden" on a woman. Of course the question of what constitutes an "undue" burden has been up for grabs ever since.

Just since the 2010 midterm elections, 231 restrictions have passed state legislatures, with 70 passed in 2013 and another 26 in 2014. Most recently 26 state legislatures now require clinics where abortions are performed to meet the same standards as ambulatory surgical centers. Such legislation also forces clinic physicians to have admitting privileges at local hospitals, a difficult task when more and more hospitals have a religious affiliation.

The media-savvy rightwing lobby and their political allies frame these restrictions not as attacks against women who need abortion and contraceptives, but against providers — clinics, health care workers and the drug industry — as if they were unsafe and unscrupulous.

The right wing talks about the need to provide a pregnant woman with "information," but loads the dice by demanding a script be read about fetal development whether or not the woman requests it. These scripts are usually scientifically bogus, designed to scare women into backing away from the procedure. A mandated ultrasound — a procedure not necessary for every pregnant woman and a bodily invasive procedure in the early stages of pregnancy — is one of the latest tactics. Driving up the cost of an abortion, there is no accurate measure of

whether these new tactics persuade women to change their minds.

Abortion Battlegrounds

While doing nothing to improve patient care, these laws have been successful in forcing clinics to spend considerable funds to meet mandated standards — driving up the cost of abortion — and a number of clinics have shut down. In Texas, there were 42 clinics throughout the state before the passage of a law that had four provisions:

- Physicians at the abortion clinic must have admitting privileges in a hospital within 30 miles.
- Abortions beyond 20 weeks are banned. (This is a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*, which outlines abortion as a procedure available through the 24th week of pregnancy.)
- Severe restrictions on the use of medical abortion ("the abortion pill") are imposed.
- Clinics that perform abortion must meet the requirements of an ambulatory surgical center.

The first three parts of the law went into effect in November 2013, but Federal Judge Lee Yeakel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held the first section unconstitutional. Seventeen clinics remained open, although located in fewer areas of the state. The fourth provision was to become effective on September 1, 2014 — to result in 10 more clinics being forced to close — but Judge Yeakel ruled that provision unconstitutional as well.

If all the provisions were in effect, 900,000 Texas women seeking abortion would have to travel more than 150 miles from their home, and given the waiting period, would have to stay more than one day, again driving up the cost. For example, a woman seeking an early abortion through "the abortion pill" would need four clinic appointments. Providers point out that these restrictions are based on a Food and Drug Administration protocols from 2000.

In early January 2015 the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals held hearings on the Texas law. If they rule the law to be constitutional, there will be no facility west or south of San Antonio. (See map:.)

By the end of January the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals refused to reconsider Ohio's restrictions on medical abortion. It requires that mifepristone (RU-486) can only be administered in the same exact dosage as approved by the outdated FDA protocol, and criminalizes its use after the first seven weeks of pregnancy.

By 2014 the Guttmacher Institute noted that 27 states have passed hostile legislation, with 18 considered extremely hostile. Several states, including Texas and Michigan, have already banned the use of telemedicine for abortion. Telemedicine, developed 50 years ago, is extremely important in servicing rural areas for a variety of medical conditions, from providing and monitoring prenatal care to disease management. With the development of RU-486, it too became a telemedicine procedure for early-stage abortion. Despite the lack of any data that suggesting this method is unsafe, it has been outlawed.

While the rightwing drive was successful in legislating a federal ban on a particular late-term medical procedure for abortion that some physicians considered safer than other methods — and in 2007 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the ban constitutional — only women with severely abnormal fetuses or those unable to come up with the money earlier in their pregnancy have late abortions. Most seek the procedure as soon as they know they are pregnant. Therefore the right's victory with this federal ban applies to fewer than one percent of all abortions. Since abortion was legalized, nine of out 10 abortions have been performed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

The Hyde Amendment has had the greatest impact, with one out of four pregnant women on Medicaid forced to carry the fetus to term. But most women who have decided that they need an abortion will jump through the hoops to obtain one. It is true

that the abortion rate has declined, but the birth rate has declined as well. More women at risk of an unwanted pregnancy are using birth control, and using more reliable methods.

New Points of Attack

Currently the anti-choice forces are focused on regulating clinics out of existence and fighting to reduce earlier-stage procedures. Like Texas, other state legislatures have passed abortion bans that challenge *Roe v. Wade* with the intention of whittling down or overthrowing the 1973 decision. Denying funds to Planned Parenthood for providing abortions is another tactic, even though the organization's work ranges from providing sex education and birth control to reducing the spread of sexually transmitted infections and cervical cancer screening.

Another avenue of attack has been to target the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), which promised coverage to millions who have no medical insurance. True, none of the 10 essential benefits outlined for women's health cover abortion — and the Hyde Amendment continues to reign. But the ACA does mandate contraceptive coverage under Medicare as well as through insurance providers that are available on the exchanges that have been set up.

The Obama administration exempted religious institutions from contraceptive coverage for their employees, but the U.S. Supreme Court has broadened that ruling in its *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* decision. Under this ruling, family-owned corporations are also exempt. Supreme Court Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., writing the majority opinion, claimed that the ruling was limited in its scope, and that if the government had a compelling interest in making sure women have access to contraception it could find ways to provide the coverage. A likely outcome, you think?

The fight over women's bodies is also evident around sex education. Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia mandate sex education, with

another 13 requiring education around HIV/AIDS. Only half require medically accurate instruction. In most cases contraception is addressed; all cover or stress abstinence, and 19 emphasize the importance of sex only within marriage. In the 12 states where sexual orientation is discussed, three are negative toward non-heterosexuality.

North Dakota, which has the most restrictive abortion laws, has no sex education apart from a policy to cover abstinence. A Utah law specifically prohibits teachers from responding to students' questions in any way that conflicts with a curriculum stressing abstinence and sex only within marriage.

However, as women continue to demand reproductive justice, some clinics are training a new generation of physicians.

The reality is that with so many sex (mis)education mandates, U.S. teenagers are generally unprepared to know their own sexual desires or to figure out the language of another's. To lay the blame for sexual oppression and violence on a repressive world is not to deny each individual's agency — but it does help explain the mechanisms by which hierarchy and domination are reproduced.

Against the Current

USA

Pushing Back Civil Rights

MALIK MIAH ·

When President Obama gave his sixth State of the Union speech on January 20, the mass media focused on its rhetoric and the likelihood that few if any of his proposals would be adopted by the Republican-controlled Congress.

What the Black media noted, at least, was on target — Obama's failure to lambaste the violence of the police across the country directed at Black men and boys. Obama's only reference to police killings:

We may have different takes on the events of Ferguson and New York. But surely we can understand a father who fears his son can't walk home without being harassed. Surely we can understand the wife who won't rest until the police officer she married walks through the front door at the end of his shift.

No mention was made of the killings of Black boys and men every 28 hours by cops. No mention of the racism of the far right and its reflection in mainstream policies. No mention of the new "Black Lives Matter" movement demanding justice now.

Selma and Civil Rights

Every gain won by the civil rights revolution in the 1960s and 1970s is now under assault. As Selma eloquently portrays, it was the self-organization and mobilization of working-class and poor African Americans that defeated Jim Crow segregation. Without Blacks leading the struggle, putting their lives on the line, significant support from whites would not have occurred.

Yet Selma has been criticized by many "establishment" white defenders of president Johnson, who in their view was the primary reason for the civil rights legal victories. The direct actions led by Martin Luther King, and what millions of former

slaves, sharecroppers and workers did to fight centuries of racial domination and exploitation, are relegated to second chair.

How could an African-American director (a woman at that!) have the audacity to place the victory on the shoulders of genuine Black Power and agitation and its leaders and not the white president?

DuVernay does not deny Johnson's legislative role, but correctly focuses on the raw power of the streets. It is a common trademark of liberals to believe that elections are decisive to fundamental changes, not mass action. This is an old narrative of American history — the leading role given to white liberals instead of the independent actions of the oppressed themselves.

What's striking since Obama became president in 2008 is how far the various institutions of the state (city, state, Congress and Supreme Court) have stepped up attacks on and moved to roll back the civil rights revolution. Every gain has been weakened beyond what almost anyone thought possible when Obama took office.

Major civil rights decisions have been targeted — the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 1968 Fair Housing Act. While the overturn of the legal justification of Jim Crow segregation is not on the table — it is not necessary to return to "whites only" signs — voter suppression legislation and moves to justify housing discrimination are big steps toward limiting the gains for working-class African Americans.

Obama has been transformational — but not for African Americans. The winners are the powerful white supremacist politicians based in the South who found his presidency (and his failure to fight against racist forces) a useful cover to lead the roll-backs of laws that stood for some 50 years.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court under Chief Justice Roberts has led the way in overturning or eroding the laws of the civil rights revolution. By a narrow majority it gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013. It is posed to roll back the 1968 Fair Housing Act this year.

That law states that the fact of discrimination is proof to seek remedy; it is not necessary to prove conscious "intent" by the landlord or employer.

The self-serving argument of Chief Justice Roberts that "the only way to end discrimination is to end discrimination" means in practice pretending that discrimination does not exist — a denial of 400 years of history — to justify the real-life everyday status quo of white advantages.

As Ferguson and Cleveland have shown, the lives of young Black men and boys are seen differently than white lives. How many whites are shot down carrying a toy gun or holding an air gun in a WalMart store in an open-carry state (Ohio)?

Obama's view unfortunately emphasizes, as does his African-American Attorney General Eric Holder, that progress should be measured by the real gains of the educated talented tenth and the end of legal segregation in the South, more than the suffering of poor African Americans.

The vast majority of African Americans' lives under Obama have gotten worse rather than better on every socio-economic level. The reasons are clear, yet Obama presents a false reality by stating that the country is more united and non-racial than ever before.

The Police "Unions"

The so-called police unions are reactionary. These "unions" are at best associations (like employers' groups) or cartels. The function of police is to "serve and protect" the ruling establishment. It is to protect big business, private property and uses force against striking workers and working people who march and rally for civil rights and civil liberties, and economic and social justice.

Their "union" is a tool to defend rogue and killer cops from prosecution, and to squeeze the public for more money and protection from prosecution. It is not an accident that the police are rarely arrested for crimes and prosecuted for what District Attorneys call "justifiable" killings of Blacks.

The social composition of the police is not decisive. New York City's police force is now majority non-white. Black cops defended the murders in Cleveland and Staten Island.

Whites rarely face police brutality over petty issues. White youth are routinely given the benefit of the doubt. Blacks are assumed to be "thugs" or other expletives when police look for a suspect — even if on a college campus or driving a BMW. Most whites, including unionized white workers, don't understand this since it is not their reality.

What's called institutional racism is actually structural discrimination based on national oppression and class exploitation.

While many Obama supporters blame the obstructionism of the Republican Party for many of Obama's failures to help African Americans, the reality is much simpler. Obama serves and defends the interests of the ruling class. That's his job. In that sense he must be colorblind.

The key lesson of Martin Luther King, and of the more radical Malcolm X and Black Power advocates of the 1960s, is that mass struggle brings radical change.

King never waited for presidents Kennedy or Johnson to act on any issue — civil rights, the Vietnam War or economic justice for the working poor. It's why he worked with James Bevel and Diane Nash on the Selma march in 1965, soon after winning the Noble Peace prize and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

The Black Lives Matter Movement

The role of cops in killing African Americans is also not new. What's new is the response by the Black community — something not seen since the 1970s.

The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement after the Ferguson, Missouri death of Michael Brown in 2014 is a significant rebuttal to those who rely on electoralism or believe in the nonracial myth.

These leaders are young Blacks who likely voted for Obama. Yet they see the lesson of the civil rights era as the government taking action only under mass pressure. The Black Lives Matter young leaders stand on King's shoulders. They are the true descendants of the activist wing of the civil rights movement and the militancy of the 1960s.

This emerging young generation understands the why and the solution to police violence. They recognize that the cop unions are fraudulent and obstacles to justice and equality — a reality the official labor movement refuses to grasp.

The 1965 and 2015 dates are important because each reflects the progress and failures in the fight for civil rights. It is clear that the Voting Rights Act and Selma march represented the power of Black-led street protests on the ruling class.

The year 1965 showed the contradictory realities of repression and reform in racial and class-based

capitalism. The violence of the police state with the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X — the most far-sighted representative of the left wing of the movement — showed what the police, FBI, CIA and government through its COINTELPRO terror was prepared to do to stop what J. Edgar Hoover termed a "messiah" from leading the Black population.

King's assassination in 1968 was the bookend of that terrorism against Black leaders. The legal victories of 1965-68, nevertheless, showed the fear of the ruling class of mass street protests and urban rebellions from Watts to Detroit. Reform came about because repression alone was failing to suppress rising Black anger and radicalization.

The same contradictions continue even with the first Black president and more Blacks in positions of authority. But the working-class Black majority that appears invisible has a hidden voice and potential power that one day will explode. That's why the incipient Black Lives Matter movement and other forms of resistance to the status quo points the way forward.

Against the Current

USA

Something That Might Be Called Neocon:" Hillary Clinton & Corporate Feminism

KEVIN YOUNG AND DIANA C. SIERRA BECERRA ·

Such depictions have little basis in Clinton's past performance. While she has indeed spoken about gender and sexual rights with considerable frequency, and while she may not share the overtly misogynistic and anti-LGBT views of most Republican politicians, as a policymaker she has consistently favored policies devastating to women and LGBT persons.

Why, then, does she continue to enjoy such support from self-identified feminists? Part of the answer surely lies in the barrage of sexist attacks that have targeted her and the understandable desire of many feminists to see a woman president. But that's not the whole story. We suggest that feminist enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton is reflective of a profound crisis of U.S. liberal feminism, which has long embraced or accepted corporate capitalism, racism, empire, and even heterosexism and transphobia.

Making Profit and War

All issues of wealth, power, and violence are also women's and LGBT rights issues. For instance, neoliberal economic policies of austerity and privatization disproportionately hurt women and LGBT individuals, who are often the lowest paid and the first workers to be fired, the most likely to bear the burdens of family maintenance, and the most affected by the involuntary migration, domestic violence, homelessness, and mental illness that are intensified by poverty.

Hillary Clinton's record on such issues is hardly encouraging. Her decades of service on corporate boards and in major policy roles as First Lady, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of State give a clear indication of where she stands. One of Clinton's first

high-profile public positions was at Walmart, where she served on the board from 1986 to 1992. She "remained silent" in board meetings as her company "waged a major campaign against labor unions seeking to represent store workers," as an ABC review of video recordings later noted.

Clinton recounted in her 2003 book that Walmart CEO Sam Walton "taught me a great deal about corporate integrity and success." Though she later began trying to shed her public identification with the company in order to attract labor support for her Senate and presidential candidacies, Walmart executives have continued to look favorably on her, with Alice Walton donating the maximum amount to the "Ready for Hillary" Super PAC in 2013. Walton's \$25,000 donation was considerably higher than the average annual salary for Walmart's hourly employees, two-thirds of whom are women.

After leaving Walmart, Clinton became perhaps the most active First Lady in history. While it would be unfair to hold her responsible for all her husband's policies, she did play a significant role in shaping and justifying many of them. In her 2003 memoir she boasted of her role in gutting U.S. welfare: "By the time Bill and I left the White House, welfare rolls had dropped 60 percent"—and not because poverty had dropped. Women and children, the main recipients of welfare, have been the primary victims. Jeffrey St. Clair at Counterpunch notes that prior to the welfare reform, "more than 70 percent of poor families with children received some kind of cash assistance. By 2010, less than 30 percent got any kind of cash aid and the amount of the benefit had declined by more than 50 percent from pre-reform levels."

Clinton also lobbied Congress to pass her husband's deeply racist crime bill, which, observes Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow*, "escalated the drug war beyond what conservatives had imagined possible," expanding mass incarceration and the death penalty.

Arguably the two most defining features of Clinton's tenures as Senator (2001-2009) and Secretary of State (2009-2013) were her promotion of U.S. corporate profit-making and her aggressive assertion of the U.S. government's right to intervene in foreign countries. Reflecting on this performance as Clinton left her Secretary post in January 2013, Bloomberg Businessweek commented that "Clinton turned the State Department into a machine for promoting U.S. business." She sought "to install herself as the government's highest-ranking business lobbyist," directly negotiating lucrative overseas contracts for U.S. corporations like Boeing, Lockheed, and General Electric. Not surprisingly, "Clinton's corporate cheerleading has won praise from business groups."

Clinton herself has been very honest about this aim, albeit not when speaking in front of progressives. Her 2011 Foreign Policy essay on "America's Pacific Century" spoke at length about the objective of "opening new markets for American businesses," containing no fewer than ten uses of the phrases "open markets," "open trade," and permutations thereof. A major focus of this effort is the Trans-Pacific Partnership involving twelve Pacific countries that is now being negotiated secretly by the Obama administration with the assistance of over 600 corporate "advisors." Like Bill Clinton's NAFTA, the deal is intended to further empower multinational corporations at the expense of workers, consumers, and the environment in all countries involved. Lower wages and increased rates of displacement, detention, and physical violence for female and LGBT populations are among the likely consequences, given the results of existing "free-trade" agreements.

Clinton's article also elaborated on the role of U.S. military power in advancing these economic goals.

The past "growth" of eastern Asia has depended on "the security and stability that has long been guaranteed by the U.S. military," and "a more broadly distributed military presence across the region will provide vital advantages" in the future. Clinton thus reaffirmed the bipartisan consensus on the U.S. right to use military force abroad in pursuit of economic interest—echoing, for instance, her husband's Secretary of Defense William Cohen, who in 1999 reserved the right to "the unilateral use of military power" in the name of "ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies, and strategic resources."

In the Middle East and Central Asia, Clinton has likewise defended the U.S. right to violate international law and human rights. As Senator she not only voted in favor of the illegal 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq—a monstrous crime that has killed hundreds of thousands of people while sowing terror and sectarianism across the region—she was an outspoken advocate of the invasion and a fierce critic of resistance within the United Nations. Since then she has only partially disavowed that position (out of political expediency) while speaking in paternalistic and racist terms about Iraqis. Senator Clinton was an especially staunch supporter—even by the standards of the U.S. Congress—of Israel's illegal military actions and settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Hillary Clinton and Benjamin Netanyahu.

As Barack Obama's Secretary of State, she presided over the expansion of illegal drone attacks that by conservative estimates have killed many hundreds of civilians, while reaffirming U.S. alliances with vicious dictatorships. As she recounts in her 2014 memoir *Hard Choices*, "In addition to our work with the Israelis, the Obama Administration also increased America's own sea and air presence in the Persian Gulf and deepened our ties to the Gulf monarchies."

Clinton herself is widely recognized to have been one of the administration's most forceful advocates of attacking or expanding military operations in

Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria and of strengthening U.S. ties to dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, and elsewhere. Maybe the women and girls of these countries, including those whose lives have been destroyed by U.S. bombs, can take comfort in knowing that a "feminist" helped craft U.S. policy.

Secretary Clinton and her team worked to ensure that any challenges to U.S.-Israeli domination of the Middle East were met with brute force and/or various forms of collective punishment. On Iran, she often echoes the bipartisan line that "all options must remain on the table"—a flagrant violation of the UN Charter's prohibition of "the threat or use of force" in international relations—and brags in *Hard Choices* that her team "successfully campaigned around the world to impose crippling sanctions" on the country.

She ensured that Palestine's UN statehood bid "went nowhere in the Security Council." Though out of office by the time of Israel's savage 2014 assault on Gaza, she ardently defended it in interviews. This context helps explain her recent praise for Henry Kissinger, renowned for bombing civilians and supporting regimes that killed and tortured hundreds of thousands of suspected dissidents. She writes in the *Washington Post* that she "relied on his counsel when I served as secretary of state."

Militarization and Its Benefits

In another domain of traditional U.S. ownership, Latin America, Clinton also seems to have followed Kissinger's example. As confirmed in her 2014 book, she effectively supported the 2009 military overthrow of left-of-center Honduran President Manuel Zelaya—a "caricature of a Central American strongman"—by pushing for a "compromise" solution that endorsed his illegal ouster. She has advocated the application of the Colombia model—highly militarized "anti-drug" initiatives coupled with neoliberal economic policies—to other countries in the region, and is full of praise for the devastating militarization of Mexico over the past decade. In

Mexico that model has resulted in 80,000 or more deaths since 2006, including the 43 Mexican student activists disappeared (and presumably massacred) in September 2014.

In the Caribbean, the U.S. model of choice is Haiti, where Clinton and her husband have relentlessly promoted the sweatshop model of production since the 1990s. WikiLeaks documents show that in 2009 her State Department collaborated with subcontractors for Hanes, Levi's, and Fruit of the Loom to oppose a minimum wage increase for Haitian workers. After the January 2010 earthquake she helped spearhead the highly militarized U.S. response.

Militarization has plentiful benefits, as Clinton understands. It can facilitate corporate investment, such as the "gold rush" that the U.S. ambassador described following the Haiti earthquake. It can keep in check nonviolent dissidents, such as hungry Haitian workers or leftist students in Mexico. And it can help combat the influence of countries like Venezuela which have challenged neoliberalism and U.S. geopolitical control.

These goals have long motivated U.S. hostility toward Cuba, and thus Clinton's recent call for ending the U.S. embargo against Cuba was pragmatic, not principled: "It wasn't achieving its goals" of overthrowing the government, as she says in her recent book. The goal there, as in Venezuela, is to compel the country to "restore private property and return to a free market economy," as she demanded of Venezuela in 2010.

A reasonable synopsis of Clinton's record around the world comes from neoconservative policy advisor Robert Kagan, who, like Clinton, played an important role in advocating the 2003 Iraq invasion. "I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy," Kagan told the *New York Times* last June. Asked what to expect from a Hillary Clinton presidency, Kagan predicted that "[i]f she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue, it's something that might have been called neocon." But, he added, "clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else."

Women's and LGBT Rights, Narrowly Defined

What about Clinton's record on that narrower set of issues more commonly associated with women's and LGBT rights—control over one's reproductive system and freedom from discrimination and sexual violence? Perhaps the best that can be said is that Clinton does not espouse the medieval view of female bodily autonomy shared by most Republicans, and does not actively encourage homophobia and transphobia. She has consistently said that abortion should remain [legal (but "rare")]-<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/13/nyregion/13hillaryready.html?pagewanted=print&r=0>] and that birth control should be widely available, and when in office generally acted in accord with those statements. She has recently voiced support for gay marriage rights. These positions are worth something, even if they are mainly a reflection of pressure from below.

But nor does her record on these rights merit glowing praise. In addition to partly capitulating to the far-right anti-choice agenda in Congress, with disproportionate harm to low-income parents, Clinton and other Democrats have also actively undermined these rights. Some observers have argued that Clinton's repetition of the Democratic slogan that abortion should be "safe, legal, and rare" reinforces the stigmatization of those who choose that option.

Her narrow definition of reproductive rights—as abortion and contraception only—does not allow much in the way of material support for parents or young children. She insists that abortion must remain "rare," but has also helped deprive poor expecting parents of the financial support they would need to raise a child (for instance, through the 1996 welfare reform and the fiscal austerity regarding social programs that has become the bipartisan consensus in Washington). She has supported the further militarization of the Mexico border and the arrest of undocumented immigrants, undermining the reproductive rights of women who give birth in chains in detention centers before being deported back to lives of poverty and violence.

Regarding non-discrimination, Clinton's record is also worse than her reputation suggests. Her old company Walmart, widely accused of discriminating against women employees, was recently praised by the Clinton Foundation for its "efforts to empower girls and women." Clinton has given little serious indication that she opposes discrimination against LGBT individuals in the workplace (which is still legal in the majority of U.S. states). Her very recent reversal of her opposition to gay marriage came only after support for the idea has become politically beneficial and perhaps necessary for Democrats. At best, Clinton in these respects has been a cautious responder to progressive political winds rather than a trailblazing leader.

Clinton's foreign policy record is even more at odds with her reputation as a champion of women's and LGBT rights. Her policy of support for the 2009 coup in Honduras has been disastrous for both groups. Violent hate crimes against LGBT Hondurans have skyrocketed. In mid-2014, leading LGBT activist Nelson Arambú reported 176 murders against LGBT individuals since 2009, an average of about 35 per year, compared to just over one per year in the period 1994-2009.

Arambú located this violence within the broader human rights nightmare of post-coup Honduras, noting the contributions of U.S.-funded militarization and the post-coup regimes' pattern of "shutting down government institutions charged with promoting and protecting the human rights of vulnerable sectors of the population—such as women, children, indigenous communities, and Afro-Hondurans." Clinton has been worse than silent on the situation, actively supporting and praising the post-coup governments.

In a review of her work as Secretary of State, Middle East scholar Stephen Zunes concludes that while "Hillary Clinton has been more outspoken than any previous Secretary of State regarding the rights of women and sexual minorities," this position is "more rhetoric than reality." As one example he points to the U.S.-backed monarchy in Morocco, which has long occupied Western Sahara with U.S.

support. Two weeks after Secretary Clinton publicly praised the dictatorship for having "protected and expanded" women's rights, a teenage girl named Amina Filali committed suicide by taking rat poison. Filali had been raped at age 15 and then "forced to marry her rapist, who subsequently battered and abused her."

Although Clinton's liberal supporters are likely to lament such details as exceptions within an impressive overall record ("She's still much better than a Republican!"), it is quite possible that her actions have harmed feminist movements worldwide. As Zunes argues:

Given Clinton's backing of neo-liberal economic policies and war-making by the United States and its allies, her advocacy of women's rights overseas... may have actually set back indigenous feminist movements in the same way that the Bush administration's 'democracy-promotion' agenda was a serious setback to popular struggles for freedom and democracy....Hillary Clinton's call for greater respect for women's rights in Muslim countries never had much credibility while US-manufactured ordinance is blowing up women in Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Threading Needles

This summary of Clinton's "enormous contributions" (Feminists for Clinton) is just a partial sampling. On almost all other major issues, from climate change to immigration to education to financial regulation, President Hillary Clinton would likely be no better than President Obama, if not worse. As in the case of Obama, it is of course necessary for Clinton to "call it something else," in Robert Kagan's words. The stark disjunction between rhetoric and policies reflects a well understood logic. Mainstream U.S. political candidates, particularly Democrats, must find ways to attract popular support while simultaneously reassuring corporate and financial elites.

The latter, for their part, usually understand the need for a good dose of "populism" during a cam-

paign, and accept it as long as it stays within certain bounds and is not reflected in policy itself. One former aide to Bill Clinton, speaking to The Hill last July, compared this rhetorical strategy to threading a needle, saying that "good politicians—and I think Hillary is a good politician—are good at threading needles, and I think there's probably a way to do it."

Hillary Clinton faces the challenge of convincing voters that she is a champion of "people historically excluded," as she claims in her 2014 memoir. The Hill reported that "Clinton is now test-driving various campaign themes," including the familiar progressive promises to "increase upward mobility" and "decrease inequality." Her memoirs, for those who dare to suffer through them, include invocations of dead leftists like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman ("one of my heroines"), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (referenced nine times in Clinton's 2003 book).

This public relations work requires that her past record be hidden from view, lest it create a credibility problem. Here Clinton has enjoyed the assistance of many liberal feminists. One former Obama staffer, speaking to The Hill, notes Clinton's successful efforts "to co-opt the base groups in the past eight years."

Rhetoric is not totally meaningless. The extent to which politicians like Clinton have been compelled to portray themselves—however cynically—as champions of the rights of workers, women, LGBT people, and other "historically excluded" groups is an indication that popular pressures for those rights have achieved substantial force. In the case of LGBT rights this rhetorical shift is very recent, and reflects a growth in the movement's power that is to be celebrated. But taking politicians' rhetoric at face value is one of the gravest errors that a progressive can make.

The Feminists Not Invited

Liberal feminists' support of Hillary Clinton is not just due to credulousness, though. It also reflects a

narrowness of analysis, vision, and values. In this country feminism is often understood as the right of women—and wealthy white women most of all—to share in the spoils of corporate capitalism and U.S. imperial power. By not confronting the exclusion of non-whites, foreigners, working-class people, and other groups from this vision, liberal feminists are missing a crucial opportunity to create a more inclusive, more powerful movement.

Alternative currents within the feminist movement, both here and globally, have long rejected this impoverished understanding of feminism. For them, feminism means confronting patriarchy but also capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression that interlock with and reinforce patriarchy. It means fighting to replace a system in which the rights of people and other living things are systematically subordinated to the quest for profits. It means fighting so that all people—everywhere on the gender, sexual and body spectrum—can enjoy basic rights like food, health care, housing, a safe and clean environment, and control over their bodies, labor, and identities.

This more holistic feminist vision is apparent all around the world, including among the women of places like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, whose oppression is constantly evoked by Western leaders to justify war and occupation. The courageous Pakistani teenager Malala Yousafzai, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her feminist advocacy, has also criticized illegal U.S. drone attacks for killing civilians and aiding terrorist recruitment. Yousafzai's opposition to the Taliban won her adoring Western media coverage and an invitation to the Obama White House, but her criticism of drones has gone virtually unmentioned in the corporate media. Also unmentioned are her comments about socialism, which she says "is the only answer" to "free us from the chains of bigotry and exploitation."

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) has equally opposed the Taliban, U.S.-backed fundamentalist forces, and the U.S. occupation. While liberal groups like

Feminist Majority have depicted the U.S. war as a noble crusade to protect Afghan women, RAWA says that the United States "has empowered and equipped the most traitorous, anti-democratic, misogynist and corrupt fundamentalist gangs in Afghanistan," merely "replacing one fundamentalist regime with another."

The logic is simple: U.S. elites prefer the "bloody and suffocating rule of Afghanistan" by fundamentalist warlords "to an independent, pro-democracy, and pro-women's rights government" that might jeopardize "its interests in the region." Women's liberation "can be achieved only by the people of Afghanistan and by democracy-loving forces through a hard, decisive and long struggle". Needless to say, Clinton and Obama have not invited the RAWA women to Washington.

A group of Iranian and Iranian-American feminists, the Raha Iranian Feminist Collective, takes a similar position in relation to their own country. In 2011 it bitterly condemned the Ahmadinejad regime's systematic violations of women's rights (and those of other groups), but just as forcefully condemned "all forms of US intervention," including the "crippling sanctions" that Hillary Clinton is so proud of her role in implementing. The group said that sanctions "further immiserate the very people they claim to be helping," and noted that few if any genuine grassroots voices in Iran had "called for or supported the US/UN/EU sanctions."

In Latin America, too, many working-class feminists argue that the fight for gender and sexual liberation is inseparable from the struggles for self-determination and a just economic system. Speaking to NACLA Report on the Americas, Venezuelan organizer Yanahir Reyes recently lauded "all of the social policy" that has "focused on liberating women" under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, those evil autocrats so despised by Hillary Clinton. Reyes emphasized the importance of independent feminist organizing: "Women from the feminist struggle have effectively brought to light the importance of dismantling a patriarchal system," thus pushing Chavismo in a more feminist

direction. "It is a very hard internal fight," says Reyes, but "this is the space where we can achieve it"—under a government sympathetic to socialism, "not in a different form of government."

This tradition of more holistic feminisms is not absent from the United States. In the 19th century, Black women like Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth linked the struggles for abolition and suffrage and denounced the lynching campaigns that murdered black men and women in the name of "saving" white women. In contrast, leaders of the white suffrage movement like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony refused to include people of color in the struggle for citizenship rights. Unfortunately this history continues to be distorted. In 2008 Gloria Steinem, the standard bearer of liberal feminism, said that she supported Clinton's campaign over Obama's in part because "Black men were given the vote a half-century before women of any race were allowed to mark a ballot."

The assumption that all women are equally oppressed by patriarchy (and that all men are equal oppressors) was fiercely challenged by U.S. women of color, working-class women, and lesbians in the 1970s and 1980s. Feminists of color analyzed their gender and sexual oppression within the larger history of U.S. slavery, capitalism, and empire. In New York the women of the Young Lords Party pushed their organization to denounce forced sterilizations of women of color, to demand safe and accessible abortion and contraception, and to call for community-controlled clinics. They redefined reproductive

rights as the right to abortion and contraception and the right to have children without living in poverty.

In recent years, a radical LGBT movement has fought for reforms like marriage equality while also moving beyond marriage and condemning how the state, from prisons to the military, is the biggest perpetrator of violence against gender and sexual non-conforming peoples, particularly trans women of color and undocumented queers. These queer radicals reject the logic that casts the United States and Israel as tolerant while characterizing occupied territories, from U.S. to Palestinian ghettos, as inherently homophobic and in need of military and other outside intervention. They condemn U.S. wars and the Obama administration's persecution of whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning (who helped expose, among other U.S. crimes, military orders to ignore the sexual abuse of Iraqi detainees and the trafficking of Afghan children).

A more robust vision of feminism doesn't mean that we shouldn't defend women like Hillary Clinton against sexist attacks: we should, just as we defend Barack Obama against racist ones. But it does mean that we must listen to the voices of the most marginalized women and gender and sexual minorities—many of whom are extremely critical of Clintonite feminism—and act in solidarity with movements that seek equity in all realms of life and for all people. These are the feminists not invited to the Hillary Clinton party, except perhaps to serve and clean up.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Israel, Jews and Arabs: the revolutionary perspective of living together

HENRI WILNO ·

Michel Warschawski has been politically active in Israel for many years. He retraced his biography in one of his books, *Sur la frontière* (Stock, 2002). After spending his early years in Strasbourg, he decided at the age of sixteen to go to Jerusalem, where he undertook Talmudic studies. In 1968 he joined the Israeli Socialist Organization, which had been founded in 1962 by expelled members of the Israeli Communist Party and older activists influenced by Trotskyism. The group was best known by the name of its newspaper, *Matzpen* ("Compass" in Hebrew). *Matzpen* was a revolutionary organization that regarded Zionism as a colonial project and fought for coexistence between Jews and Arabs on the basis of complete equality. As of June 1967 *Matzpen* called for the full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied territories and affirmed its support for the Palestinian people's right to fight for its freedom.

Despite a limited membership, the actions and positions of *Matzpen* had an echo that made it an "enemy within" denounced by Zionists of both right and left, whose activists were frequently arrested. Although composed mainly of Jewish activists, *Matzpen* tried both to mobilize Israeli Jewish youth and to develop ties with the Palestinians of Israel, as well as Palestinian left organizations and those of Arab countries.

In the 1970s, a debate began in *Matzpen* on its perspectives. *Matzpen* and activists of the Palestinian Left decided in 1984 to create the Alternative

Information Center (AIC), an organization providing information and solidarity, of which Michel Warschawski is the director. *Matzpen* subsequently ceased to exist as an organization, although many of its activists remain active in various movements. In 1989, Michel Warschawski was sentenced to several months in prison for "providing services to illegal organizations" (for printing leaflets). H.W.

In something you wrote in the summer of 2014, you speak of "fascism" in Israel. What are the roots of this process? Is it just the product of the state of war? Can we say that it is now the far right that governs?

I am speaking of a long process that dates back to the campaign of hatred and delegitimization that preceded the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. The assassins of the Prime Minister took power and have in fact been in power since then. I include the episode of Ehud Barak (1999-2001) who was admittedly the candidate of the Labour Party, but who defended far-right policies and did everything he could so that Ariel Sharon became Prime Minister, with himself as his Minister Defense.

So we have had twenty years of continuous power of the Right, which has changed the situation, not so much in the field of the colonial policy towards the Palestinians, but in the internal regime of the State of Israel.

Racism has been unleashed, in political discourse, in the streets and in legislation which culminated in the proposal to amend the "Basic Law - Israel, the nation-state of the Jewish people." A series of extremely repressive and openly discriminatory laws against the Palestinian minority in Israel have already been adopted; others, even worse, are on the

way. The Supreme Court, which was for many years the guarantor of a system that was juggling between "Jewish state" and "democratic state", has for some time been the object of violent attacks by far-right members of parliament. Several bills are aimed at reducing its power.

The government relies on a bloc of three far-right parties, a bloc in which Netanyahu appears as a moderate!

If for a year I have been talking about fascism, it is because on top of everything I have just mentioned we have to add violence against democratic activists and organizations, from small fascist groups or even passers-by. Far-right government + draconian laws + violence aimed at terrorizing any words of criticism = fascism.

Israel is now one of the countries where social inequalities are greatest (including among Jews), and where neoliberal policies are dismantling social gains. And yet looked at from the exterior, social and political debate among the Jewish section of the Israeli population seems to be completely polarized around two themes: religion and "security." Is that correct? Have social issues disappeared from the landscape?

Israel is indeed, in the group of industrialized countries, in second place concerning the gap between rich and poor: a very rich bourgeoisie and many very poor people. According to data from the Israeli social security authorities, 32 per cent of Israeli children - Jewish and Arab - live below the poverty line! The dismantling of the welfare state and its achievements has been done with such brutality and speed as would have made Margaret Thatcher green with envy.

However social struggles, particularly trade-union struggles, remain extremely limited. There are three reasons for this: the economic success of Israel, which makes it possible to leave some crumbs for the workers; the fact that the unemployment rate is very low (less than two per cent); the absence of trade-union traditions and organization

worthy of the name. Fifty years of absolute power of the Histadrut, which had nothing to do with a trade-union organization, even a class-collaborationist one, has prevented the formation of class consciousness, even of a primitive kind. Although there are struggles, they remain confined to one enterprise (usually over lay-offs) or take place in more privileged and better organized sectors (nurses, teachers).

Do the popular classes react to austerity policies? What has happened to the movement of the "Indignados" of two years ago? What does the Koach Ovdim ("Workers Strength") union, which seems to be getting stronger to the detriment of the Histadrut, represent?

The movement of the Indignados was a flash in the pan: a gigantic mobilization that drew in hundreds of thousands of people for a return to the welfare state but only gave birth to a national commission (the Trachtenberg Commission)... almost all of whose recommendations were rejected by the government. Koach Ovdim, which is the first trade union confederation independent of the Histadrut, remains a small organization compared to it, but it has been able to organize strikes and other economic struggles by some of the most neglected sectors, among others maintenance workers in some major civil service departments and workers in a quarry near Jerusalem.

For the majority of Israeli workers, the positions they adopt, including their identities, are first of all determined by the political and "national" and, far behind, by what social class they belong to. If you ask someone what he or she is, they will answer: Jewish, then Israeli, then of Tunisian or Russian origin. Then they will say "religious" or traditionalist. Very rarely will they say "worker" or "employee".

What has become of the "peace camp"? Is it in a position to exert any kind of influence?

About 3,000 people demonstrated against the war of aggression on Gaza. This is very little and repre-

sents especially what in France is called the far left. In this sense, the mass peace movement that we knew in the 1980s and 1990s has not yet recovered from its rout in August 2000. This date should be remembered because it marks a break, a sort of August 1914 of the peace movement: when Ehud Barak came back from the negotiations in Camp David (which he sabotaged with the collaboration of the Clinton administration), he, who had been elected on the basis of an alternative to the policy of occupation of the Right, succeeded in convincing his own camp that Yasser Arafat was using negotiations to lull Israel to sleep, creating lines of fracture with the aim of finally driving the Jews into the sea (sic!). He added: the Right was right, it was us, the pacifists, who were wrong.

The problem is that this mega-lie was received loud and clear by the peace movement... And Sharon was elected with a large majority, to undertake the reconquest of the territories administered by the Palestinian Authority and the few gains resulting from the negotiations between Israel and the PLO. The peace movement has not recovered from that rout, and we are still far from seeing a rebirth of it as a mass movement capable of influencing the political choices of the government.

You have explained, I believe, that by its ignorance of social questions, part of the Israeli Left and the peace camp had thrown the Sephardic Jews into the arms of Likud and the far right: is this definitive?

The popular classes, and especially the poor Jews who came from Arab countries (wrongly called "Sephardic"), have, since the late 1970s, made the choice of the Right, not by identification with its ideology of Greater Israel but because it represented the opposition to the absolute, totalitarian and racist - against non-European Jews – power of the pseudo-left.

The "Left" has no chance of winning back the popular electorate because its reality and its image are bourgeois, and its anti-oriental racism is glued to its identity. The massive immigration of Russians

has also reinforced this fault line. To regain a foothold in the popular classes, a new Left has to be built, but this is the task of the next generation.

Having said that, inter-community marriages are becoming more numerous, and I think attachment to ethnicity, in the Jewish-Israeli community, is tending gradually to lose its relevance.

What does the far left represent in Israel? Anarchists against the Wall? Other movements? What we call here the radical left is very modest, defined primarily by its position on political issues (colonial conflict and wars), even though in general the far left also defends an anti-capitalist orientation. It does not have, in the Jewish population, a party within which it could organize, and it is in collectives that we find it, whether on political issues (occupation, racism) or social ones (economic refugees, women's rights, housing ...) When there are elections, it votes by default for one of the "Arab parties", in particular the Communist Party. Besides, this party denies being "an Arab party," even though 85 per cent of its electorate comes from the Palestinian population of Israel.

Anarchists against the Wall, some feminist organizations, various groups fighting against the occupation or social injustice, or again the Alternative Information Center (AIC), are to be found in specific campaigns (against the Wall, against the fascist groups, for undocumented workers, etc.), but there are no permanent structures.

One of the problems we face is what I called years ago the "NGO-ization" of politics, groups of people employed by small organizations, which are often well financed for their activities by European foundations or governments. NGOs certainly do a good job concerning information and awareness, but they can in no circumstances be the basis of a mass movement. Some people might even say that they are, involuntarily, an obstacle.

How is discrimination against Israeli Arabs evolving? Is the secession between Israeli Jews and Arabs now complete? Or are there

common spaces of cooperation and struggle?

Since 2000 (in October 2000, Ehud Barak ordered a bloody crackdown on the solidarity demonstrations in Arab localities with the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories), we have witnessed a breakdown of the Jewish-Arab front that characterized the movement of opposition to the occupation and to discrimination against the Palestinian minority in Israel (which is 20 per cent of the population). The Palestinians no longer come to Tel Aviv to protest and have chosen to mobilize in their towns and villages. That explains why the protests in major Jewish cities have decreased from tens of thousands to a few thousand.

Behind this choice there is also expressed a desire for autonomy, because in the "Jewish-Arab front", the Communist Party was pushing towards Jewish hegemony, of which the presence of Israeli flags and the over-representation of Jewish speakers were the external signs.

The Arab minority is represented in the Knesset by three parties of more or less equal influence: the Communist Party (in the form of the Front for Peace and Equality, Hadash), the National Democratic Assembly (Balad - radical nationalists) and the Unified Arab List (conservative nationalists).

An amendment to the electoral law may push the Arab parties to constitute a joint list in future if they want to be elected, and if this perspective is realized, there could be in the next Knesset an Arab parliamentary group of around fifteen deputies (out

of 120 ...) Unless the attempts of the far right to prohibit certain Arab parties from running are successful. On this question, the coming weeks will be crucial [1]

For the Jewish-Arab front to be rebuilt, it is essential that Jewish activists agree to abandon their objective of being hegemonic and become a force in support of a movement that is primarily an Arab national movement.

What echo does the AIC have in the present context?

The specificity of the Alternative Information Center is to be, three decades after being established, still the only joint Israeli-Palestinian organization. The AIC brings together activists, known and recognized, from the Palestinian Left and Israeli anti-Zionists. Although, as its name suggests, it conducts work of information and political and social analysis (especially on its website *alternativenews.org*), its originality and its importance reside in its choice to be a breach in the wall that separates the two societies, including the activist world, and to promote a perspective of cooperation and partnership between movements on both sides of the "green line".

In a context where separation is seen as an almost absolute value, the perspective of living together is eminently revolutionary, and it leads to the necessity of a common struggle.

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INDIA

Bhopal's Fight for Memory

Over 5000 persons from the area immediately adjacent to the factory died in the 72 hours following the gas "leak," and over 20,000 persons died subsequently as a result of severe health complications from the toxic air.

To this day, 30 years later, toxic materials (wastes, by-products, solvents, polluted water) dumped by the plant have not been assessed or cleaned up and there are few warning signs in the adjacent areas. The waste has entered the water supply of the city.

More than 600,000 persons continue to suffer severe health problems and physical deformities now present in the third generation of survivors of the catastrophe. Dow Chemical, which subsequently acquired Union Carbide Company, denies liability for damages.

Survivors and activists rally in Bhopal every year on the anniversary in their battle to have Dow Chemical and the governments of India and Madhya Pradesh face their culpability, clean the site, provide free health care, undertake epidemiological and environmental research, as well as regulate chemical plants across the country.

Sara Abraham, advisory editor of *Against the Current*, spoke in December 2014 to Nityanand Jayaraman, an environmental activist from Chennai, and member of the Bhopal Memorial Trust, who travelled to Bhopal for the 30th anniversary meetings and protests.

Against the Current: What is the ongoing importance of the struggle for justice in Bhopal?

Nityanand Jayaraman: The struggle in Bhopal, firstly, underscores the importance of memory as a weapon or tool to get justice and to hold corporations and the government accountable.

The one thing that the government wants is for Bhopal to be forgotten, and the one thing that the Bhopalis know is that they need to fight for memory of Bhopal. It is that classic fight of memory against forgetfulness, as stated by Milan Kundera.

The fight is to keep the memory alive, not only through holding the anniversary but by having significant victories and defeats and ongoing struggles as the subject of each anniversary. It is a stock-taking effort, and also an invitation for people to come to Bhopal to witness the rehabilitation work and the struggle, to see the strengths and the fatigue, and to see firsthand the extent of damage that has been caused by one corporation's pursuit of profit.

There have been struggles against corporations in India and abroad — powerful pitched battles against employers. In those cases, there was no attempt to extinguish the life of the corporation or to damage its business.

Bhopal brought in the realization that corporations are not merely about jobs, welfare and the creation of wealth, and that the damages caused in the pursuit of a corporate agenda are not just small externalities but can be disasters and can resemble a small war. This was something that was not firmly in people's minds.

It is more than 50 years since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which talked about the toxic chemicals that corporations produce that harm the foundation of life. In Bhopal we see that in an incident of a few hours the city witnessed a death count of several thousand — and 30 years later the city is bursting at its seams with evidence of ongoing damage.

The Chingari Trust (rehabilitation center — ed.) has about 200 children who are affected by a variety of congenital disorders, a large number having cerebral palsy, compromised motor skills, compro-

misdeveloped mental development, others with physical deformities, and this is in the third generation.

The harm to the people of Bhopal did not really hurt Union Carbide. It managed to pretty much save itself, barring the marginal nosedive that the share prices had during the disaster. The 1989 settlement was rewarded with an upsurge in the stock prices of Union Carbide.

Bhopal also makes it very clear on whose side the state stands — and how the language and procedure of law is stacked against victims of industrial disasters and the poor. That the Indian Supreme Court endorsed a shameful settlement, about one-seventh the original demand, and authorized the quashing of criminal charges against the accused indicates a compromised nature of the judiciary. The fact that they reviewed the judgment and reinstated the criminal charges two years later only underlines how the Indian Supreme Court can screw up on such important matters.

The other ironic upshot of the Bhopal disaster was that the Union Carbide crime was a bonanza for other multinational corporations (MNCs) that are equally polluting and carry equally dangerous chemicals. The pharmaceutical industry in particular is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the widespread morbidity in Bhopal — administration of symptomatic interventions (drug treatments — ed.) only improves the health of the companies, not the patients.

Over the years we often heard people who came and suggested that perhaps the survivors ought to try this trick or that. Well-meaning people, solidarity workers have come offering suggestions like a new legal forum, approaching shareholders at the annual general meeting, or a direct action like dumping toxic waste on Union Carbide or Dow headquarters.

Many of these suggestions have been taken up and executed, to a point now that very few new ones coming in; a large number of options have been tried, some with success and many without.

The package of survivors' demands has remained largely unchanged over the last three decades. And the breadth of the demands indicate the breadth of interventions that have been necessary to give survivors a fighting chance to return to a life of dignity.

The demands have revolved around economic rehabilitation, medical rehabilitation, social rehabilitation including support for the disabled and the aged, criminal punishment, environmental rehabilitation and financial compensation.

One other lesson that can be drawn from the Bhopal struggle is the importance of pursuing the government to set up medical infrastructure, and equally the importance of communities to monitor these. Through a series of public citizen-led audits of medical infrastructure and medical practices, the Bhopalis have underscored the importance of eternal vigilance.

No Justice in Court

ATC: Can you tell us about the shifts and twists in the legal cases against Union Carbide and Dow Chemical?

NJ: Bhopal survivors' organizations have to be credited for predicting very early on that the government stands resolutely on the opposite side. That is the reason why they had the wisdom to insinuate themselves in the ongoing criminal case as interveners.

Left to itself, the criminal case would have died in 1989 when the Indian Supreme Court rubber stamped a settlement that included a condition that all criminal charges against all accused would be dropped. A subsequent review petition filed by alert survivors' organizations resulted in the reinstatement of the criminal case in 1991.

Subsequently the criminal case was split into one where the Indian accused were tried, and another to pursue the charges against the foreign accused all of whom were declared absconders in 1992. Once again the perfidy of the Supreme Court came to light when Chief Justice Ahmadi allowed the pe-

tition by the Indian defendants to reduce charges to one that drew a maximum prison sentence of two years.

The case against the foreign accused was the one of utmost concern for the government, and an agenda item in the bilateral discussions between the governments of India and the United States.

In the early 2000s the then National Democratic Alliance (right-wing) government went so far as to propose that charges against Warren Anderson, CEO of Union Carbide, be reduced from "culpable homicide not amounting to murder" to "rash and negligent act," a charge normally aimed at people guilty of causing traffic accidents.

The fact that this was proposed by then home minister L.K. Advani, without any public request by the accused, again goes to demonstrate the preoccupation of the government with the welfare of U.S. corporations and their agents.

The manner in which Bhopalis have checked the bad moves of the government, and prompted and pressured it to make the right moves through their acts of civil disobedience, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the interaction between public and legal fora.

Bhopal's history very clearly demonstrates that a case is never fought only in the courts. Street battles are as important if not more to ensure that courts and the government do the right thing.

Bhopalis have also never left their guard down and have been always been on the lookout for new opportunities to hold the corporation liable.

In February 2001 Union Carbide attempted to put Bhopal behind it through its merger with Dow Chemical. Bhopalis saw this almost immediately as an opportunity to enforce Union Carbide's appearance in the criminal case.

After several years of denial by Dow Chemical that it would assume any of Union Carbide's liabilities in Bhopal, Dow Chemical is now faced with a situation where it has to appear before the magistrates'

court in Bhopal to explain why it should not be charged with abetting the fugitive Union Carbide Corporation in its attempts to evade criminal charges.

They did this as UCC continued to do business in India through a series of front companies including Dow Chemical's subsidiaries in India and abroad.

Unlike Union Carbide, which has no assets to be attached to enforce its appearance in India, Dow Chemical has millions of dollars worth of assets and can potentially be forced to make an appearance.

This fact puts a lie to the cocky assertions of the company in past shareholder meetings that Union Carbide's liabilities will have no bearing on the material well-being of the company. [1]

(After Dow failed to appear for a court hearing on November 12, survivors' organizations have demanded that prime minister Modi compel it to comply [2])

Thirteen years after its acquisition of Union Carbide, Dow finds itself in a position where its plans for pumping a billion dollars into India within a decade and to use India as a manufacturing hub (Dow is in the automotives market and India is going through a domestic automobile boom) and springboard to Asian markets has been a non-starter, solely because of its association with the Bhopal disaster.

Medical Neglect and Health Crisis

ATC: Can you tell us about struggles on the health front?

NJ: In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, medical authorities in Bhopal were totally in the dark regarding the nature of the chemical that caused the health effects that they were observing. As a result they did not know how to treat the problems of the thousands of patients who were pouring into the hospital.

Only symptomatic treatment was given. If people had burning sensation in their eyes they were asked to wash their eyes or were given eye drops; oxygen respirators were used for people with breathing distress; etc. Even in the days that followed, Union Carbide refused to reveal the exact nature of the toxic chemicals that had escaped that night, or the nature and extent of damage it could cause to human tissue.

It took a large number of post-mortems and educated surmises for medical professionals to conclude that a cyanide-based chemical was the main agent of poisoning. When it became known that it was MIC and cyanide chemicals, Union Carbide's doctors downplayed the extent of damage that these chemicals could cause.

The most criminal act in all this was that of the Madhya Pradesh state government. Within a month of the disaster a German doctor recommended an injection of sodium thiosulphate to effectively chillate cyanide-based compounds circulating in the blood stream. If the poisons had been chillated with the help of this drug the likelihood and the intensity of longterm effects among the exposed population would have decreased dramatically.

However, the success of sodium thiosulphate would have also effectively proven that the poisons had entered the bloodstream and reached virtually every nook and corner of the body. This in turn would be contrary to Union Carbide's claims that the poisons would have a localized and temporary effect on eyes and lungs. This in turn would mean a very heavy compensation bill.

Acting at the behest of Union Carbide, the state government banned the administration of sodium thiosulphate, calling it an unproven remedy. Not only that, they busted a health clinic set up by activists that was administering the drug despite the ban, confiscated the supplies, ransacked the clinic and arrested and jailed the activists and doctors for 18 days.

In 1996, the setting up of the Sambhavna Trust Clinic (Bhopal People's Health and Documentation Clinic) with entirely private funding set a new benchmark for modern medical treatment of survivors. There have been other previous instances of such medical facilities in India, such as the Shaheed hospital and the Jan Swastya Sahyog set up by mineworkers in Chattisgarh.

Sambhavna offers free medical treatment incorporating an integrated treatment protocol that draws from Ayurveda, yoga, panch karma, and allopathy. The clinic stresses the importance of data collection, research and community-based work with volunteers drawn from the community.

As with Shaheed hospital, this too has a robust community outreach and preventive medicine program. A team of community workers visit different parts of the affected areas daily at their camps. The clinic also has its own medicinal garden spread over an acre of land, where 150 different species of plants are grown.

Sixty percent of the garden's produce is formulated locally and administered to the patients. The remaining 40% is handed in raw form to patients with instructions on formulating powders or decoctions (purified liquids) for their use.

Sambhavna has an extensive outreach program to popularize the cultivation and use of medicinal herbs by affected communities. Fifteen medicinal plants have been identified as part of a package based on three criteria — ease of cultivation, ease of formulation and effectiveness of commonly reported ailments. Five community gardens have been set up which are cared for by local volunteers.

The medical interventions by Sambhavna are interesting for a number of reasons. For instance, cultivating community gardens poses community health care as a community issue as opposed to a private problem.

Second, through encouraging cultivation of herbal medicines by patients themselves, people retain some control over their own well-being.

Thirdly, the introduction of systems of medicine that are historically associated with the Hindu community such as yoga and Ayurveda were introduced tentatively among the survivors, who included a large number of Muslims. These were eventually adopted quite wholeheartedly after their successes, especially the exercises such as pranayama (breathing control) for treating respiratory disorders.

That clinic, however, cannot begin to and did not intend to treat all the survivors, who number over 600,000. It was set up as a model for the government to adopt. Thus far the government has begun to computerize patient records, introduced pulmonary physiotherapy, and agreed to adopt antibiotic treatment protocols. It has done little else, but it can no longer say, as it used to, that nothing can be done.

Creativity in Struggle

ATC: What have been some of the campaigns launched by the Bhopali survivors over the past 30 years?

JN: Starting from the time when a consumer boycott of Everready batteries, a popular Union Carbide brand name, was launched in 1985, Bhopal survivors and their supporters around the world have engaged in a variety of direct action that have drawn from principles of civil disobedience, satire, theater, legal actions and also daredevil acts.

There have been more than 100 hunger strikes, including several indefinite hunger strikes. In 2002 an indefinite hunger strike that had to be terminated due to the ill health of one of the fasting survivors was revived when a solidarity activist — Diane Wilson — decided to fast unto death on behalf of the survivors from her hometown in Seadrift, Texas. [3]

Working closely with the Bhopalis' vast network of international volunteers, the prematurely terminated hunger strike was converted into a global relay hunger strike where more than 4000 people from various parts of the world signed up to fast along with Diane for a day or longer in a show of solidari-

ty. This was the earliest use of social media by the Bhopal campaign, where a separate webpage was set up where people could do more than just sign a petition.

Another action in 2002 that was proposed by and largely executed by women survivors and their women supporters from around the world was the jhadu maro Dow ko ("Sweep Dow Chemicals") campaign. Bhopali women had a bumper harvest of more than 5000 used brooms, donated by irate families, which were collectively handed over to Dow.

A third campaign was prompted by revelations of an investigation by survivors into Dow's attempts to win the support of the government of India to rid itself of Union Carbide's liabilities.

An explosive collection of documents retrieved by the Right to Information Act exposed the long list of people who were acting on behalf of Dow Chemical. This list included then vice chairman of the planning commission, Montek Singh Aluwalhia, Indian Ambassador to the U.S. Ronen Sen, then Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, BJP Spokesperson Arun Jaitley, Congress spokesperson Abishekh Manu Singhvi, Tata Sons chairperson Ratan Tata, and Mukesh Ambani of Reliance Industries.

All these luminaries had written urging the Prime Minister to exonerate Dow and facilitate its business in India. The papers also revealed that the PM had set up a high level U.S.-India Business Council involving industrial leaders from the United States and India. One of the 13 agenda points of this committee was the resolution of legacy issues such as Bhopal with the intent of assuring untrammelled trade between the two countries.

Bhopalis reacted by organizing the 2007 Mir Zafar award ceremony. Mir Zafar was the infamous traitor who betrayed Siraj-ud-daulah in the Battle of Plassey (1757), paving the way for the East India Company to consolidate its hold over India. The satirical award ceremony pilloried the above luminaries for their collusion with Dow.

Bhopal has also inspired several documentaries, one novel and at least two full length feature films, the latest being Bhopal: a Prayer for Rain [released on November 7, 2014 in the United States and December 5, 2014 in India, starring Rajpal Yadav and Martin Sheen].

Bhopal Express was the first Bollywood film. All these productions have been substantially influenced by the survivors and their supporters. In some instances survivors had to prevail quite forcefully on the film producers to ensure their voices were not distorted. [4]

Shaping Activism

ATC: How has Bhopal shaped the work you do as an environmental activist?

JN: I went to Bhopal in 1995 to write a story on water contamination. By that time, the campaign had already coined and popularized long lasting slogans such as "No More Bhopals," "Remember Bhopal" and "A Thousand Bhopals."

After several years of intimacy with the campaign, I could not help seeing a Bhopal-like situation unfold in every corner I turned. The situations involved rampant industrial pollution, a helpless affected community, a collusive state and a corporation that went ahead with impunity.

In my home state of Tamil Nadu, in 2001 we uncovered a toxic mercury dump by Anglo Dutch multinational Unilever, which operated a mercury

thermometer film in Kodaikanal. As with Bhopal, this MNC had run a sub-standard facility that polluted the environment and hurt the workers and families. [5]

It is now 13 years since the factory has closed and our efforts and the efforts of the workers to get Unilever to clean up the site and compensate affected workers and their families are still ongoing.

Our experiences with the courts has been dismal. A case filed by workers in the Madras High Court has inched ahead to nowhere in the last seven years, in the course of which at least 25 workers have died. We are not approaching the courts for environmental remediation, as we have learnt from the Bhopal case that the courts lack the sensitivity and understanding of complexity of remediating contaminated sites.

We are working with communities in similar toxic hot spots in Thoothukudi, Cuddalore, Mettur — all places where local and foreign industries have already caused significant damage to the environment and people. In all these places, public campaigns and awareness material have invoked Bhopal in one way or the other.

You can say that Bhopal is no longer a place alone, but a symbol for corporate greed and impunity, government collusion, toxic pollution, and peoples' struggles against all of these.

Against the Current

MEXICO

Solidarity with the students and parents of Ayotzinapa. We want them back alive!

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

Since September 26, 2014 the demand has been the same: "They were taken away alive! We want them back alive!" We denounce the clear participation and responsibility of the state at all levels and in particular the involvement of the 27th Infantry Battalion of the Mexican Army in the disappearance of our comrades.

The government of Peña Nieto has not only given no response to the demand of the social movement in Mexico, but has also attempted to hide the deep social crisis the country is going through. Ayotzinapa features in this crisis, not as an isolated deed, but as the consequence of a deliberate state strategy which has militarized the country and unleashed a wave of violence which can only lead to tragedies of this type. To this type of drama, we should add the increase in killings of women and violence against women in general, the dozens of journalists assassinated in recent years and the growing violence of criminal groups against immigrants and national or central American immigrants, to complete the panorama of a country in full social decomposition.

Parallel to this, this government has liquidated the final social conquests that the Mexican revolution of 1910 had bequeathed in a political Constitution which is now dead. Simultaneously, Peña Nieto as well as the leading figures of his government has been implicated in scandals of corruption and conflicts of interest.

That is why the social movement of solidarity with the students of Ayotzinapa rejects the version of the

government, which attempts to make this a "local" affair, and rejects any return to the institutional road and participation in the intermediary parliamentary elections in June. These elections will take place in the midst of a crisis of legitimacy of the electoral and political institutions of the country and when the movement points clearly to the responsibility of the state and demands the departure of Peña Nieto.

The defiance towards all parties and political-electoral institutions has reached an unprecedented level. We call on all the left and trade union forces and social movements in our country to pursue actions of solidarity with the Mexican social and popular movement and to maintain world pressure on the government of Peña Nieto whose international credibility is at its lowest.

We hail with enthusiasm the mass demonstrations and multiple forms of mobilization, struggle and expressions of solidarity developing in Mexico.

We support the demands for the reappearance of the students alive, the punishment of those responsible both intellectually and materially for these deeds, as well as the growing demand for the resignation of Peña Nieto.

The state is responsible!

Peña Nieto out!

They took them away alive, we want them back alive!

Statement by the International Committee of the Fourth International, meeting in Amsterdam on 24 February 2015.

ARGENTINA

A death in Argentina

CLAUDIO KATZ ·

The commotion caused by the death of Argentinian prosecutor Alberto Nisman doesn't simply revolve around the question of how he died. Questions abound: Why was he given the gun, why were his guards absent, why was medical help slow to arrive, and why did it never seem like a suicide?

His death added a new mystery to those that arose after the bombing of the Mutual Aid Association of Argentina (AMIA) in 1994, which left 85 people dead. In fact, this prosecutor was intimately involved in covering up clues in the investigation of who was responsible for the attack, and it's not at all clear how he got caught up in this trap.

Twenty-five years after the murder of 85 people, no one has been held responsible, sent to prison or even indicted. The only thing that has been talked about is whether or not the government has engaged in negotiations to absolve the Iranian state of any responsibility, based on the assumption that the Ayatollahs were behind the attack. Nisman made this accusation without any evidence, and the majority of the media went along, silencing other more likely possibilities.

All traces of the attack were immediately erased by the Israeli, U.S. and Argentine governments. They diverted the investigation to focus on Iran, rejecting signs pointing to Syria and providing a cover for any local connection.

In the mid-1990s, Israel was negotiating with Syria for the eventual extension of the peace agreement signed by Egypt, and it wasn't convenient for them to involve their negotiating partner in what had taken place in Buenos Aires. The AMIA and the DAIA (Argentine Delegation of Israeli Associations)

subordinated themselves to Zionist diplomacy and helped deceive the victims' family members.

The U.S. threw blame onto Iran, its principal geopolitical adversary in the Middle East. Then-President Carlos Menem—a longtime power broker in the Justicialist Party, which is based on the legacy of Juan and Eva Peron—backed this cover-up in order to hide his own responsibility in the massacre. Some analysts argue that the explosion was revenge for breaking a promise during arms trafficking that the ex-president oversaw. Others have suggested that Menem broke commitments to transfer nuclear or missile technologies to foreigners who provided funding for his electoral campaigns.

These theories coincide with a string of scandals that accompanied his administration. The tragedy at AMIA cannot be separated from the sale of arms to Croatia, the violation of neutrality in the conflict between Ecuador and Peru, the privileges extended to the drug trafficker Monzer al-Kassar, the explosion at the Rio Tercero arsenal or the strange helicopter accident which claimed the life of the president's son, Carlitos Menem, in 1995.

Intelligence and judicial agencies worked together to obscure what had taken place at the AMIA. They cleaned up the crime scene, destroyed recordings of telephone conversations and protected the real suspects, while inventing accusations and bribing witnesses. Claudio Lifschitz—a former secretary of Juan José Galeano and the first presiding judge in the AMIA investigation—was kidnapped and tortured.

Current Argentinian President Cristina Fernandez de Kircher raised these irregularities during her time in the Senate, but after becoming president,

Cristina, who succeeded her deceased husband Néstor Kirchner, maintained the cover-up and continued to harass Iran (as her husband had done). Both gave speeches at the United Nations putting their complaints against Iran on par with their claims to the Malvinas Islands, which Britain had seized from Argentina during the so-called Falklands War in 1982. And both of them validated the unlikely reports that Nisman received from his superiors in the CIA and the Mossad.

The Kirchners (who also come from the Justicialist Party) initially upheld a governing pact (less open hostility between the factions in exchange for impunity) that had been made between Menem and Eduardo Duhalde, Menem's one-time vice president, who was subsequently elected president himself in 2002 after the collapse of the Argentinian economy. Later, this same agreement was invoked to improve relations with the U.S. and Israel.

The inconsistencies in the accusations against Iran led to one embarrassment after another. One person, who was supposedly involved in the attacks and who carried out diplomatic functions and Argentina, was detained and then immediately released in Europe for lack of proof. Meanwhile, senior Israeli officials boasted of having killed those responsible for the crime.

But the story put forward by Nisman began to fall apart over the course of the last two years for other reasons. The government distanced itself from manipulations by the U.S. and moderated its complaints against Iran, exchanging their arrest warrant for negotiations that culminated in the signing of a Memorandum between the two governments.

This turn coincided with the new situation created by talks undertaken by the U.S. and Iran with the aim of dismantling the latter's nuclear program. Israel continued to advocate bombing these installations, but Washington began to prioritize its campaign against Syria, up to and including the demolition of the country, following the precedents set in Libya and Iraq.

In this new context, Nisman found himself out on a limb and someone encouraged him to raise the stakes. He floated speculations of a ridiculous charge against Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, accusing her of pardoning the Iranians (lifting the "red flags" at Interpol) in exchange for increased trade of grain for oil. Nobody believed this nonsense. Nisman lost an important U.S. supporter (Ronald Noble, who left his post as Interpol chief), the complicity of key Argentine judges (Rudolfo Canicoba Corral and María Servini de Cubría) and the security services (Antonio Stiusso).

The right has tried to present Nisman as a crusader seeking the truth. In fact, the U.S. embassy was mixed up in the investigation, as reported by WikiLeaks. The presence of the main representative of the U.S. diplomatic delegation at Nisman's wake is enough to remind us of this close relationship.

The right-wingers are working to once again realign Argentina's foreign policy with that of the U.S. and Israel. Thus, they are proposing the creation of an international commission, established in Washington, D.C., to find out what happened to Nisman.

They also aim to block an upcoming trial focused on how the attack was covered up and involved several figures among Menem's supporters, the Justicialist Party, the DAIA and insiders in Mauricio Macri's Buenos Aires city administration. In addition to Galeano and Ruben Beraja (former president of the DAIA), Fino Palacios, one of Macri's close advisors, could soon be parading through the courts.

In order to conceal their complicity, the right is trying to blame Nisman's death directly on Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's government. Clarín, Argentina's largest daily newspaper, which is critical of the current president, is aiding and abetting this campaign by claiming that inconsequential telephone conversations between Kirchner aids (Luis D'Elía) and people close to Iran constitute a

felony. The aim of all this is to demonstrate—at a minimum—that the president cannot handle the current crisis.

Meanwhile, the government appears confused. The president polemicizes by Twitter, first suggesting Nisman's death was a suicide, and then later a crime. At the same time, she has accused Diego Lagomarsino (an IT specialist in the prosecutor's office who lent Nisman the gun that killed him) without even checking with the powerful chief of the intelligence services.

Aside from all this, presidential support would have been sufficient to pursue a serious judicial investigation. But the death of the prosecutor came a few weeks after a major conflict had arisen between the president and the higher-ups in the security services. And the government has also recently been at odds with judges investigating hotels owned by the Kirchner family and their connections to money laundering.

These palace intrigues aren't designed to punish corruption. They always proliferate when the end of a presidential term comes close and confrontations erupt between the various groups who are fighting for preeminence in the state apparatus.

Nismans death may also have an impact in the electoral arena. Until Nisman's death, the government had regained the initiative with its anti-vulture funds campaign (U.S. investors holding discounted Argentinian bonds who are demanding billions of dollars in claims) and plans to promote the presidential candidacy of Fernandez de Kirchner's former vice president Daniel Scioli in this year's elections.

In a context of recession and high inflation, the president intended to resume borrowing, peg the dollar, postpone cutting subsidies and revive consumption—all in order to pass along any cutbacks to the next president. Will she be able to stick to this plan in the new context?

In the middle of all this turmoil, the president has proposed a reform of government services in order to overcome what she calls the "great democratic deficit." She forgets to add alongside this pronouncement that she has governed for an entire decade without addressing it.

Her real aim is to simply change the names, but leave the structures of spies in tact. The old SIDE (State Security Secretariat) was changed into the SI (Secretariat of Intelligence) and will now be called the AFI (Federal Intelligence Agency), maintaining its existing personnel and its enormous budget. The National Congress would appoint the intelligence directors under the new plan, but the executive could then replace them. No changes are envisioned for military or police agency spies, and judicial supervision will only be extended over some controversial wiretaps.

All of this means that the supposed dissolution of the SI is really nothing more than a reorganization. As there will be no investigations or clearing out of the old staff, it represents cosmetic change in place of real transformation. The project also eliminates previously announced plans for the declassification of intelligence files. Likewise, it is worth remembering that there have been several spy scandals over the last decade and none of these diminished the security service's power (bribes in the Senate in 2001 and the dismissal of Justice Minister Gustavo Béliz in 2004).

Moreover, Army Chief César Milani has been confirmed as the new strongman in the security services despite the serious allegations brought against him for the disappearance of a soldier during the dictatorship. Officialism (a term describing the Justicialist Party) has not talked a great deal about Stiusso and his fortunes. This may be because this super-spy has compromising files on hand that he could use against the party's leaders.

But for the first time, the huge network of informants, operating as a state within a state, is being forced to the surface. This apparatus has built up its own businesses and is involved in numerous

crimes. Its officers and outside agents are involved in drug trafficking, police protection rackets, looting and the murky management of prisons. They resolve their disputes through murder and grease the wheels of power that connect them to mayors, governors and political bosses.

Clarifying what really happened at the AMIA could be the first step toward dismantling this Mafioso structure. This case concentrates all the nefarious spies and their actions into one place. The formation of an Independent Investigation Commission, as suggested by the Council to Investigate the Unpunished Massacre at AMIA (APEMIA), might open such a path.

The Congress and the Justice Department have demonstrated their total incapacity for fulfilling this task. As was the case with the National Commission for the Disappearances of Persons (CONADEP), only an independent body with broad powers and staffed by well-respected public figures

and family members of the victims will be able to conduct this investigation.

This is the moment to act quickly and with conviction. There is a generalized feeling of indignation in the face of governmental impunity. The left and progressives must take the initiative in the face of dangerous attempts to manipulate the protests by the right wing, middle-class activists and the DAIA. Parliamentary actions or meetings with the government's ministers are not enough. Congress has never been the central arena for the people's demands.

The most important thing is to prioritize mobilizations. This week will see the first march in a series of demonstrations that must grow. The powers-that-be need the security services to hide their outrages, but the people want transparency, democracy and justice.

Translated by Todd Chretien.

Socialist Worker

[1]

RUSSIA

The Murder of Boris Nemtsov

We demand a transparent investigation and an immediate end to propaganda that incites hatred.

It's difficult to say just yet how the Friday-night murder of Boris Nemtsov will change the situation in this country – but something will happen, without any doubt. Regardless of who pulled the trigger, this act of terror is inextricably tied to the unbri-dled and chauvinistic Kremlin propaganda that, for years now, has accompanied a foreign policy of aggression. One of the main facets of this propaganda since President Vladimir Putin's speech on the accession of Crimea has been hatred of the "fifth column," a group of "national traitors." And it is around this hatred, the current rhetoric goes, that the nation must unify in the face of hardship. The "internal enemy" has never been left anonymous: he has several faces, constantly visible on billboards, and a few names, endlessly repeated on television. One of these "enemies" was Boris Nemtsov. And even on the eve of his death, NTV was preparing the next of its foul "investigations," this time on the "Russian Maidan." In this one, Nemtsov was once again in line to play a front-and-center role.

It is true that Nemtsov was one of the main operators among the Yeltsin elite in the late 1990s, and that he is largely responsible (along with, for example, Putin) for many of the social catastrophes and political crimes of that period. His views could be characterized as right-wing liberal, and his foreign policy orientation, pro-U.S. It is also no secret, though, that even today, such views do not preclude one from elite positions in the Russian leadership or at the tops of corporations. However, the most important unwritten rule is the total ban on public criticism of the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine – an open protest against Russian troops on another country's territory. It was precisely this rule that

Nemtsov so consistently violated, a violation that put him high on the list of "internal enemies," and his place on that list that was the proximate cause of his murder.

Of course, Nemtsov's killing came as an unpleasant surprise for the federal government, which is already occupied with a last-ditch effort to maintain the illusion of stability and control of the country. There are a few possibilities in terms of who may have ordered the execution. Among them are certain circles of Russia's extensive security class who have an interest in ramping up tensions here. Others include the members of amateur groups broadly falling under the "anti-Maidan," as well as veterans of the military operation in the so-called Novorossiia, or even militants on the payroll of Ramzan Kadyrov. In any case, what happens next depends on how society reacts to this killing. Liberal leaders' decision to move their march from Maryno to central Moscow, at the location of Nemtsov's death, is absolutely proper. After what happened last night, the agenda in this country has changed. What started as a murder is now the most important political question of the moment.

As we take to the streets tomorrow, we demand:

- An independent and transparent investigation into the murder of Boris Nemtsov
- An immediate end to the incitement to hatred by way of aggressive propaganda on state television
- Real and unconditional freedom of speech and assembly
- Termination of the Russian military operation in Ukraine
- The development of a crisis relief program aimed at helping the Russian people, not financial and energy corporations.

Translated from the original Russian by Thomas Callahan.

LeftEast

GREECE

Solidarity with the Greek people!

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The electoral victory of Syriza and the rout of the parties committed to respecting the demands of the Troika was also a frontal challenge to the European ruling classes and institutions.

For the first time, the regressive social plans imposed for 4 years on the European working classes have been repudiated electorally, bringing to government a party that, despite contradictory statement, waged its campaign mainly around the rejection of these plans. This was in the country in Europe, that has suffered the most violent social attacks imposed by the memorandum of the European Union, the ECB and the IMF,

Consequently, the arrival of this government was a sign of hope for all those, in Europe in particular, who are suffering from these same policies and for the social and political forces who seek to point the way to a fightback against austerity policies.

Just after its election, the Tsipras government announced that it was going to implement a series of measurements that broke with the commitments of former prime minister Samaras.

These declarations immediately ran up against the demands of the European Union and the Troika. On February 4th, the European Central Bank announced that the refinancing of the Greek banks was stopped, because it no longer accepted the bonds of the Greek debt. At the same time there was a massive movement of withdrawals of liquidities in Greece. The pressure on the Tsipras government has been increasing in these recent days, in the meetings of the Eurogroup, that Greece should accept and maintain the framework of the memorandum, pressure supported by all the European governments, of both the right and social democracy. The unanimous and visible desire is to strangle

the Greek government by controlling its banking system.

The demands put forward by the Eurogroup demonstrate that the idea of a break with the austerity policies without a confrontation with the European Union is impossible in practice.

Over and above the words, in the first agreements made between the Eurogroup and the government of Tsipras, the government undertakes to reimburse fully and in respect of the deadlines its creditors. This is a retreat on the undertakings given to the Greek people.

A long-term battle is underway. The European institutions are once again displaying their desire to impose extremely harsh neo-liberal policies which lead to the economic and social marginalisation of whole countries. For any force which wants to stand against the dominant choices in economic policy, rupture is an essential condition. The rejection of the memorandums, of the budgetary diktats of the EU, the non-repayment of most of the debt are the key questions of confrontation. It is up to the Greek social and political forces themselves in the framework of a very broad and democratic discussion to choose the methods that seem the most appropriate to carry out such an anti-Troika policy building the best relationship of forces possible within the population in Greece, and addressing the European populations, who are also victims of austerity.

This policy cannot be consolidated without a policy that breaks with all the antisocial attacks imposed on the Greek people in the last four years in wages, health, the right to work and housing. Such an orientation require the taking of anticapitalist measures, of inroads 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 and workers' control of their own affairs are essential.

A decisive battle has begun in Greece, but all the peoples of Europe are concerned. The Greek people should not remain isolated. The leaders of the European Union claim to speak in the name of their people in their desire to strangle the Greek people.

We must immediately build a massive movement of solidarity with the Greek people, their political and social labour movement, to build a Europe-wide relationship of forces in the struggle for who imposes

their will in Greece, through the mobilisation of the great forces of the workers' movement throughout Europe. The fight to put an end to austerity will be able to develop only through mobilizations of the major forces of the labour movement throughout Europe. We must stop the European Union governments from continuing to impose their diktats, reject any interference, any blackmail. It is for the people to decide their own business. We – with campaign groups, the trade union movement and political organizations throughout Europe – must build a wall of solidarity with the Greek people, against the policies of the troika. This is the task that the militants of our International will take up in the days and the weeks to come.

PALESTINE

Declaration of Fourth International on Palestine

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

Situation

1) The year 2014 was characterized in Israel and the Palestinian territories by a deepening of the dynamics that had been at work during the two preceding decades. Israel strengthened its hold on Gaza and the West Bank. Jewish settlement continued and sped up. Repression of the Palestinians was uninterrupted, and accompanied by intermittent, targeted, extremely violent military attacks, with a new level reached in the last bloody attack on Gaza in summer 2014. The political and economic strangulation of Palestinian society continued, as did the rightward radicalization of Israeli society and politics.

2) These dynamics had already been manifest before the Oslo accords of 1993-94. The long-term process of expropriation of Palestinian land and ethnic cleansing had been proceeding all along, on a shifting scale and at varying tempos in different conjunctures. But the situation today can only be understood by taking account of the changes made with the introduction of 'Palestinian autonomy'. This period has seen an end of the direct Israeli military occupation of the main Palestinian population centres. Direct occupation has been replaced by the Palestinian Authority (PA), a Palestinian politico-administrative and repressive apparatus. In the process, the Palestinian refugees outside historic Palestine have been marginalized.

3) The 'peace process', and thus the tasks assigned to the PA, were rife with intrinsic contradictions. They were meant to contain Palestinian demands through the distribution of international aid,

backed up by repression. But given the lack of any real political advances, the contradictions exploded in September 2000 with the outbreak of the Second Intifada. This revolt manifested the refusal of broad layers of Palestinian society to keep silent in the face of the so-called 'peace process' and faced with an unprecedented acceleration of the colonization: in reality a thinly veiled restructuring of the Israeli occupation. The uprising further increased the visibility of the divisions at the PA's summit between, on the one hand, those who advocated trying to maintain an implausible balance between struggling against the occupation and collaborating with the occupation authorities, and, on the other hand, those who supported unqualified integration into the colonial system.

4) Israel repressed the Intifada by liquidating or arresting thousands of resistance fighters, the majority of whom came from Fatah. This violent repression strengthened the most capitulationist currents of the Palestinian leadership. Yasser Arafat's death and his replacement by Mahmoud Abbas were the visible expression of the new balance of forces. Since 2005, under the direction of Abbas and his old and new associates, the PA has fully played the role of an auxiliary of the Israeli occupation forces. This has been apparent, notably, in the reorganization of the Palestinian security services under US tutelage. In addition, pushed forward by former high IMF official Salam Fayyad as PA prime minister, the PA sped up and completed the Palestinian economy's integration into and subjection to the world capitalist system and its chief local representative: Israel. While there are still, within the Palestinian Authority's apparatus nationalist sectors coming from Fatah hostile to co-management with the occupying power they are more and more marginalized.

5) The victory of Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) in the 2006 legislative elections was a new, albeit deformed, expression of the refusal of the majority of Palestinian society to submit to Western and Israeli orders or to give any political support to the PA's capitulationist and corrupt leadership. Most Palestinians did not identify the PA leadership with Fatah, however: while the PA's rulers were defeated in individual constituencies, Fatah as an organization obtained a percentage of the national party list vote that was only slightly lower than Hamas'.

6) Hamas' victory was followed by its complete seizure of power in the Gaza Strip in reaction to Fatah leader Mohammed Dahlan's attempted putsch, which had the direct or indirect support of the US, Egypt and Israel. But this exposed Hamas to the contradictions of Oslo. There are increasingly visible divisions within Hamas between advocates of resistance to Israel, including armed resistance – and thus of confrontation with the Abbas leadership – and those who support rapprochement with the Abbas leadership (and thus a 'cold peace' with Israel).

7) Hamas faces the same problem that Fatah confronted in the first years of Palestinian autonomy: the tension between co-managing structures integrated into the system of occupation and at the same time continuing the struggle against occupation. So far, Hamas has managed to maintain its unity by combining the clientelist management of its mini-state apparatus in Gaza with the direction of the armed struggle (alongside other Palestinian organizations but with far more visibility and on a greater scale than the others), particularly in response to Israeli aggression. This has enabled Hamas to maintain its legitimacy, both among those who have benefited directly from the movement's institutionalization (by appropriating some of the revenues of the mini-state apparatus) – who support more peaceful relations with Israel – and among those in the most marginalized layers of the population (especially in the refugee camps) who oppose any form of peaceful relations with Israel.

8) This precarious equilibrium also rests on a discourse – the reactionary utopia of an Islamic state in Palestine, whose extent in space and time remains deliberately unspecified – that makes it possible to unite social categories with divergent, even contradictory material interests. Hamas has no monopoly on religious ideology, and this is not the main line of cleavage in Palestinian politics. But religion is central for Hamas, and is manifested in the movement's projects and practices: the marginalization of women, the substitution of religion for politics, the confusion between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, etc. Looking beyond the clear need for inclusive frameworks that allow unity in struggle among different currents of the Palestinian resistance, this underlines the necessity of a political leadership that can provide an alternative to Hamas.

9) The Palestinian left (the PFLP, DFLP and PPP and Mustafa Barghouti's current) is not capable today of forming the necessary alternative. It is divided between advocates of total (in the case of the PPP) or partial (in the case of the DFLP) integration into the PA and the devotees (in the case of the PFLP) of national unity between Hamas and the Abbas leadership. The left is thus paying the price for its ambiguous attitude towards the 'peace process'. Unlike the PPP, the DFLP and PFLP formally opposed the Oslo accords. But their leaderships' insistence on the legitimacy of the PLO led them to mute some of their criticisms. Their failure to undertake the construction of a 'third force' left Hamas with the mantle of the only credible opposition, first to Arafat, then to Abbas. In view of this lack of perspectives, many of the left's cadres and activists gradually reoriented to NGO work. While their work has often been essential, it contributes, as long as it is not linked to the construction of a political alternative, to the depoliticization and NGO-ization of Palestinian society.

10) Meanwhile, the rightward radicalization of Israeli society and politics is continuing. Recent Israeli governments, dominated by racist, anti-democratic, far right forces, have continued and sped

up the policies of settlement, repression and ethnic cleansing, directed against the Palestinians not only in the West Bank and (minus the settlements) in the Gaza Strip but also within pre-1967 Israel. The Israeli centre and centre-left have shared responsibility for these developments, either by participating in coalition governments or through their silent complicity in these policies. The 'peace movement' is paying the price for its orientation towards the Labour Party. Only small anti-colonialist groups are now really taking on the task of struggling against all the dimensions of Israeli colonialism and of full-fledged solidarity with the Palestinians. Unfortunately, they are a small minority in Israeli society today. They face growing repression and harassment from the Israeli state and from far right groups.

11) These developments, taken as a whole, and the shift in the relationship of forces to the Palestinians' disadvantage, can only be fully understood and analyzed by situating them in their regional and international context. The Israeli state is in fact an integral part, politically and economically, of the world imperialist order. It benefits from open backing or indirect support from virtually all the Western countries. The tensions which exist between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government do not lead to any pressure on Israel; the USA, weakened in the region, cannot enter into open confrontation with their Israeli ally. Even some states that are more critical of Israeli policies, like Brazil, Turkey or even China, are continuing to step up their military and commercial ties with Israel. The recent votes in several European countries recommending recognition of a Palestinian state may express irritation at Israeli violence, arrogance and stubbornness and more and more marked isolation of the state of Israel, but they have not led to any real change in the diplomatic balance of forces. The Arab revolutionary process, which had raised the possibility of a break in the Palestinians' regional isolation, is going through a period of retreat with the rise of counter-revolution in its different forms, both repressive

regimes and Islamic fundamentalism. The process has not been defeated and the region is far from being stabilized and new developments are to be expected, particularly in Syria and Egypt which could have an impact on the Palestinian situation. The revolutionary ebb is currently benefiting the Israeli state, due both to extreme forms of rivalry among the Arab countries and to growing collaboration with Israel by several Arab states: Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states, etc. The Palestinians' isolation, contrasted with the widespread, strong support enjoyed by Israel, underscores all the more the vital necessity of international solidarity, as the key to changing the relationship of forces.

Tasks

12) For almost three years now, we have been witnessing a tactical shift by the Palestinian leadership led by Abbas: it has decided to appeal directly to the international institutions, thus partially freeing itself from the constraints of the Oslo framework. The PA has thus asked to join the UN and various bodies linked to it, acceded to the International Criminal Court (ICC), tried to make the UN adopt a resolution imposing a calendar for Israeli military withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, etc. The failure of this last attempt shows the limits of the tactical shift. So does the threat of financial sanctions hanging over the PA, mainly by the US and Israel, especially if the PA pursues its appeal to the ICC. This would paralyze the functioning of the Palestinian institutions.

13) The conclusion is nonetheless unavoidable that these initiatives reveal an increased awareness by part of the Palestinian leadership that the 'peace process' and bilateral negotiations under US tutelage have led to a dead end. Even so, Abbas and his associates do not for the time being explicitly envisage a formal break with the Oslo accords. Rather, they aim to improve the relationship of forces with Israel. These initiatives also reflect, though in a distorted way, the aspiration of a steadily growing proportion of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories to escape from the cage of a 'peace

process' that is making the prospect of satisfying the Palestinians' national rights more remote every day.

14) It is this realization in particular that guided the Palestinians who in July 2005 launched the civil society appeal for boycott, divestment and sanctions. Without taking a position on a long-term solution, they noted the failure of the strategy of negotiations and the unbalanced relationship of forces, and set the goal of isolating the state of Israel politically, economically and diplomatically until such time as the Palestinians' national rights are achieved. BDS is thus meant to escape from the logic of bilateral negotiations and of an 'acceptable compromise'. Its aim is to develop mechanisms that will force Israel, which until now has stubbornly refused to speak any other language than the language of force, to change course. It is also a question of breaking with the logic of military confrontation with Israel, a dead end for the Palestinians, and to combine external pressure and the new development of a popular movement within the country.

15) BDS gives the international solidarity movement a key tool to denounce and pressurize not only the state of Israel, but also other states that are complicit in the occupation, as well as the big capitalist multinationals that profit from it by participating directly or indirectly in the economic exploitation of the Palestinian territories. In the last decade, especially in the wake of the massacres in Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009, BDS has made steady progress on an international scale. It has become a central activity of the solidarity movement and has won some significant victories, mainly in the areas of boycotts and divestment.

16) The Palestinian initiators of the BDS campaign rely on the creativity and tactical sense of the international solidarity movements, so that they take account in each country of the different possible aspects and levels of BDS suitable to specific national and regional realities. In different countries and regions, therefore, different demands can be highlighted, favouring demands which could have a real

impact on Israel: suspension of the EU-Israel agreement, an immediate end to Egyptian participation in the blockade of Gaza and the opening of the Rafah crossing, an arms embargo, an end to military and economic cooperation with Israel (for example on the extraction of gas in the Mediterranean), the freeing of prisoners – particularly child prisoners etc. The key thing, apart from tactical adaptations, is to reject any concession on the fundamental demands, and to insist that BDS will only stop with the full and entire achievement of Palestinian national rights as a whole, including the rights of Palestinians in the 1967 territories, of the Palestinians in pre-1967 Israel and the Palestinian refugees in exile outside historic Palestine.

17) Through and over and above the BDS campaign we should especially emphasize the reinforcement of contacts, links and partnerships between different social and labour movements – trade unions, peasant movements, the feminist movement, the LGBTI movement, human rights movements, the progressive Christian movements, etc. – with their Palestinian counterparts. These partnerships directly benefit the Palestinians by breaking their isolation, and by enabling solidarity movements to root themselves more deeply in national and regional social and political dynamics, widening their social base and audience. The chaos created by the counter-revolution in the region in the region has strengthened the logic of exodus of Palestinian refugees towards, in particular, Europe: taking into account this new fact should be a preoccupation of the solidarity movement linked with the movements of defence of migrants' and refugees' rights. The criminalization of the BDS movement and more largely the solidarity movement among other, and particularly in France, it also a new fact that we should take up in building as broad and unitive mobilizations as possible.

18) We should of course combat any form of racism, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, within the movement in solidarity with the Palestinians, and reject any form of collaboration

with extreme right forces. The recent events in Paris and Copenhagen during which Jewish people were deliberately assassinated, underline the need to struggle against all forms of stigmatization on religious or ethnic bases, and the importance of the presence of anti-occupations Jewish movements and networks within the solidarity movement. This implies developing a solidarity movement that is firmly wedded to principles. In imperialist countries, this does not however rule out an inclusive and proactive approach towards people of Arab and/or Muslim culture, who often provide some of the main bases of support for solidarity. On the contrary, solidarity movements should work towards or deepen their collaboration with forces representing these groups, including Muslim movements and grassroots organizations, insofar as unity is possible without abandoning such fundamental principles as the reject of any confessional approach to the Palestinian question and any instrumentalization of solidarity in the service of religion.

19) Finally, it is important to establish and cultivate ties with the forces of the Palestinian left, in all their diversity, without posing any preconditions. This dialogue should focus, on the one hand, on forms of joint work that are possible within the international solidarity movement and, on the other hand, on perspectives for the recomposition of the anti-imperialist left on a regional and international scale and on the contribution that we can make to this process, in particular in defending our revolutionary Marxist point of view. In this connection, the joint meetings and declarations of the revolutionary left organizations of the Arab region provide precious support, even if we may sometimes consider them imperfect and/or insufficiently representative. It is our task to build them, strengthen

them and broaden them, while respecting pluralism and allowing for tactical divergences. In the solidarity movement with Palestinians, we should fight against any attempt to counterpose the regional revolutionary process and the Palestinian struggle, in particular in recalling the historical hostility of the regimes in the region to the Palestinians' demands, and underlining the complementarity between the struggle against the Israel and the struggle against the regimes. The combination between the Palestinian struggle and the other struggles for emancipation should also be particularly highlighted in our educational system, including and particularly in the IIRE schools.

20) In all these struggles and discussions, we will uphold the demands included in the resolution of the FI's 2010 World Congress: unconditional, immediate and total retreat by the Israeli army from the territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; the dismantling of all colonies built since 1967; destruction of the separation wall; liberation of the political prisoners held by Israel; immediate and unconditional lifting of the blockade of Gaza – as initial steps towards a political solution based on equal rights. We support the struggle of the Palestinian people in all its forms for the attainment of their rights: the right to self-determination without any external interference; the right of return for the refugees or compensation for those who demand it; equal rights for the Palestinians of 1948. Furthermore, we reaffirm the necessity of the emancipation of the Arab peoples, of the dismantling of the Zionist state, which represents a racist and colonialist project at the service of imperialism, in favour of a political solution in which all the peoples of Palestine (Palestinian and Israeli Jewish) can live together in full equality of rights.

SYRIA

The Syrian bourgeoisie and the people's revolution

GHAYATH NAISSE ·

It is notable that this gloomy picture concerns the areas which are revolutionary – and therefore destroyed – which are the areas where the popular classes, including the working class, live and work. This geographic map corresponds to a large extent with the nature of the social forces which are driving the revolution

The political understanding of the traditional, nationalist and Stalinist left, both before the wave of revolutions which has swept across the region and during it, can be characterised as a mixture of statements saying that the coming – or current – revolution is a national-democratic revolution, and another set of statements speaking of revolutions by stages, meaning that the first stage is a national-democratic revolution, but with a 'socialist horizon' which will arrive one day, in the far future. This is a repetition of debates which used to be current among the leftist forces during the experiences of the revolutions of the twentieth century – as if no lessons whatsoever had been derived from them

These two concepts, which are in fact a single concept, Stalinist in essence and origin, are based on the idea that we possess a national bourgeoisie, or a national capitalism. This demands, according to this Stalinist proposition, that we ally with it in order to reach the sought-after national-democratic stage, so as to build a strong economy, industry, growth, etc. From this intellectual proposition, originally Stalinist, are derived a number of Third-Worldist schools, which accuse a mafioso, comprador or rentier bourgeoisie, in order to distinguish it from a national industrial bourgeoisie which will have a progressive role. Some of them see it as necessary that the 'revolutionary party' should lead a class alliance (popular-national bourgeoisie) during this national-democratic stage. This

is in fact a repetition of the demagoguery of which we have seen the miserable effects under the slogan of national liberation, and what were called people's democracies, which were revealed to be in reality pure capitalist dictatorships, or state capitalisms

Our object is not an intellectual contest with the above-mentioned myths, which we oppose, with the adoption of the concept of permanent revolution, and the idea that all mass revolutions carry within them, in the age of capitalism which dominates the whole world, the dynamism of social revolution, that is, the actuality of socialist revolution in our era. Rather, let us see where in reality this Syrian bourgeoisie is today, this bourgeoisie which is supposed, according to the positions set out above, to be concerned with the 'democratic' revolutions, and what its political and class position actually is.

A strong bourgeoisie in possession and in power

The regime of the Assads, father and son, has succeeded, over four decades, in re-forming a large and strong bourgeois class. But what the dictator Assad the elder did over three decades in this respect is distinguished by its caution and by a slow return of spirit to the large bourgeoisie, via carefully-considered measures and by its organic connection with the ruling power. To do this it used two implements: the Law of Profit no. 10 of 1991, and the establishment of a general regime of corruption and generalised robbery, through which the high state bureaucrats, and especially the ruling clique and its partners, became, by the plunder of property, a large bourgeoisie in real estate, commerce and industry. But Assad the elder conserved to some degree the social role of the state, retaining free health and education systems and subsidies for ba-

sic subsistence products for the great majority of the toiling classes; and absorbed part of the unemployment by pumping it into a large state bureaucracy with no rational productive function, especially the army, the security apparatus, and the administrative departments

This caution on the side of preserving some of the social achievements which Assad the elder retained, was cast aside by Bashar al-Assad when he succeeded his father in July 2000. He instituted swift and violent neoliberal changes to the economy, with a shameful disregard for any expected social reactions, in the belief that the repressive apparatuses of power had destroyed, over the decades, any attempt at protest. This was a grave mistake, for social protests did not stop but increased from 2006 onwards

The regime had given its antisocial neoliberal policy, undertaken in the interests of the Syrian large bourgeoisie, the name of the 'social market economy'. The regime of the clique, after Assad the younger inherited the leadership, brought the number of those living below the poverty line from 11 to 33 per cent; if we add to that the number of those living on less than two dollars a day, the number of people living in poverty in Syria in 2009 was almost half of the population, according to UN statistics

This rising bourgeoisie gained possession of 70 per cent of the GDP according to the statistics for 2009, at the time when there was a kind of unwritten agreement between it and the power of the ruling clique, by which the latter said to the rising bourgeois class: 'Get as rich as you like, but leave us in power'. This is what happened over the last four decades. Thus the regime symbolically brought a number of businessmen into the People's Council, which has no practical role. And it increased the powers of the industrial and commercial associations, and even formed businessmen's councils with 69 states in 2009, allowing Syrian businessmen to do business and associate directly with companies and institutions in trade, banking and industry in these countries (it is these same coun-

cils which were dissolved in June 2013 as a result of the siege and economic boycott imposed on Syria and the disappearance of their role)

In addition to this, the despotic form of the regime may be regarded as the form corresponding to the rising Syrian bourgeoisie, in that there is no space for protest against its exploitation and plunder, and no legal or trade-unionist obstacles in the path of its greed.

What national bourgeoisie

When the people's revolution broke out in March 2011, it was noteworthy that a section of this Syrian large bourgeoisie expressed its support for the ruling regime by propaganda and proclamations, in that stage in the first months of the revolution when demonstrations of support for the clique were still a pressing need of the regime. Another section continued to finance and arm militias loyal to the regime, especially that part of the bourgeoisie which is a partner to the ruling family clique.

But it is well-known that capital has no homeland and no religion other than its profits: from the end of the first year of the revolution there began a growing movement to smuggle the property of this bourgeoisie to Lebanon and other Arab and foreign states. This began, in the second year, with the closing of its factories and the arbitrary sacking of tens of thousands of workers, or the moving or sale of these factories.

The bourgeoisie did not long hesitate in grasping the danger that the popular revolution posed to it. It immediately began arbitrarily sacking large numbers of workers, in order to prevent them from taking part in strikes in their factories, and to protect their capital in the best conditions for the guarantee of their interests. The semi-official newspaper 'al-Watan' published a report noting the dismissal of over 85,000 workers in the first year of the revolution; half of those dismissed were from Damascus and its surrounding areas. The official figures indicated that 187 firms in the private sector were closed completely in the period from 1/1/2011 to

27/2/2012. The report indicates that these figures were not confirmed: the number of workshops and factories closed was estimated at 500. [2]

The British Financial Times stated that 'Syrian businessmen have quietly moved their property abroad since the start of the crisis in the country. Economists have said that the operation sped up when the violence destroyed the commercial centres in Damascus and Aleppo...' [3]

The researcher Samir 'Abbud estimated the value of what has been withdrawn from deposits in Syrian banks by the depositors (especially the large bourgeois), by the end of 2012, at nearly 100 million Syrian pounds. [4]

But no-one has an exact estimate of the size of the capital smuggled out by the bourgeoisie, including that section which is closely linked to the ruling family clique, and there is no correct estimate of the number of factories which have been moved abroad to be worked or sold, or those damaged or stopped from working

According to statements of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, 'capital flight from Syria is estimated at 20 million dollars', [5] a figure we believe is much lower than the real one, especially as it was produced at the start of 2013

In reality, the number of private factories which have stopped working in Aleppo alone, a city whose industry forms 36 per cent of Syria's total industry, is more than a thousand, meaning the arbitrary dismissal of more than 500,000 workers. [6]

Nor did the industrial bourgeoisie smuggle most of its factories abroad in the dead of night: many of the factories were transferred outside the country with the agreement of the Syrian authorities themselves, as is demonstrated by the statement of the Egyptian Minister of Industry and Foreign Trade Hatim Salih, at the end of March 2013, that '70 Syrian factories have moved to Egypt', indicating that 'there are 300 more factories waiting to find sites'. [7] Another indication is the decision of the Syrian government to prohibit the export of facto-

ries, issued in March 2013, [8] and the statement of the Syrian economic expert Muhammad Sa'id, that 'around 90 per cent of the industrial establishments were moved abroad with the permission of the state and with the agreement of their owners....' [9]

The Syrian bourgeoisie did not just sell or move the majority of its establishments and factories; it also smuggled out the larger part of its capital. And of even greater importance is that a large part of the bourgeois fled the country themselves to place themselves and their property in security, looking on at the ongoing death and destruction, the price of which was being paid by the poor and the toiling classes, whether they were civilians or fighters with the 'popular resistance', or soldiers in the regime's army. And this at a time when the part of the bourgeois class that remains in the country is flourishing and getting drunk on the war economy, by selling land, building, smuggling, speculation, monopolies, or other profitable activities that wars provide. Some of them can now live exclusively off these activities: those who have been given the name of warlords

We are looking at something like the emigration of a 'class', or of a large part of it, outside the country, while it waits for other classes to wear each other out (among them is that section of the class which holds the reins of political power), in their violent struggle, until things are stabilised in such a way as to allow it to return and dominate once more, in conditions more than suitable for it politically and economically. This is the class which has preserved itself physically and retained all its economic and financial energies

Various sources are in agreement on the estimate that at the start of 2013 the number of 'Syrian businessmen who have gone to Egypt is around 30 per cent of the businessmen who have fled Syria: in number 50,000 investors'. [10]

This is also what is announced, despite some discrepancy in the estimates, by numerous Syrian official statements. Mazen Humur, member of the ad-

ministrative council of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, announced that '60 per cent of businessmen left the country at the height of the crisis, causing the economy losses estimated at 20 billion dollars'. [11] At the same time, Muruwwa al-Aytuni, member of the administrative council of the Damascus and Environs Chamber of Industry, announced that '70 per cent of Syrian businessmen have left the country, which is alarming.' [12]

The working class and the common people

The Syrian working class has been exposed to an official deformation of its struggle and trade-union activity since the Ba'th took power, but the regime succeeded in attaching the labour unions to itself – we mean here the top union leadership – in 1974 under the slogan of 'political unionism'. This is the case for the other union and professional organisations like the Peasants' Union or the Students' Union and others

In the first months of the 2011 revolution, the ruling bourgeois power used these 'yellow' trade union structures, in addition to a long tradition of terror and repression, to mobilise large numbers of workers, public employees and teachers in demonstrations in support of Bashar al-Asad. But the regime, out of fear that such demonstrations might turn against it on the one hand, and because it had called out the army to suppress the oppositional popular demonstrations, on the other, stopped using them in demonstrations in its own support – which, we repeat, benefited from the support and financing of many of the Syrian large bourgeoisie

It is well known that the Syrian regime openly hates and fears two basic segments of society, the workers and the students. It inserted into the founding document of the ruling National Progressive Front – which includes, along with the Ba'th Party, some small nationalist parties and the Stalinist Communists – a paragraph emphasising the obligation these parties are under to refrain from activity in those sectors, in addition to the army

But the deterioration of the living standards of wide sectors of the population led, from 2006 onwards, to a marked increase in workers' and popular protests and demonstrations. Complaints spread even in the ranks of the official trade unions themselves. It was notable, from the beginning of the revolution, that the violence and destruction of the regime affected essentially the areas in which the labouring masses live and work, in the environs of Damascus, Dera'a, Homs, Aleppo and Deir el-Zor. Similarly, the bourgeoisie continually dismissed workers arbitrarily, even in factories not at risk from violence and in areas loyal to the regime

For its part, the regime is laying siege to the surviving workers' establishments with its militias and official apparatus, and trying to get sectors of the workers to endorse its battles, preventing its members from existing or acting as a class with its own distinct interests. Especially with the increasing collapse of the economy and subsistence in the country, which pushes those who still have a job to hold onto it, and those who have lost their jobs to seek work, which is not available in the current economic and political conditions. Some of those who have been made unemployed have been forced either to join the opposition fighting groups, which pay a subsistence allowance to their fighters, or have joined the so-called 'Syrian National Army', a kind of regime militia, not necessarily out of conviction, but as a means of subsistence and an attempt to survive

The general picture of the socio-economic condition of Syria has become more than tragic. The number of unemployed, at the end of the first quarter of 2013, has reached around 2.96 million, which brings the percentage of unemployment to 47.8 [13], while the actual labour force has dwindled to around 3.1 million workers today (2013), whereas it was around 6 million in 2010. This has led to an increase in the number of those working in the unofficial sector of the economy, such as travelling sellers of all kinds of goods, including oil, and smugglers

The living conditions of wide sectors of the workers and popular classes have deteriorated to the point that the Damascus Workers' Union was driven to criticise the current conditions in its annual report for this year (2013), presenting very high figures emphasising the decline taking place in living standards. It indicates, for instance, that the state has coined a huge quantity of money, which has pushed the rate of inflation up to 75 percent, and led to an alarming rise in prices, especially of foodstuffs and oil-derived products. This report states that 'Capital flight has caused the closure of thousands of establishments and factories in Syria, and hence the rise of the unemployment rate to record figures and the appearance of social problems,' emphasising the collapse of the living standard of around 6.1 million people, and a rise of around 100 percent in rents. The 'official' Workers' Union demanded the improvement of the living conditions of the poorest class of the society, the workers, by the increase of their pay by between 30 and 300 percent. [14]

It goes without saying that, from the facts we have given, in addition to the shift of a large part of the revolutionaries into armed combat, the violence of the regime and the savagery of the ongoing battles – all this has made the action of the working class, as a class, in its workplaces, extremely weak – although in 2013 we saw the first strike in medical supplies factories in Damascus on 29 July. But this by no means implies that the workers and toilers form the essential bloc of the revolutionaries of the popular armed movement

Therefore, in these extremely violent conditions of the current class struggle, we see on the one hand the flight abroad of an essential part of the bourgeoisie with all its structures, in order to preserve itself and its property. This surviving part is growing in wealth as a result of the war economy, and even the encouragement of the ruling power to move its factories and establishments into the so-called 'safe areas' on generous terms. On the other hand, we see the emergence of a new segment of war profiteers and warlords, especially in the 'liber-

ated areas'. This is a new bourgeois segment, no less corrupt than its peers

What is the political position of the Syrian bourgeoisie

The new war bourgeoisie has an interest in prolonging the struggle for an additional period, provided that this gave them the possibility to put the wealth they have plundered back into circulation. We find some of their representatives in a number of the political organisations of the opposition, especially the Syrian National Council and the Coalition of the Forces of the Revolution and the Opposition. But it is not opposed either to working with the regime itself: some of them are among those who have taken possession of oil wells and are selling their products to the regime which they claim to be fighting, as well as smuggling part of these products to Turkey. In fact, the Syrian bourgeoisie, in its essential part, continues to see the regime as 'its regime', and does not welcome any political step that expresses a position resisting it, or distinguishing itself (the bourgeoisie) from it (the regime). We may say that the initiatives of Mu'adh al-Khatib, former president of the National Coalition, expressed the position of the Damascus bourgeoisie only, and was based on the opening of dialogue and negotiations with the regime, without conditions. But the sole political initiative of the 'Syrian bourgeoisie' came two years after the revolution following a meeting of some Syrian businessmen in Amman, Jordan, in late March 2013. They launched what they called the 'Syrian Conscience Initiative', which guaranteed that al-Asad would stay (in power) until 2014 and that the current government would be retained, with the exception of the Ministers of Defence and the Interior only. It was clear that none of the revolutionaries were interested in this sole bourgeois initiative; rather, it was a miserable attempt to save the dictatorial bourgeois regime. [15] Meanwhile, the middle strata scarcely have an existence any more – it was they who suffered most in the last ten years from a state of continual dwindling. The condition of impoverishment has reduced these middle strata to the con-

dition of the popular classes, poor or miserably poor

Whatever happens to the political conditions in Syria in the coming period and their fluctuations, and whatever is the fate of the revolution, socio-economic demands will impose themselves at the core of any future political project. Specifically, it will become clearer that they have a place – alongside the desire to sweep away despotism and claim democratic freedoms – among the basic motives of the ongoing struggles and revolutionary dynamisms of all the labourers to achieve their demands

This gives an in-depth picture of the socio-economic changes under way in Syria, which are increasing in gravity and disintegration. The regime has used this fact, in addition to the policies of destruction and of inducing people to emigrate, in order to push wide sectors of the broad revolutionary masses to a state of despair and gasping for survival, fleeing from killing, destruction, hunger and deprivation. The regime hopes thereby to expel or paralyse the masses from revolutionary action and protest, and has in fact been relatively successful, because the 'liberated areas' suffer from the same problems as they did under dictatorial rule. Add to that the growth of the jihadist and takfiri forces, reactionary and opposed to the revolution, which are attempting, in addition to what is mentioned above, to impose a model of backward social relations, offer a reactionary vision which reveals an understanding of the Islamic religion submerged in its backwardness, narrow-mindedness, and narrow horizons, and announce their desire to impose a Caliphate, which is in clear contradiction with the reasons and aims of the great Syrian people's revolution. This makes these reactionary, fascist forces a dangerous obstacle in the way of the continuance

of the popular movement and the victory of the revolution. These reactionary forces have come at present to constitute a black danger for the future of the revolution and of the country. At this point of the revolution, for the sake of its victory, there can be no escape for the popular movement and the armed popular revolutionary resistance, from accepting their responsibilities and confronting these reactionary forces with determination, with arms if necessary, and without hesitation, while continuing the popular revolution against the regime of the ruling clique at the same time. This may permit the popular revolution to return to its original course, for the sake of freedom, democracy, equality, and social justice

This requires, of necessity, the collaboration of the responsible forces to lay down a strategy for the victory of the Syrian popular revolution, the revolution of freedom, dignity, and social justice. This requires, in our opinion, urgent efforts to establish a mass revolutionary leadership, making use of forms of popular self-organisation, in various parts of the Syrian land outside the domination of the regime, as opposed to the existing emaciated forms, besides bringing to maturity the emergence of a unified political and military leadership for the armed popular resistance, putting an end to its fragmentation, laying siege to the fascist takfiri groups and their isolation from the mass movement, as a step towards ending the dangerous, destructive and murderous role they have been playing. As for the revolutionary left, the building of the mass revolutionary socialist workers' party remains an urgent task, and a matter of life and death, in the current stage of the violent class struggle, and in the days to come

Translated by Peter Hill, June 2014

Syria Freedom forever

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



DANIEL BENSAÏD

We Are Alive: A film about the thought, activism and legacy of Daniel Bensaïd

28 March 2015

What first made you think of making this film?

I have always been preoccupied with the question of political engagement. In Calle Santa Fe I touched on the mystery of the activist lives of the 1960s and '70s, and I tried to deal with one particular question: was the resistance worth it? Yes... Of course it was. That was my generation. We young people were convinced that we would live to see the Revolution. Our political engagement was clear, vibrant, we knew where we were going. It was full of life: for that generation, across the world, it carried forth a desire for freedom, justice and autonomy. But what came next? After our religion of History and our certainties collapsed, after what Daniel [Bensaïd] called the disappearance of the radiant future: then what? Should we do what everyone else does? Give up, pack it all in, and fall back in line? Believe in triumphant liberalism and the mirages of a joyous globalisation?

For me these questions crystallised with Daniel's death in 2010. We paid tribute to him, a great homage to his life, at the Mutualité [a large meeting hall in Paris]. I was there, I felt very inhibited as I spoke; I was representing Latin America, a continent Daniel devoted a lot of himself to through the Fourth International sections there (he spent a long time in Argentina, Brazil and Chile). I felt something weighing on me after losing his friendship: but it was the opposite of a burden. Rather, I felt I now had to bear Daniel's message. This was not just made of his actions, but also the scars he picked up across his life – and his laughter.

Many of us had always relied on Daniel to look out for our interests. When he died I felt the need, the desire to go and find out on what basis, based on

what kind of thought, we could get together and begin to reflect. How to be in movement – active, an actor. Daniel wrote a lot about that. There were a number of occasions when I fell into melancholy periods, and he shook me out of it. He was funny, understated and full of humour. He had this way of helping you pick your head up again, just by using a couple of words.

Did you first meet him through your activism?

Yes. He was in the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and had got involved in supporting the Chilean resistance, in opposition to the Pinochet regime. That was how I first met him. He was one of the people who took me in. I had to abandon the cult of death and nostalgia, to kill it off; I had to accept that I was a woman who had suffered wounds, but first of all a militant. The pain of our defeat and the death of Miguel [Enriquez] and my friends did not make any dent in my belief that we could continue fighting and that we could defeat the dictatorship. Our discussions were always very sincere; they were to the point, with no time for dogmas.

Did you have a lot of disagreements?

At that time we disagreed on the question of continuing with the armed struggle. He was against but he also knew that in Latin America this was a question of life and death – militants' lives were at stake. He addressed the issue without the least hint of arrogance. He posed questions and warned of the dangers. He was most directly involved in Argentina, with the PRT (the MIR wasn't part of the Fourth International). This was political engagement for the sake of life itself – as the Zapatistas put it, better than anyone – even when

we were handling weapons and setting up armies. You had to live for the struggle. Daniel already understood that, even back then. When he found out that he had AIDS he didn't stop his activism; far from it, he devoted himself to an ever-greater amount of writing. These were hugely important works. Here I'm thinking of his *An Impatient Life*, his *Walter Benjamin*, his *Pari mélancolique*... this always makes me think of Victor Serge's decision when he was inhospitable after surviving a bowel obstruction: to write, write, and write again, whatever the circumstances... I never talked about that with Daniel, but it seems like he too redoubled his efforts.

It's also striking how attached he was to literature and poetry: he wasn't only a scholar or an academic.

Exactly! Daniel was very literary. He was keenly aware that we have to use everything we can – including our emotions – to understand the world (he was talking about the merits of indignation long before Stéphane Hessel did). And also he was a teacher: he trained people up, or as Olivier Besancenot put it very nicely, he 'smuggled across' his knowledge. He passed it on. And always did so in the understanding that we would need this to move forward, at the same time as we acted on the present. He evoked the memory of the defeated in order to build active revolutionary subjects, but without ever saying that things had been better back then: there had to be an opening, a breach in the present. We need to understand that we do have the power, that it is possible, and that the future will be something different from now. Our vision of History is finished, that's a fact – but even so... etc. That was Daniel's strength, and indeed the strength of other people who thought along similar lines, for instance Michael Löwy. So that was where I got this idea of a film allowing us to see what concretely is happening in today's struggles.

So you never thought of making a biopic?

No, I didn't want to recount his life. Impossible. This isn't a film about him, but a film that starts out

from our friendship, his thinking, and all the attributes I mentioned before. As well as the question: what's going on today? And how could Daniel help me understand it? I didn't want to go to the places that are currently in vogue: I was looking for post-1990 struggles, but ones that have already been going on for some time, fighting and creating, both at the same time. I'm currently reading Kristin Ross's book *Communal Luxury: the Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*: which isn't the umpteenth narrative history of the Commune, but rather a work that delves into what still remains of its imaginary, the surviving militant energy that we can still find here and there, for instance at Occupy Wall Street or among the indignados. That's a bit like what I'm trying to do as well. I also immediately decided against using 'experts'; I stuck to looking at the anonymous. Daniel taught me – he put it a lot better than me – that these anonymous people in struggle represent all that is great about politics. I wanted to stay true to that. More than anything, these people are active. They develop their thinking, even if they haven't pulled it all together yet, and still isn't ready for analysis. I wanted to give life to them, to show them in their beauty. To show that these fine people are also a beacon – that they are what engagement means! This is so much better than sitting in front of the TV or sinking into drugs or nihilism. They live better, it's as simple as that. It's a fuller life, it's even more... fun! For my generation, activism meant sacrificing a lot of things, never going outside of the collective (which was everything). Being revolutionary also means laughter, love, dancing, children, 'normal' things; but if you followed the ideology too closely, it meant sacrificing all that. Today such a division is senseless.

That's what Bensaïd was referring to when he wrote that activism is 'the opposite of a sad passion'.

Absolutely. Anyone involved knows that, feels that. You go from powerlessness and submission to action, to creating something. The problem is that today media and consumerism do everything possible to stop there being connections, encounters, affec-

tion, thinking. All those who are associated with collective action feel a sort of joyous melancholy. I've often seen that. Rarely does our joy in victory last long, and the road still to be travelled is always a long one. So bitterness can take over. But those who we meet on this road, those who share in our commitment, those who we go through such wonderful experiences with – it's them who make this engagement a joyous passion.

So I want to hand over the mic to these anonymous fighters, so we can see what kind of people they are. Not movements or abstractions. But subjects who are also part of a collective: the landless peasants in Brazil, the Indian resistance, the right-to-housing movement in France, trade unions... I had thought about including Chile, but there weren't the same kind of long-term movements. And I wasn't just cataloguing whatever struggles are out there... I had to make some choices. I could of course have looked at some things happening in Spain or in Greece. But film is money, and I made this one with a lot of activist energy and not a lot of funding. Every day I thanked the technicians, the collectives, the producers and filmmakers immersed in day-to-day action. Without them there'd have been no film. Not one like this, anyway.

Your film has a real aesthetic quality, in its composition as well as how it's shot. Sometimes we tend to think an activist film has to be rough at the edges, or even ugly, in order to seem convincing [laughter]. How did you address the question of form?

This is essential. A film is always a form. When I talked about honing in on the beauty of political engagement, I meant this, too. Even if we didn't have much time, our work on the images was vital. It certainly wasn't OK for it to look ugly. There is already violence and even death in it... the image itself had to look as good as possible, as far as a documentary allows. And my photo editor Ned Burgess was right there, contributing his kindness as well as his talent.

There are a lot of words, throughout the film. Some of Daniel's writing appears in it, a sort of red thread running through my narrative; I needed a wider backdrop to bring them to life.

How long did it take you to produce the film?

From the time when I first wanted to do it, through the writing process, the search for funding, shooting (a few days shooting, but scattered over a long period), months of production, and now preparing its release... a total of five years!

So you set off on this journey with Bensaïd's writings... how did you decide where you were headed?

The world is vast and I wanted to show something of its extent. For example, in terms of Latin American struggles I'd already met Subcomandante Marcos in Mexico, but here I wanted to share the experiences of the Brazilian landless peasants, who've waged a thirty-year battle that has been necessary for many of their survival. In Bolivia the election of Evo Morales, after a series of often-violent struggles, allowed me to show a fight that resulted in victory. In France I had already met with the right-to-housing movement as early as 1996, impressed by the obstinacy of the homeless in refusing to accept injustice, as well as militants' creativity in promoting dignity in the face of poverty and other people's contempt.

But you'd never been to Brazil before, which is quite a surprise...

Brazil was very important for Daniel: he went there a number of times, and took part in the formation of the Workers' Party (PT). It was following his activity there that I found out about the landless peasants' movement. This was something very tangible: a highly organised political force that defends its autonomy as well as being in dialogue with the PT. It embodies a series of attempts at self-management, popular control and participatory democracy. With its travelling schools – the teachers who head out into the areas where they've taken over

land – this movement has managed to train two generations of young people who have successfully resisted the trap of voluntary servitude. They call their perspective 'ecosocialism' – a new word, but a resonant one, and an urgently important task for our time.

And how about Bolivia – you said you wanted the film to include a success story?

What happened in Bolivia in 2005 is a real revolution. I wanted to have a success story, and what happened there was more than I could have hoped for. We ignored institutional politics and the emblematic Evo Morales, and instead went to Cochabamba to seek out the protagonists (most of them illiterate indigenous people) of the Water War, a 2000 struggle that defeated the ultra-neoliberal government and a French multinational. I met with Oscar Olivera, one of the founders of the 'Coordinadora'. This organisation not only brought together a whole people in struggle during the Water War, but also showed the way for those fighting over the country's coca and hydrocarbon resources. Oscar is still active in the social movements: he refuses to accept any kind of governmental post. As soon as I first saw Oscar he seemed somehow familiar. For me there is a community of people in struggle, and they look alike – they are all equally beautiful. Like the women of La Busserine in the northern districts of Marseille!

It was the 2005 banlieue revolt that brought you to the northern districts of Marseille; and yet there weren't any riots there?

Indeed – they had already taken place beforehand. These misunderstood revolts were a political baptism. You can't see the reality of the place if you're distracted by the rag of drugs and Kalashnikovs, as the media and politicians normally present it. Via some activist networks I met Fadela, then I was introduced to Fatima and Karima. Their collective is active in these neighbourhoods stopping the cycle of violence among the youth, as well as denouncing the violence that's being perpetrated against these young people. These women are active in social

work and educational associations as well as developing an uncompromising political critique that allows them to propose alternatives. For me, they are the real heroines of our time.

You bring in the voices of the right-to-housing movement, which has succeeded in promoting the requisition of empty private housing. But the film also provides a platform for another cause that is often neglected (or even disliked) in social movements today: trade unions. Why?

I think that the trade union struggle is simply essential. At its best it is the bearer of values that we have sometimes tended to forget: solidarity, sharing... As Daniel put it, it reminds us that the class struggle exists, and it smashes open the false unity of a race, a nation or a religion – because you find that there is always another side within each of these camps. These are words that we really need to listen to, particularly at the present moment.

I first discovered Christophe when I was watching a video online about the pensions strike at the Total oil refinery in Donges. Moved to tears, he said something almost exactly the same as what Daniel once wrote: 'There are defeats that have the taste of a victory'. I was bowled over to see a union leader showing such emotion, and by the fact that he had simultaneously found the words to express such a fundamental political insight. I thought that if I put him at the end of the film, I could show how we can overcome disheartenment and defeat and progress onwards, despite everything.

You have already produced a film on Victor Serge. Do you consider yourself close to Trotskyism?

I've never fully identified with it. I am, let's say, of a Trotskyist education. It's a question we could talk over for ages – I have often been very angry with certain Trotskyist organisations, particularly in Latin America. The most important thing, in my view, is that for Victor Serge, for Daniel, for the MIR and the comrades I've had across my life, is that communism – the communist utopia – is

something magnificent, and we must do everything possible to defeat Stalinist communism. The price we have had to pay because of Stalinism and the Communist Parties the world over is an enormous one. It caused very serious damage. We have to save the word 'communism' – the common, sharing. This word has been polluted, contaminated, and stained with blood and authoritarianism. I very much like the idea of libertarian communism, which Michael Löwy has described very well.

Bringing together Marxists and anarchists?

Yes. We can't leave aside the question of organisation, connections and structures. I'm no believer in spontaneism – that kind of anarchism is not my tradition. The movement I most identify with today, out of all those I've encountered is the landless peasants' struggle. This movement has shown an extraordinary kind of political intelligence. It has been going for thirty years, and lays emphasis on education, freedom, resistance and a refusal to submit to authority. It does everything possible to escape the trap of voluntary servitude. We need organisation, but I don't know what form it should take. The Zapatistas are also making an opening, in this sense.

But contrary to what some might think when they read this, your film isn't about a

party or any particular political current?

No, not at all! It's not a film on the NPA, though Daniel was of course an intellectual for this party. It's anything but a manifesto. It is political, certainly, but since there is a personal narrative and a storyline it is just a film, not a militant act. It is a film that poses questions, and I don't give the answers: people can discuss them after they've seen it. It is very wide in its scope, spanning both my homelands – Latin America and France. This is the first time that I've shot a film in France, and it changed my way of 'being French' quite a lot. I wanted it to be wide in its scope, as these experiences exist everywhere, and I found some of them here [in France] and others in Latin America.

What thought do you want to leave in your viewers' heads as they head out of the cinema?

I want them to be energised. I want the film to open up a corner of their mind that can be open to ideas and actions. I hope that it can do at least a little something, in these terrible times, to free us from our sense of impotence. I want it to be una canción, a paean to possibility. If it does that, I'll be happy with it.

Translated by David Broder for Versobooks.com.

See the original article on the French site Ballast.

PAKISTAN

"We have lost one of the best women activists"

FAROOQ TARIQ · 26 March 2015

Tahira Mazhar Ali's death a profound loss to many

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LAHORE: Veteran leader of the left movement, Tahira Mazhar Ali, passed away on Monday. Though she had been unwell for some time, her death has been met with a profound sense of loss by those who knew her.

Born in Lahore in a prominent family, Tahira's father was Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, the prime minister of united Punjab from 1937 to 1942, while her maternal grandfather was Nawab Muzaffar Ali Khan, a prominent landlord of Punjab. She studied at Queen Mary School in Lahore and later married Mazhar Ali Khan at the age of 16. Marrying a student leader may have been a turning point in her life and her political life began after marriage.

Being born in an affluent family did not deter her from struggling for the rights of the marginalised. She carried on her activism for labour and women's rights for over 60 years.

It was Tahira who for the first time in Pakistan observed the International Women's Day publicly, where it was openly demanded that women be given their equal status and their rights be established. When it came to fighting for human rights, Tahira was unbending and her marked resistance made her a threat to the establishment.

In 1950, the Democratic Women's Association (DWA) was formed and led by Tahira. It is considered the country's first women's rights organisation that ran with the support of the Communist Party, something that Tahira was proud of, often comparing it to internationally run organisations today. Other members of the DWA included Hajra

Masood, Khadija Omar, Amatul Rehman and Alys Faiz. Its work was based in the grassroots in small neighbourhoods and involved mobilisation of women and workers.

It is because of her work in this regard that Tahira is seen as one of the greatest women of the subcontinent. Those who knew her well recall her active role in protests and rallies.

Amid tears, her long-time colleague and close friend 'Baji' Naseem Ashraf Malik recalled Tahira and said she was "history personified".

"I cannot even begin to explain her greatness," she said. "All that I have learnt about activism has been taught by her. Inspired by her, we used to follow her through the streets of Lahore holding brooms and sweeping neighbourhoods. When the women who lived there used to see us, Tahira used to explain to them about cleanliness and made them aware of so many other things too."

Baji Naseem adds that Tahira was not just an activist for the working class and women — she was someone who actually worked with the masses.

"Unlike many others, she never thought it was beneath her to sit next to workers in their homes and eat with them," said Baji Naseem. "She had so much empathy within her. But at the same time, she was outspoken, confident and brave and nothing could deter her."

She said no other woman had done as much as Tahira had for women's rights in Pakistan. It is because of this that she has been recognised in the subcontinent as a great woman of Punjabi origin. Tahira also led fierce resistance against dictatorship, especially under the Ayub and Zia regimes.

In the 1960s, Ayub Khan banned the DWA for its stance on his rule. Later, during Zulfikar Ali

Bhutto's regime, though there was more freedom of movement and expression, the DWA was restrained from inviting Indian women activists to celebrate the International Women's Day here. After further restrictions on the association during Gen Zia's reign, these leading women's rights activists formed the Women's Action Forum (WAF) as a new resistance movement. Zia's oppressive regime and controversies such as the Hudood laws compelled the formation of WAF in 1981.

"Tahira was indeed a true activist," remembers I.A. Rehman. "She joined the Communist Party at a very young age and since then never once stepped back from the work she was doing. After the

Partition too she worked on peace and was on the peace committee between India and Pakistan."

He described her as a very active political person who even participated in rallies and protests in her old age. She remained a member of the Central Working Committee of the National Workers Party. But though she remained strong inside, outwardly Tahira Mazhar Ali's health began to turn fragile, especially after she suffered a stroke.

On Monday, March 23, she passed away at her house in Shah Jamal, Lahore.

Tahira Mazhar leaves behind a daughter, Tauseef Hyat, and two sons, Tariq Ali, a renowned writer, and Mahir Ali, a journalist in Australia.

Stalinist caterpillar into libertarian butterfly? - The evolving ideology of the PKK

ALEX DE JONG · 11 March 2015

The stated goal of the Rojava project is to build a liberated, democratic society with equal rights for women in which different ethnic and religious groups can live together. The ideological inspiration for this project is the thought of the Turkish Kurdish PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan.

In the early to mid nineties the PKK led a fierce guerrilla-war against the Turkish state and it remains a significant force in itself and through its influence over other organizations. Initially, the PKK followed a 'marxist-leninist' ideology. However, the movement underwent deep ideological changes, especially after Öcalan's capture in 1999. The PYD denies any organizational links with the PKK but it was set up by Syrian PKK-members and claims to follow the same ideology as the current PKK.

This article examines this ideology and its changes in several key aspects. The first two parts discuss the early strategic orientation of the PKK and its similarity to other national liberation movements of the time. Part three discusses the idea of 'creating a new man', an idea that became central to the PKK's conception of the future society they struggled for. This idea was a distinctive characteristic of the PKK. It is not unusual for activists in this movement to describe their political convictions as 'the ideology of Öcalan' and part four discusses the role of Abdullah Öcalan as the leader and ideologue of the movement. Part five discusses another distinguishing characteristic of the PKK: the role that it sees for women and women's liberation in social change. Part six and seven deal with the changing

ideas of the PKK about the future society: its vision of a 'democratic civilization and its changing conception of 'socialism'.

The goal is not to provide a history of the PKK but parts of its history will be discussed to situate its ideological evolution. The focus is on the movement's 'official' ideology as written down in statements of Öcalan and documents of the PKK. How this ideology is translated into actual politics on the ground and how grass-roots activists interpret it are questions that are beyond the reach of the article. The influence of Abdullah Öcalan in the PKK can hardly be overestimated. As one former member put it; 'the PKK is in a certain sense identical with its founder, Abdullah Öcalan'. [1] Because of his dominant role as both the leader and ideologue of the movement, the article will give extensive attention to statements and writings of Öcalan himself.

Roots of the PKK

The current Kurdish liberation movement in Turkey has its roots in the radicalization of the sixties. After a coup by 'progressive Kemalist' army officers in 1960, a new Turkish constitution was introduced that promised the right to work, a minimum wage, the right to strike as well as freedom to organize. In this atmosphere, trade-unionists and progressive intellectuals organized the 'Workers Party of Turkey' (Turkiye Isçi Partisi, TIP), a party that in 1965 won three per cent of the vote and 15 seats in the parliament. The TIP was a reformist party that re-introduced socialist ideas that had been made taboo and even outlawed by the Kemalist state.

The TIP condemned the militant actions of radical-left youth activists and had only shallow roots among the working class. However, the TIP did have relatively strong support among Turkey's Kurds. The Kurdish provinces of Turkey have always been the poorest part of the country, partly the result of racist state policies that discriminated against the Kurds. Speaking Kurdish was a crime, use of the letters x, q and w – which exist in the Kurdish alphabet but not in the Turkish – could be prosecuted, publications that simply mentioned the word 'Kurd' were banned and the Kemalist state tried to assimilate the Kurdish minority into the Turkish majority. In the late sixties, a number of Kurdish members of the TIP started to discuss the specific problems of the Kurdish population in the country. Out of these discussions grew the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearts (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları, DDKO). The word 'Eastern' was an euphemism to avoid state-repression since any discussion of even the existence of Kurds was banned.

Simultaneously, Turkey saw the growth of a new, militant Left. In 1965 the Federation of the Revolutionary Youth of Turkey (Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu or Dev-Genc) was formed. Dev-Genc members organized university occupations, protested against the presence of US-troops, organized solidarity with workers' protests and fought fascists on campus and in the streets. Parts of the workers movement also radicalized and in 1967 the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, DİSK) was formed as a left alternative to the established trade union federation. Workers also organized wildcat strikes and factory occupations, peasants occupied land. Out of this ferment and radicalization the first armed groups grew in the early seventies. Inspired by the Cuban revolution and Maoism, these groups saw Turkey as a 'neo-colony' of the US and considered themselves to be fighting for a 'national-democratic' revolution that would break the grip of imperialism on the country, bring true national independence and

open the way for a second, socialist stage of the revolution.

Abdullah Öcalan began his political life in these radical-left circles. Born in 1949 as a son of a poor peasant family, Öcalan grew up in a very religious and conservative environment. In 1966, he went to Ankara to attend a vocational school that trained students to work in the state's land registry offices. In 1969, he graduated and found work, first in Diyarbakir and after a year in Istanbul. Shortly before graduating, Öcalan had become interested in politics and started to visit political meetings. Öcalan joined the DDKO and protests of the radical youth. In 1971 the army staged a new coup, now to stamp out the radical movement. The TIP was banned and the DDKO closed down as many activists fled the country. In 1972 Öcalan, who by that time had begun to study political science in Ankara, was arrested during a protest in solidarity with Turkish leftists who had been killed in a firefight with the police. Öcalan was sentenced to seven months and found himself in the military prison Mamak in the company of Dev-Genc leaders and other experienced radicals. His arrest radicalized him further and the political discussions he witnessed in jail made a strong impression on him. He decided to dedicate himself fully to radical politics. After his release from jail, the coup regime had successfully repressed many of the radical groups.

Öcalan didn't feel at home in any of the existing groups, either Kurdish or Turkish. The Turkish radical-left, more or less under the influence of Kemalist nationalism and the theory of a revolution by stages, tended to neglect the oppression of the Kurds or even denied this was an issue. Such groups reasoned that since Turkey itself was an oppressed nation, the Turkish state was incapable of imperialist policies like national oppression of the Kurds. If they did recognize there was oppression of Kurds specifically, many Turkish leftists saw this as an issue that could be dealt with only after a national-democratic revolution that would liberate Turkey from imperialism. In 1975 the traditional Kurdish nationalist movement suffered a heavy

blow with the defeat of the guerrilla-war in Iraq led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani (father of the current president of the Iraqi Kurdish region, Massoud Barzani). Barzani had allied with the US, Israel and Iran against the Iraqi state but was abandoned by his allies after Baghdad made concessions to Tehran.

Öcalan drew the conclusion that the Turkish Left could not be the champion of the Kurds and neither could this be traditional nationalists like Barzani who looked for support abroad. The Kurds would have to fight for themselves, as Kurds. Öcalan started to build his own group that adopted the notion of pioneering Turkish sociologist Şemîl Beşikçi that 'Kurdistan' was an international colony, occupied by Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. From 1975 on, Öcalan's group started to agitate under the name Kurdish Revolutionaries (Soresgeren Kurdistan, SK). Its core members often resembled Öcalan: young Kurds from a poor, rural background that had radicalized as students. This was a very different layer than that of the wealthy family of Barzani or the urban students that played an important role in the Turkish Left. The SK was not exclusively Kurdish but also included a number of Turkish leftists who saw the liberation of Kurdistan as a precondition to revolution in Turkey.

Unlike other Left groups, the SK decided not to spend resources on publications, instead recruiting people through intense one-on-one discussions. Its recruitment focused on poor, often illiterate Kurds, often from a rural background who had moved to the cities to look for work. Another characteristic of the SK was its willingness to use violence against groups like the fascist Grey Wolves. This brought the SK a certain respect and attraction to radical youth which helped make up for the lack of a well-known leader or financial means. This militancy appealed to many Kurds who had recognized that the Turkish state would not allow the Kurds to free themselves through non-violent means and who, after the defeat of the traditional nationalism of Barzani, were looking for an alternative.

Former PKK central committee member Mehmet Can Yüce later explained his radicalization: 'You're a colonized nation and you seek your rights. You can bring out magazines and set up associations and enter parliament – in short, you can operate within the limits that the state has set, but the trouble is that the state outlaws the use of the word 'Kurd', they won't let refer to a place called Kurdistan. Saying these words is a crime, splittism, ample cause to get you arrested, tortured, kept in jail for years on end. So, what is keeping this nation under repression? Force. The army, the police, the gendarmerie, the counter-guerillas, the far-right Nationalist Action Party. In such a country, where the machinery of repression is so organized and entrenched, you're left with one route, and that's to use force to answer with force'. [2]

A few years later, the SK had won modest support in several of the bigger cities of the Kurdish regions. In 1977, the group was reorganized as the Kurdish Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, PKK) and adopted a manifesto. This manifesto, 'The Road of the Kurdish Revolution' strongly resembles statements of other 'marxist-leninist' national-liberation movements of the time. In 1977 its first party program, which largely summarizes the ideas in the manifesto, was drafted.

These documents declare that the immediate goal of the PKK is a 'national-democratic' revolution that will lead to an 'independent and democratic Kurdistan'. Any other option than the creation of an independent Kurdish nation-state is vehemently rejected; the original program called for exposing 'capitulationist attitudes that do not aim for smashing the colonial yoke of the Turkish Republic and suggest things like "regional autonomy", "autonomy" et cetera', since such proposals are; 'in essence a compromise with colonialism'. The program calls for a 'determined struggle' against such ideas. [3]

The revolution will take the form of a prolonged armed struggle or 'people's war', based on the peasantry. The leadership of the revolution has to be 'the working class', led by the PKK. The power of the 'feudal' leaders of Kurdish society needed to be

broken since these are the representatives of colonialism. The peasantry and the urban petty bourgeois are the two main allies of the working class. There is no Kurdish 'national bourgeoisie' because colonialism did not allow such a class to develop. International allies of the revolution are 'socialist countries', working class parties of capitalist countries and 'the liberation movements of oppressed peoples of the world'. Its enemies are the Turkish state, its 'native feudal-collaborators', and 'the imperialist powers behind them'. After the 'national-democratic' revolution, the struggle will, 'without interruption', proceed in a socialist revolution. This manifesto, and the party symbol, a red flag with the hammer-and-sickle, would be in place until the fifth party-congress in 1995.

The documents are obviously heavily influenced by Maoist ideas but do not adopt the designation of the Soviet-Union as 'social-imperialist'. The ruling parties of the Soviet-Union and China are both criticized as implementing 'revisionist' policies. Overall the 'really existing socialist countries' are considered allies of the Kurdish revolution, but none of their governing parties is accepted as an ideological lodestar. PKK-ideologue Mehmet Can Yüce later mocked Turkish left-wing groups that were looking for a 'Mecca' in Moscow, Tirana or Peking.

The PKK was not the only Kurdish leftist group to adopt such a framework at the time, nor was it the only one to declare armed struggle a necessity. In fact, several other Kurdish groups at the time, like the Vanguard Workers Party of Kurdistan (PPKK—Partiya Pêşengê Karkerên Kurdistan) and Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (TKSP, known as Özgürlük Yolu, Freedom Path) had more support at the time and made similar declarations.

One minor difference from other groups at the time was the highly charged language of the PKK's funding documents; liberating Kurdistan was called a 'holy' task and 'our Movement...would deem leading our people with ideological, organizational and political means to be a sacred and historical task' and 'having a life distant from the Kurdistan

Revolution would be no different from a bestial lifestyle'. [4]

People's War

A more important difference was that the small group of mainly youth that made up the early PKK actually made organizing armed struggle an immediate task, while the other groups declared that armed struggle would only follow after a phase of building political support for it. Talking about the leaders of the other Kurdish Left groups in the late seventies, people who had often criticized the PKK and their leader for their lack of ideological finesse and political experience, Öcalan declared in 1996; 'I had a principle for myself: Why did I dare to initiate and believe in this war? Because the greatest harlot is one who does not fight. My word at the very beginning was this; I moulded myself to believe this. All of these men in the Kurdish groupings which claimed to undertake the national cause are dishonest. Why? Because, I said, they prostitute themselves more than a prostitute. I said I will not be like them; I will fight for loftier aims.' [5]

The PKK's willingness and ability to use violence appealed to many oppressed Kurds. It was during the following war that the PKK built itself. Revenge became an important theme in the self-conception of the PKK throughout the eighties and the nineties as the war grew more intense and the state tried to terrorize the Kurds into submission. One 1985 brochure even declared the PKK to be a 'revolutionary revenge organization' and stated; 'Pseudo-socialist sermons will not save us any better than the religious sermons that they have come to replace. Violence...will in Kurdistan not only be the midwife assisting in the delivery [of a new society] but it will create everything anew. Revolutionary violence has to play this role, and it will, we say, assume the form of revolutionary revenge'. [6]

The class composition of the PKK was different from that of the other groups. In the words of Kurdistan expert Martin van Bruinessen; the PKK was 'the only organization whose members were drawn almost exclusively from the lowest social

classes – the uprooted, half-educated village and small-town youth who knew what it felt like to be oppressed, and who wanted action, not ideological sophistication'. [7] '[T]ribal elites are represented in various other parties but not in the PKK. Rather, this party represents the most marginal sections of Kurdish society.' [8]

The PKK first began to move against the traditional Kurdish elite, aghas - the 'feudal' landlords that with the aid of their supporters controlled whole villages and often closely cooperated with the Turkish state. The PKK fought on the side of rebelling peasants and lost dozens of members in clashes with the militia of landlords. The guiding principle in choosing its targets was for the PKK however not social antagonism, but the politics of the aghas: whether they opposed the national movement or not. At the same time, various Turkish leftist and Kurdish groups fought among themselves; 'the PKK was initially relatively insignificant among [rival organizations] and only became known because it was the most violent' [9]. During fighting between different radical groups, dozens were killed. The PKK was both initiator and victim of such violence.

When in 1980 the army staged yet another coup, the PKK had become the strongest Kurdish party in Turkey. After the coup, tens of thousands were arrested. The Turkish Left, that in the previous years had again grown to a significant force, was largely unable to withstand the repression. At the end of 1983, there were still 40.000 political prisoners that were routinely brutally tortured. Among the prisoners were thousands of PKK-supporters and members. Many of them continued the struggle inside the prisons, undertaking 'deathfasts' that claimed the lives of leading members or committing suicide in protest. The dead became important martyr-figures for the movement and their sacrifices reinforced the reputation of PKK-members as unyielding revolutionaries.

Öcalan himself escaped the repression; shortly before the coup, he had gone to Syria and from there he went to Lebanon. In Lebanon, he made contact

with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and later other Palestinian groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Fatah. Abu Laila, a leader of the DFLP, later said of Öcalan; 'We had met other Turkish Kurds and they didn't seem to be very reliable. This man seemed to be serious. He didn't want [military or financial] assistance...he only wanted to send volunteers...to be trained for the future'. 'These people turned out to be really serious, real fighters, real soldiers. It was clear he [Öcalan] had some popular base in Kurdistan.' [10]¹⁰ The Palestinians provided valuable military and organizational training to the Kurds, but the PKK members received their ideological training separate from the other groups. The PKK joined the Palestinians in the fight against the Israeli army when it invaded Lebanon in 1982.

A few years later, the PKK launched its people's war. Öcalan had established contact with the Syrian regime and was allowed to base himself in Damascus. The PKK opened a training camp in a Syrian controlled part of Lebanon. In 1982, the PKK reached an agreement with the major Kurdish rebel group in Iraq, Barzani's KDP, that allowed them to set up camps near the Turkish border. The PKK started small-scale armed actions in Turkish Kurdistan and agitation among the rural communities in the border-area. Its first large action took place in 1984 when it attacked several army barracks and temporarily took control of some villages. PKK-fighters distributed statements declaring their goal was 'the struggle of our people for national independence, a democratic society, freedom and unity, under the leadership of the PKK, against imperialism, Turkish colonial fascism and its local lackeys'. At the same time, the PKK appealed to 'revolutionaries and the working people from Turkey'; 'every blow of the HRK [the armed wing of the PKK] against colonial fascism is a blow against fascism in Turkey'. [11] However, cooperation between the PKK and the Turkish radical-left was very difficult. The military coup had decimated the Turkish Left and the PKK tried to dominate any al-

liance, reasoning that the Turkish Left had proven to be incapable of leading a revolution. In turn this drove away potential allies.

The PKK's theory of revolution at the time was heavily influenced by the Maoist conception of protracted people's war. In this strategy, the armed struggle is the primary means to seize power. The armed struggle is based in the rural countryside and the majority of the fighters are recruited from the peasantry. The struggle is led by the party that supposedly represents 'proletarian' leadership and is supposed to keep socialism as a goal, although the strategy first aims at a 'national-democratic' stage. The people's war starts with small guerrilla attacks and proceeds through different stages of escalating warfare, from a 'strategic defense', in which the rebels are limited to small scale hit-and-run attacks, to a second stage, during which the government forces are pushed on the defensive while the party expands its political influence. In the final stage, the guerrilla has gathered enough forces and weapons to move to conventional warfare and engage the enemy in decisive battles. Until the mid-nineties, Öcalan and the PKK referenced this strategic framework with an independent Kurdistan as its goal.

Two elements that distinguish the early PKK from like minded movements were its evaluation of the history of the Communist International and of the relation between the party and the guerrilla-army. Already in its early documents, the PKK severely criticized the Soviet-Union of the early twenties and the Comintern for its critical support to Kemalism. In early 1920 Mustafa Suphi, founder of the Turkish Communist Party TKP, and a dozen of his comrades were murdered by right-wing nationalists. The massacre happened with at least tacit approval of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk but that did not stop the signing of the Treaty of Brotherhood between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey under the leadership of Atatürk, and the Soviet-Union on 16 March 1921. PKK statements criticized the early TKP and the Comintern not only for having illusions in the democratic potential of Kemalism

but also accused the Comintern of ignorance of the local situation and the Soviet leadership of prioritizing the national security of the Soviet-Union over internationalist and anti-imperialist principles. Such a critical view of the early Soviet-Union was not shared by many 'marxist-leninist' parties that tended to regard Soviet statements as holy writ.

Later, after the implosion of the Soviet-Union, the PKK would attempt to formulate a more exhaustive critique of the Soviet 'model' but this remained rather superficial: it blamed the defects in democracy on faulty decisions of the leadership and the prioritizing of state-interests over those of its citizens but did not explain why such errors could become policy for decade after decade.

Another element that set the PKK apart was that it was a 'guerrilla-party'. Instead of following the Maoist model that dictates a clear distinction between the army and the party that leads it (Mao: 'our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party'), the two organizations were mixed. In the PKK, fighters were expected to completely give up their previous life and dedicate themselves exclusively to their life as a guerrilla. Cadres who did not have any military responsibilities were also expected to be prepared to join the guerrillas in their mountain bases at any time. According to PKK-leader Duran Kalkan 'this was not only of military value, but more important was its ideological and moral meaning'. [12] Referring to the party's 1986 congress, Kalkan describes this meaning as follows; 'Such a guerrilla makes ideologically a complete break with the ruling order, he breaks in a certain degree with the hierarchical system of the State and of power. That is why at the third Congress there was a serious ideological renewal in the conception of really existing socialism; the really-existing socialist line of individual and familial, petit-bourgeois equal rights and freedom was superseded. Such a measure has consequences inside society as well where it calls forth changes that bring closer freedom and equality. It destroys individual family-life.'

Creating the 'new man'

Kalkan touches upon the most distinctive element of PKK-thought of the eighties and nineties; its ambition to create a 'New Man', characterized by a certain personality. The theme of the 'personality' of the Kurds appeared already in Öcalan's texts in the early eighties and remains a prominent part of it. According to Öcalan there is a metaphysical 'Kurdish mentality', a certain 'composition of the Kurdish psyche'. Öcalan still claims 'many of the qualities and characteristics attributed to the Kurds and their society today can already be seen in the Neolithic communities of the cis-Caucasus mountain ranges - the area we call Kurdistan'. [13] However, the Kurds have been alienated from their 'true' identity by the attempts of the Turkish state to assimilate the Kurds and by the traditional social structures, what Öcalan calls 'feudalism'.

Through criticism and self-criticism and hard work, PKK-members were expected to remake themselves, to free themselves of their views and attitudes that they had learned in their 'old life' and remould themselves into 'new men'. The goal, as described in the party journal *Serxwebûn*: 'The new man does not drink, does not gamble, never thinks of his own personal pleasure or comfort, and there is nothing feminine about him, those who (in the past) indulged in such activities will, sharp as knife, cut out all these habits as soon as he or she is among new men. The new man's philosophy and morality, the way he sits and stands, his style, ego, attitude and reactions [teпки] are his and his alone. The basis of all these things is his love for the revolution, freedom, country, and socialism, a love that is as solid as a rock. Applying scientific socialism to the reality of our country creates the new man'. [14]

In a 1983 text, 'On Organization', Öcalan discussed the role of the political organization, citing Marx, Engels, Lenin, Giap and Che Guevera. Like other texts by the PKK and Öcalan at the time, most of it is very similar to the rest of the Kurdish and Turkish radical left but; 'the substantial and distinctive part of the argument in this work is con-

cerned with the "reorganization of the whole society". Rather than structuring a 'Marxist-Leninist party of the working class', an overall reorganization is proposed because Kurdish society has been the victim of a "deliberate disorganizing program from top to bottom implemented by the Turkish colonialists". [15] Re-organizing Kurdish society 'from top to bottom' would require building a new Kurdish identity and person-hood.

Gradually, notions like 'humanization', 'socialization' and 'liberated personality' replaced marxist notions of classes and class-struggle. When in Öcalan's recent writing names of classes still appear, they function as synonyms for political opponents (feudal for Kurdish clan-leaders, petty-bourgeois for non-PKK Kurdish groups) whose determining characteristic is often their 'distorted' or 'sick' personalities. Time and time again, Öcalan attacks the 'diseased' personalities of people who disagree with him.

The PKK's 1995 congress marked an ideological renovation. The theme of building the 'new man' was officially incorporated into party-ideology and the new program defined the goal as 'a personality that, with great foresight, great understanding, with great effort and determination, seeks to conquer every obstacle and turn the negative into the positive; a personality whose strong willpower fascinates under all circumstances and who for the struggle for development of humanity, without seeking personal benefits, even gives his life'. [16] 'Socialization of people' was now declared to be essential to socialism. [17]

The creation of the new man played a central role in the critique the PKK tried to formulate of 'really-existing socialism' after its collapse and of the new vision of socialism it tried to elaborate. The PKK did not regret the collapse of the Soviet bloc; 'we mourn the collapsed not so much, because we rather experience the relieve from a burden', Öcalan stated in 1992. [18] The 1995 program defined 'really existing socialism' as the 'lowest and most brutal stage of socialism', and explains its defects as such; 'in the ideological aspect a descend

into dogmatism, vulgar materialism, and great-Russian chauvinism; in the political aspect the creation of an extreme centralism, the freezing of democratic class struggle and raising the interests of the state to be only decisive factor; in the social aspect the restriction of the free and democratic life of society and the individual; in the economic aspect the dominance of the state sector and not overcoming a consumption society that emulates foreign countries; finally in the military aspect the prioritizing of the army and weaponry over all other fields'. The way the PKK thought these failings could be avoided by a new socialism was by building the new man.

In the mid-nineties, the PKK emphasized its differences with really existing socialism as it tried to formulate its own distinctive ideology. In 1993, Öcalan claimed that the PKK, when it discussed 'scientific socialism' did not refer to marxism but to its own peculiar ideology of a 'socialism' that supposedly 'exceeds the interests of states, the nation and classes'. [19]19 Symbolically, the 1995 congress removed the hammer and sickle from the party flag; 'the hammer and sickle in really existing socialism only involved the class of workers and peasants, and is with this also an expression of really existing socialism. The new conception of socialism is about the whole of humanity'. [20] The claim to be fighting for 'the whole of humanity' remains a frequent trope in PKK and PYD statements.

The PKK's alternative to the collapsed Soviet-model was a socialism of the new man: creating this new personality was the goal of socialism and the only guarantee that even after a revolution, society won't regress into capitalism or fascism. This 'socialism' was not a way of organizing society into 'an association of free human beings which works with common means of production', as Marx put, it but the creation of certain personalities. This is why, in a text from this period by Mehmet Can Yüce, which is otherwise rigidly 'marxist-leninist', he can also talk about 'the socialism that has been realized in the party', [21] just like the 1995 program does. [22] Yüce writes; 'If socialism does not dominate in the

personality of the individual and in the relations inside the organization, it can not arise in society, respectively in the social system'. [23]

The idea of people 'remoulding' their personalities to become revolutionaries is not unique to the PKK. In the maoist Communist Party of the Philippines it was a recurring theme that to become truly proletarian revolutionaries, members had to 'remould' themselves to lose so-called 'petty-bourgeois' habits. But the PKK went much further: people were not only expected to become good party-members but to change their whole personality. The idea of creating a new man brings to mind Che Guevara's writing about socialism and human personality or the Soviet discourse about the socialist new man. The crucial difference is that the PKK claimed to be creating this new man already before revolution, and that through sheer determination and hard work, the socialist 'superman' would be created in the bases of the PKK.

It was not only socialism as a social-economic system that was gradually pushed aside by this socialism of the new man. Something similar happened in PKK statements about Kurdish self-determination. In the second half of the eighties, the PKK would mention less and less the goal of a 'independent and united Kurdistan', instead talking about a 'Free Kurdistan', a formulation that leaves more ambiguity about the political goal.

Terms like 'freedom' and 'independence' were used more and more to talk about individual, 'spiritual' goals, referring to this new personality, instead of to statehood. This theme became especially strong in Öcalan's statement before the court in 1999, partly published as 'Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish Question' and in the prison writings. In these texts, Öcalan claimed that already before his imprisonment he used terms like 'freedom' and 'self-determination' mainly to refer to individuals, and not peoples. He even claimed that the PKK was never secessionist, a statement that contradicts the vehement insistence from 1978 that anything less than an independent Kurdistan (specified to be under occupation from Turkey,

Iran, Iraq and Syria) would be betrayal. Despite the other ideological renovations, the 1995 program insisted that an independent Kurdish state was the final goal of the movement.

Öcalan would after 1993, when the PKK made a cease-fire offer to the Turkish state, start to talk about a political settlement to the conflict and declared a break-up of the Turkish state was not a precondition to such a settlement. But this didn't exclude the possibility that an independent (and 'socialist') Kurdish state would remain the final goal, one that could possibly be fought for with other means than armed struggle. This is certainly how many PKK-members and supporters read these declarations. When shortly before his capture Öcalan was declaring that a 'democratic alternative' could be achieved on the basis of Turkish recognition of the Kurdish identity, a federated parliament and within the existing borders of Turkey, he was contradicting the PKK's official program. When in 1999 Öcalan in his defense speech emphatically denied the goal of a Kurdish state, even in the long run, thousands of PKK-supporters left in disillusionment. [24]

Serok Apo

In the eighties, Öcalan consolidated his control over the movement. After a power struggle in the early eighties, which ended with the death or flight of his rivals, 'Apo', a diminutive of Abdullah and meaning 'uncle' in Kurdish, consolidated his control over the organization. Officially the chair of the party, Serok Apo (leader Apo) became not only a political leader but also the military commander, the movements' 'philosopher' and a prophet-like figure. 'One person represents the new upright posture, practically the resurrection of a nation. My role is indeed that of a prophet, speaking to an enslaved, mercilessly oppressed people', Öcalan declared in 1992; 'we have to fight for our freedom ourselves. I symbolize this fight'. [25] The ideological publications of the PKK consist almost completely of texts by Öcalan. Only a few other prominent figures of the party published books and

those are often memoirs. At party meetings, Öcalan would deliver speeches, without notes, that lasted for hours and were then transcribed and published as books, even telephone conversations were recorded to be 'studied'. In PKK jargon, Öcalan's statements are known as 'analyses' (çözümlemeler).

In the PKK, all members were expected to be completely dedicated to the party and in turn this came to mean complete dedication to Abdullah Öcalan. Öcalan himself was referred to as *şanderlik* (leadership), 'guide' and even 'Sun'. In a sympathetic account of her time in the PKK-guerrilla, German internationalist Anja Flach wrote; 'the status of the party-leadership (meaning Öcalan) is an institution, he doesn't so much represent the party, as he is the party'. [26] An author who experienced Öcalan as leader in this period later wrote; 'Öcalan was not willing to share his authority. He demanded absolute submission to his person from the people in his surrounding and unrelentingly pushed this through.' [27]

Opposition to Öcalan and his decisions was impossible and the PKK would pay a heavy price for this as its fortunes on the battleground declined. In the late eighties and early nineties, the Turkish army was gaining more experience in fighting against guerrillas, using sophisticated equipment like Israeli supplied night-vision goggles and US combat helicopters. In addition, the Turkish state viciously targeted civilian supporters of the PKK and of Kurdish rights in general. Between 1984 and 1999 up to 40.000 people were killed. According to the Turkish army, they lost almost 6500 soldiers until 2008 and killed 32.000 PKK-members but those figures are not credible. According to the PKK, their losses were much smaller but the total number of casualties of the conflict must be much higher.

Both sides, but overwhelmingly the Turkish state, targeted civilians suspected of aiding the enemy. Jandarma *şstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele* (JTEM), a branch of the Turkish gendarmerie that officially did not even exist, was according to the Turkish Human Rights association IHD involved in

5.000 unsolved killings of journalists, intellectuals, human rights and political activists, and responsible for 1.500 'disappearances'. Turkish intelligence services also cooperated with right-wing and Islamist militia that made thousands of casualties, most of them civilians. In the late eighties, the Turkish army started to forcibly remove Kurdish villagers to separate the guerrillas from civilian supporters. Estimations of the number of people displaced vary from 275.000 to 2 million. With much of its civilian support removed in this way, and under increasingly heavy attack, the PKK started to suffer military setbacks in the mid-nineties.

But Öcalan refused to listen to warnings from field-commanders and insisted they should go on the offensive. A 1994 statement claimed 'the struggle which the PKK carries out has left the stage of strategic defense (. . .). It is inevitable that we escalate our struggle in response to Turkey's declaration of all-out war.' Setbacks were not blamed on the faulty instructions from 'the leadership' but on the failure of commanders to correctly carry them out. Flach described 'criticism and self-criticism' sessions she witnessed in this period; 'failures were seen primarily in the personalities of the commanders and the fighters. Structures from the old life [before the guerrilla] are still lived, feudal or petty-bourgeois attitudes and views are not superseded and exactly this is seen as the most important obstacle to implementing the ideas of the party'. [28] But the validity of these ideas themselves was not put into question.

The PKK's idea of creating a 'New Man' was a powerful means of control as the ideal incorporated unquestioning obedience - and criticism of the 'leadership' was seen as proof of failing to achieve this goal. Öcalan was more than a distinguished or even indispensable leader, he himself, his person, was built up to be indispensable to the liberation of the Kurdish people. As a critical observer noted his role; 'he alone "is" the key to liberation - as opposed to just possessing it'. [29] This also explains why even after his capture Öcalan remained the leader of the movement.

In 1998 Turkey threatened Syria with war if it continued to shelter the PKK leader. The Syrian regime ordered Öcalan to leave and in October 1998 he left the country. For 130 days Öcalan went from country to country looking for asylum. He intensified his calls for a political settlement and declared the PKK would accept a 'democratic republic'; a united Turkey that would guarantee freedom of speech for the Kurds and recognize the presence of a Kurdish minority. Öcalan said the PKK was ready to lay down arms if those conditions were met. In February 1999 Öcalan was captured by Turkish agents.

A revolution of women

Already in its first program, the PKK called for full equality of men and women in all social and political aspects, but this was little more than one clichéd demand among others, just below introducing the eight hour workday, if possible. The same program declared the national oppression of the Kurds to be the 'main contradiction' that the party should fight against. In 1987, the party organized the 'Union of Patriotic Women of Kurdistan' (Yekîtiya Jinen Welaparezen Kurdistan, YJWK). Like the women's organizations of many other marxist-leninist parties, its original intention was facilitating the participation of women in the party, but it was also to provide a space to deal with specific women's issues.

The PKK's distinctive practice of women's liberation was developed in the second half of the nineties, when the active participation of women in the Kurdish movement, both as politicians and as fighters, increased. [30] But, like on any other issue in the PKK, the ideological guide on the issue of women's liberation is Öcalan. Starting in the eighties, 'Öcalan's "analyses" increasingly criticized traditional patriarchal family structures, women's secondary status within the family, and the gender roles that associated women with *namus* [the control over women's sexuality] and assigned men the duty to protect it.' [31]

Today, it is in the field of women's liberation and gender equality that the PKK movement takes its most radical positions. One of the aspects that sets the struggle of the PKK apart from other Kurdish rebellions is the large participation of women in all levels of the movement. In a way, the category of 'women' has replaced that of 'the international proletariat' in the PKK ideology: today it is women as such who are assumed to be the vanguard of the struggle. The movement declared that its goal is not just the liberation of Kurdish women but of women worldwide.

The PKK's ideas on women's liberation are heavily influenced by the myth of a prehistoric matriarchal past during the neolithic, 'when the woman was a creating goddess' (Öcalan). [32] With the rise of class society, the oppression of women began. These notions are clearly taken from Friedrich Engels' 'The origin of the family, private property and the state'.

The patriarchal family structure and inequality between men and women, according to Öcalan and the PKK, serve the interests of the oppressive Turkish state and the 'feudal' Kurdish leaders that cooperate with it. This state and its puppets play a crucial role in perpetuating these inequalities by enforcing tribal traditions that block the development of Kurdish women and of society as a whole, thus controlling the Kurdish people. The traditional family oppresses women by blocking them from social life, and the family is protected through *namus*, surveillance of women's bodies, behaviors, and sexualities by men. [33] Öcalan: 'Since sexual motives are fundamental instincts, the problems thus created lead to profound political perversions. To resolve the sexual motives is to realize the greatest revolution. There is no one among us who has not yet realized this. Everyone succumbs. Kurdish society expresses an individual type and a social reality, which succumbs, more than any other society in the world, to instincts of hunger and sexuality. [...] Around these sexual motives are formed a certain *namus*, a certain understanding of morality, and no brave fellows have the power to overcome this. [...]

In this bottleneck, our individual has lost once again, even before it reached the age of twenty.' [34]

Breaking the bonds that oppressed women would not only enable them to play an active role in the liberation movement, thereby strengthening it. Öcalan also assumed that women, as the victims of both national and gender oppression, are more receptive to radical ideas, more willing to challenge tradition and the status-quo; 'Today, during the Palestinian uprising, it is almost entirely women, children, and the youth with stones who carry out the revolution. There are lessons to take from this. [...] When women, who make up half of the society, take to the streets, it is impossible to control them [...]. In this respect, especially for improving the urban movement, we must take action in this next stage. [...] Certainly, all women are furious. All of them are hungry and impoverished. It is possible to make them into rebels by using all kinds of methods. [35]'

The liberation of women was and is seen as part of the liberation of the Kurdish people, but there has been a shift in how this relationship is conceived. In her article 'From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological-Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in post-1980 Turkey', Handan Ça?layan summarizes this change as one of talking about women, an instrumental view of seeing women as a resource for the revolution, to one of talking to women as actors in their own liberation. This shift took place in the second half of the nineties.

In the early nineties, the participation of women inside the PKK, including in its guerrilla units, increased dramatically. In these years, large protests broke out among the Kurdish population, the *Serhildan*, also sometimes known as the Kurdish *intifada*, that were fueled by a new sense of Kurdish identity and strength that had been made possible by the armed struggle. These protests involved layers of the population that were not in direct contact with the PKK guerrilla's units in the mountains but nevertheless sympathized with them. Especially the

Newroz (Kurdish New Year) celebrations of 1990, 1991, and 1992 were important as they turned into confrontations with Turkish security forces. Women participated massively in these protests, confronting security forces in the streets.

The protests were repressed but in their aftermath, the Kurdish movement became a truly popular mass movement, involving student organizations, cultural associations, publications, women's groups and other initiatives. The PKK was the hegemonic force in this movement but at the same time struggled to integrate the many new recruits that often came from very different social backgrounds than the old guard. Dozens of these often young, educated volunteers were executed by PKK commanders who mistrusted them or felt that their power was being challenged.

But the influx of new members did change the party. As the participation of women in the guerrilla increased, the movement was forced to confront persisting sexist ideas and practices. Women refused to have their roles in the movement limited to that of providing support, instead choosing to fight as part of the guerrilla.

The party soon discovered the emotional appeal of images of young female fighters that had abandoned their homes and old lives to fight for the Kurdish cause. Martyred women became emotionally powerful symbols of the movement and still are, as the recent example of Arin [Mirkan] and other female fighters killed in the defense of Kobani show. The martyrs of the movement include women who set themselves on fire in protest or killed themselves in suicide attacks on the enemy, tactics that were adopted in the nineties. Distressingly, it were disproportionately women that sacrificed themselves in suicide attacks, in a region that has had a tradition of women choosing suicide to escape their unhappy situation. [36]

The new role of women led to changes in the ideology and organization of the PKK. In the guerrilla, independent women's units were formed and later an independent women's army – a practice that

was also adopted by the Syrian Kurdish movement when it organized the YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê, Women's Protection Units). The motivation is that in this way women are freed from the sexist practices of male comrades and at the same time forced to break with traditional notions of female obedience and servility and instead assume leadership roles. The same principle was applied in the political organizations. In 1994 the Free Women's Movement of Kurdistan, later renamed as Free Women's Union of Kurdistan (YAJLK), was formed. After Öcalan's capture, the organization was dissolved and later reformed as the Party of Free Women (PJA). In all mixed PKK-organs a mandatory gender quota exists. The leaderships have to include at least 40 per cent women, executive posts are double functions of one man and one woman. The PYD for example has two chairs: Salim Muslim and Asya Abdullah, who stayed in Kobani during the siege.

Handan Ça?layan describes one change in Öcalan's texts on women as such; 'in the 1980s, Öcalan spoke to militant men about how they should treat women, that is, he spoke with men about women; in the 1990s, however, he spoke with women militants about men, and drew attention to the significance of this'. [37] Öcalan in 1999: 'Man at hand was analyzed, and it was seen that man is the main problem. [...] For me, the Man Question is now prior to the Woman Question. Does being man equals being in power? I ask men: If you have power, then why can't you show this in the most elementary problem of war? He proves his manhood by domination over women, in sexual domination. This is a dominion of crude power; I found it foul, and I shattered it.'

Again, the PKK's idea of creating a new man, and a new woman, proves to be a powerful ideological tool. An important difference between the PKK's theory of women's oppression and liberation and that of Friedrich Engels is their neglect of social-economic factors. Engels argued that with the rise of social classes came a division of labor that relegated women's labor, and hence their social status,

to a secondary position. In the PKK, the emphasis is instead (again) on issues like 'mentality' and 'personality'; women's oppression is supposedly rooted in patriarchal attitudes that are transferred from generation and that are internalized by women. To liberate themselves, women need to unlearn these attitudes just as much as men, and this way men and women are created anew.

The PKK discourse on women's liberation sees the category of women as superseding political differences. As the PJA stated; 'The women's liberation ideology is an alternative for all previous world-views, whether right-wing or left-wing. It is also a result of the critique of these ideologies. Because all previous ideologies as they were classified as either capitalist or socialist in the last centuries, have a masculine shape. Meaning, they have been shaped by patriarchy that since 5000 years has institutionalized itself in all fields of life'. [38]

The PKK's thinking is strongly essentialist. Women and nature are often equated, and following this, 'woman' is identified with motherhood. Women are assumed to have certain characteristics as women, such as empathy, an abhorrence of violence and a closeness to nature. These qualities need to be taught to men so that patriarchal society can be overcome.

These ideas put a heavy burden on women. On the one hand, the traditional family is criticized as a space in which patriarchal attitudes oppress women and as an institution through which the Turkish state and feudal rulers dominate the Kurdish people. On the other hand, the family is seen as the cradle from which a new Kurdish society should be born since the family plays such an important role in socializing people, in 'creating personalities', and this is at the center of the PKK's vision of liberation. Thus it is women, as mothers and educators, who are given a primary responsibility in deciding the outcome of the struggle.

Women are considered to be in the vanguard of the liberation struggle but to be able to play this role, they first have to liberate themselves from what is

called their 'slave mentality'. Setbacks for the movement become then the responsibility of women who have failed to play their role. Liberation and the 'top to the bottom' reorganization of Kurdish society that the PKK set itself as a goal are now considered to be impossible if women are not liberated and in fact, it is women who should play a pioneering role in this social transformation.

Democratic Civilization

The PKK started to develop its own peculiar ideology in the late eighties and in the mid-nineties a number of ideological inventions had become part of the official policy. After his capture however Öcalan would accelerate the PKK's ideological metamorphosis. In the hands of the Turkish state, Öcalan started to make statements from jail through his lawyers. He praised his prison conditions and called on the PKK to hold on to the ceasefire it had declared the previous September and declared that negotiations with the Turkish state would continue – through him personally.

Öcalan's subsequent statements before the court came as a shock. Öcalan drastically reinterpreted the history and the ideology of the PKK. In court, Öcalan expressed regret over the death of Turkish soldiers and when the court asked if it would be correct to transcribe his words as an apology, he did not disagree. Öcalan did not mention the suffering of the Kurds but did find time to praise Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish republic, and referred to the cooperation of Kurds and Turks in the independence war in the early twenties. He claimed that if only Atatürk's ideas had been faithfully followed, there would have been no 'Kurdish question'.

It was not only history that was revised by Öcalan. He insisted that the goal of an independent Kurdish state was impossible, even in the long term, and that this was not even desirable. Even the ideas of Kurdish autonomy or a federative parliament, which Öcalan had suggested shortly before his capture, went out of the window. The 'democratic solu-

tion' that Öcalan instead proposed in his defense plea published as 'Declaration on the Democratic Settlement of the Kurdish Settlement' was that Turkey would recognize the existence of the Kurds and respect basic democratic rights like freedom of speech and the use of the Kurdish language. This would supposedly suffice to make Turkey into a democratic society that could transcend the conflict; 'I wish to emphasize that it (meaning 'democracy') transcends tension and conflict with a wonderful balance. That it has ideal governments which, thanks to the suitability of democratic state institutions for such a purpose, can offer a solution without allowing different kinds of politics and the forces behind these to come into conflict'. [39]

An ideologeme that recurs since the 'Declaration on the Democratic Settlement' is that of 'democratic civilization', which the PKK now declares to be its goal. In this text, Öcalan explained he took the term from a 1964 book by US sociologist Leslie Lipson: a study of the development of the parliamentary system in western societies. In his recent prison writings, the term takes center-place, now without being credited. What exactly this 'democratic civilization' is for Öcalan remains unclear.

But it is clear Öcalan, at the latest beginning with the 'Declaration on the Democratic Settlement', became an admirer of western parliamentary democracy. In it he repeatedly refers to it as a model for Turkey. The statement contained long quotes from Lipson describing the political system of Switzerland which Öcalan used as an example of how in a single country, different social-cultural groups can live together. According to Öcalan, this could be an example for Turkish-Kurdish co-existence in a single state. Later, Öcalan became an enthusiastic supporter of Turkey joining the European Union, hoping this would force Turkey to introduce democratic reforms that would bring closer the 'democratic republic'.

The democracy Öcalan praises is often equated with the parliamentary, capitalist states of the West: he claims that in European countries a 'determined democracy' developed and that this led to

the 'supremacy of the west', 'Western civilization can, in this sense, be termed democratic civilization'. [40] What Turkey and the Kurds needed was 'Western-style problem solving'. [41] And in 2011; 'In principle, the western democratic system – which has been established through immense sacrifices – contains everything needed for solving social problems'. [42] 'Europe, its (referring to 'democracy') birthplace has by and large left nationalism behind in view of the wars of the twentieth century and established a political system adhering to democratic standards. This democratic system has already shown its advantages over other systems – including real socialism – and is now the only acceptable system worldwide'. [43]

In his court statements, Öcalan presented the most intensive phase of the war as a mishap; 'Turkey failed to have a democratic system due to a lack of conviction, serious efforts and a true understanding of democracy (as opposed to demagoguery)' and this led to the outbreak of armed resistance. [44] But, Öcalan stated, the PKK's armed struggle in the nineties was wrong; 'In Turkey in the nineties, together [for Kurds and Turks] there were positive developments in human rights. After this the uprising was wrong. There was a way of solving the problem'. [45] Here Öcalan was talking about the period in which he, as absolute leader of the movement, had ordered the PKK to go on the offensive and branded cadres who wanted to shift attention away from the armed aspect of the struggle as traitors.

After the capture of Öcalan, the PKK-presidium declared that he is 'our leader but he is captured. His directions are no longer binding'. For an underground movement, this was a common sense statement to make but the PKK quickly made a u-turn; in July an enlarged meeting of the central committee adopted Öcalan's defense plea as the new party manifesto or 'Second Manifesto'. In their book 'PKK. Perspektiven des kurdischen Freiheitkampfes: Zwischen Selbstbestimmung, EU und Islam', Nikolaus Brauns and Brigitte Kiechle write; 'Öcalan's authority was so great, that the

PKK presidium, whether it liked it or not, had to take this step if it didn't want to lose its influence over the party or even be branded as traitors.' [46] 4Captured or not, Öcalan remained the önderlik.

Öcalan's new orientation, now made party policy, was unacceptable even for many previously loyal followers of Apo. Thousands left the movement. [47] A small number of PKK-leaders unsuccessfully opposed the new orientation and the end of the armed struggle that was officially adopted at the PKK's seventh congress of February 2000. Leading figures like Meral Kidir, general secretary of DHP (Revolutionary Peoples Party), an off-shoot of the PKK, and Mehmet Can Yüce criticized the new orientation from the jails where they were held by the Turkish state. A DHP statement responded by declaring; 'Liquidation and provocations, which were all smashed until today, cannot succeed. The fate of provocations and liquidation which is imposed will be the same.' After the seventh party-congress, Serxwebun threatened the dissidents with the 'most severe punishment' under 'conditions of war'. The dissidents were unable to formulate any other alternative except a continuation of the failed people's war strategy and were quickly sidelined. As a sign of goodwill, Öcalan ordered the PKK guerrillas to withdraw from Turkish territory. Many of them were killed as the Turkish army attacked the retreating fighters.

In the period 1999 - 2005, the PKK was in shock, grappling with Öcalan's capture and trying to re-organize without the Serok and in accordance with his new instructions.

Since the Second Manifesto, even though he is depended on his jailers for information about the outside world, Öcalan continues to make authoritative ideological statements. In these statements, Öcalan often returns to the mythical past. Öcalan claims the PKK's struggle is only the latest Kurdish rebellion against centralized state-power. In a remarkable example of 'auto-orientalism', the Kurds are presented as a people without history that since Sumerian times (4th millennium BCE) have rebelled against state-power, all the while remaining

'at essence' the same. The 'original sin' that caused their oppression was the formation of the state as such, against which the Kurds tried to preserve their 'natural' free culture. Öcalan describes his goal as a 'renaissance' of the idealized society that during the Neolithic supposedly existed in what is now Kurdistan. In a kind of *Aufhebung*, the positive aspects of this mythic past – a central role for women in society, a 'pure' Kurdish identity, social egalitarianism – are to return in a modern form and become a guiding example for the entire regime.

This renaissance is supposed to be realized in three intertwined projects: democratic republic, democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. [48] The 'democratic republic' entails a reform of the Turkish state. Similar to the kind of statements Öcalan was making in the years before his arrest, the call is for Turkey to recognize the existence of minorities, especially Kurds, among its population and to dissociate citizenship from the Turkish ethnicity. This theme is prominent in Öcalan's defenses for the court.

Democratic autonomy is a concept borrowed from Murray Bookchin (1921 – 2006), a US libertarian socialist and theoretician. After a brief period as a Stalinist in his teenage years, Bookchin joined the Trotskyist movement in the late thirties and became a member of the Socialist Workers Party. Like many trotskyists, Bookchin had expected the Second World War to end with a wave of social revolutions, led by the working class, in which trotskyists would play important roles. When this did not happen, and the trotskyist movement remained small and isolated, Bookchin started to reconsider his ideas. Bookchin gave up on marxism, which in his eyes had made a fundamental mistake in seeing the working class as the revolutionary subject, but remained anti-capitalist.

It was clear for him that capitalism was a destructive system that had to be abolished. Its weak point, Bookchin reasoned, was not the contradiction capital-labor, but the contradiction capital-ecology. Capital, endlessly accumulating, destroys the envi-

ronment. The struggle to save the eco-system takes on an anti-capitalist character and can unite everybody who see their lives threatened by the deterioration of the natural environment and who rebel against their alienation from it.

To construct an ecologically sustainable society, Bookchin suggested, cities would need to be decentralized and scaled back to allow people to use renewable energy, grow food locally and cut expenditures of energy on transport. These smaller cities would be governed by assemblies of their populations who would democratically make decisions. Bookchin is often called an anarchist but he did not reject participation in elections and the existing political structures the way many anarchists do. Instead, he favored the combination of social movements and cooperatives that would pre-figure the future society with participation in local city-councils to gain vested, legal political power.

This is the strategy the Kurdish movement now seems to be applying with some success in eastern Turkey. In cities and villages where the legal Kurdish party HDP has won enough support in the councils, state-resources are used to facilitate councils and neighborhood associations that are set up by the population in cooperation with various movements and NGO's. In this way, the movement hopes to build 'democratic autonomy', the power to locally make decisions in assemblies and councils, while 'evading' the central, Turkish-chauvinist state. Öcalan and the PKK see this as a way of making citizens actors in exercising self-government. Through strengthening local executive councils and associations of different ethnic, religious, cultural identities and women, pressure is built on the Turkish state to enforce its reform into a democratic republic.

A Kurdish activist explained the strategy as follows; 'When we speak of democratic autonomy, we can't wait till the laws have changed. We have to make the transformation ourselves, in practical deeds. [...] In ten years we will build democratic autonomy and make all the decisions that have to do with city planning and its implementation. [...] So we're

slowly building our own institutions, to develop resistance. [...] Turkey has no choice but Democratic Autonomy – the current system is senseless. History overturns everything that is senseless. The state will be forced to realize this and change.' [49]

The 'old' PKK of course already built civil organizations of various kinds but the crucial difference is that now these structures, although they are inspired by it, are supposedly autonomous from the party. The PKK, which reverted to its old name after a few name changes in the early 00's, today states its function is not to be the organizational leadership, but to be the ideological inspiration, a center from which Öcalan's thought is spread through other structures.

The PKK suggests to build structures of democratic autonomy across the borders of the existing nation-states. These structures would then federate from the bottom-up, in a system of 'democratic confederalism'. Bookchin: 'a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities'. [50] Öcalan describes the system as 'a pyramid-like model of organization. Here it is the communities who talk, debate and make decisions. From the base to the top the elected delegates would form a kind of loose co-ordinating body. They will be the elected representatives of the people for one year'. [51]

This strategy also implies a fundamental shift in the PKK's use of violence. In the old strategy, the armed struggle was essential to defeat the existing state and capture power. Today, the PKK policy towards violence is designated as 'legitimate self-defense'. Violent actions initiated by PKK-fighters are often retaliation for Turkish violence against the PKK and/or civilian supporters of Kurdish rights and serve to maintain a kind of balance of forces, to show the Turkish state that such repression comes with a price and to prove the PKK still has considerable military potential. The only legitimate violence, the PKK now claims, is this kind of defensive violence.

In addition to Bookchin, Öcalan names two other authors as influences, French historian of the *longue durée* Fernand Braudel and world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein. Öcalan borrows from them the idea that the development of human society can be seen as moving through various world-eras. The stalinist interpretation of historical materialism is still clearly visible in Öcalan's recent texts. The familiar list of 'primitive communism – slavery – feudalism – capitalism – socialism' has been reworked but the idea that history necessarily moves through a progressive sequence of stages is still there. The Sumerian neolithic has replaced primitive communism and the era of 'democratic civilization', which the world is supposedly moving into, replaces socialism.

In this new civilization, political differences will be superseded: 'the political process of the present however make it clear that the world-views of both the right and the left need to undergo a fundamental evolutionary transformation, at the end of which they will come together in what I call the system of democratic civilization. This approach has already begun to show its qualities in the solution of conflicts, building of international institutions and the rebuilding of the international order according to democratic principles'. [52]

The prison writings show a strongly idealist bend in taking 'culture' and 'civilization' as the explanation for social-economic and political developments. Öcalan agrees with right-wing US political scientist Samuel Phillips Huntington there is a clash of civilizations between 'east' and 'west'. [53]

Whatever happened to socialism?

Rather surprising for somebody who once claimed to be a marxist, there is very little mention of the deep social-economic inequality between the west and east of Turkey or proposals for improving the economic position of the Kurdish population in Öcalan's recent writings. The themes of class-struggle and class formation, dealt with in clichés in the old documents, have largely disappeared, except as empty labels for Kurdish collaborators and oppo-

nents of the PKK as 'feudalists' or 'petty-bourgeoisie'. A discussion of Kurdistan as a (neo-)colony or victim of exploitation is absent in a book subtitled 'The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century'. A few times, the possibility of government development in eastern Turkey is mentioned but no more.

For Öcalan, socialism and workers' struggles are of secondary importance compared to questions of religious and ethnic identity and democratic freedoms. This assessment seems to be shared by many of his followers. When a group of German leftists visited North Kurdistan to see the system of democratic autonomy 'in practice', a topic like land reform was not even discussed. Almost echoing the old Maoist principle that attention should be focused on the 'main contradiction' (the national one), one youth activist declared; 'socialism and the anti-capitalist struggle are important components of our ideology. But at this moment our oppression as Kurds is our main problem'. [54]

The PKK's socialism became more abstract as it moved from the stalinist idea that socialism means a party-state that owns the means of production to the creation of a new man. What remained consistent during this evolution was the assumption that it is the party that establishes socialism. The working class and its self-emancipation were not issues in the old ideology, even though the PKK paid lip-service to being to a party of the working class.

Whereas in marxism, the working class is the actor that through its self-emancipation can create socialism, the PKK had a rather distrustful attitude towards the working class and did not see the self-emancipation of the working class as the way to socialism. Many workers in Kurdistan were employed by the state and lived in the cities. [55] The PKK, whose members predominately had a rural background, looked with mistrust at the city population that in their eyes was privileged and too closely associated with the institutions of the Turkish state. In a book based on conversations at the PKK's party school, a cadre named Heval Zilan put it like this in the mid-nineties; 'The proletariat that has grown

here is a proletariat in the service of the enemy. It is not a strong power. It does not play a role important enough to be able to be the vanguard. That does not mean that one does not have to take up proletarian struggle in Kurdistan. It also does not mean that no proletarian ideology should emerge. [...] We know that over 70 per cent of the Kurdish population are peasants, naturally under feudal conditions'. [56]

In the early nineties, Öcalan stated that there were no pronounced class divisions in Kurdish society. [57] The real dividing line was between 'collaborators' and 'patriots', not between capitalists and working people. Recently, Öcalan insisted the conditions for class-struggle have (still) not developed in Kurdish society. [58] Such a viewpoint seems to contradict the first manifesto and program that declared the revolution should be led by the working class. But by this was meant that it should be under leadership of the PKK, since it is this party that supposedly carried socialist consciousness and impeded it to the people. Heval Zilan put this view like this; 'Firstly, the army [meaning the PKK guerilla] is the protector of all the created values. Secondly, it is the carrier of socialist consciousness, which she also passes on through to society. Thirdly it is the army that turns the labor carried out in Kurdistan into value and creates the corresponding consciousness. Fourthly, the army is the basis of the socialist society.' [59] Since there was, according to the PKK, hardly a proletariat in Kurdistan nor class-struggle, it was the party that needed to create socialism.

It is not surprising that as the PKK changed from claiming to be the vanguard to being an ideological center, the emphasis on 'socialism', whether as a social-economic system or as the name for a society of the New Man, also became less pronounced. The project of 'democratic autonomy' is based on different identities and the struggle for the free expression of these ideas. 'Worker' is just one identity among others. Today, Öcalan believes that recognition of democratic rights for all these different identities would bring about the new 'democratic

civilization'. He believes the twentieth century saw 'the disappearance of the material foundations of class division', because of 'technological progress'. But the possibility of a society without class divisions remains unfulfilled because of the state; 'the state governs the social structure' and it is the state that 'continues class divisions'. [60] Any discussion of capital is absent. Öcalan does not distinguish between social-economic exploitation that leads to class-divisions and the extra-economic oppression of certain identities. Instead, these are all described as forms of oppression. Perhaps this echoes the reduction of the 'old' PKK of class-position to the political position one had towards the party.

The continuing oppression of certain identities, like the Kurdish one in Turkey, are blamed by Öcalan on state-policies that are lagging behind the development of the new civilization, a development that however is unavoidable because of technological progress. [61] The task then is to pressure the state to allow the realization of the democratic potential that already exists. This in turn would enable in the long term the creation of some kind of socialism and the realization of the old dream of the disappearance of the state as such.

The social-economic vision of the new PKK in the medium-term is an economy based on cooperatives. These would contribute to the 'democratization' of society. PYD co-chair Asya Abdullah discussed the economic ideas for Rojava in February 2014;

'Who should own the means of production? The state, the cantons, the capitalists? What about private property? Who should own the factories and land?'

'In principle we protect private property. However, the property of the people is the property of the people and is protected by it. We have only a short while ago founded a council for trade and economy that will draw up rules for trade and economic relations and establish economic relationship abroad.'

'But again on the issue of the means of production: are there any forms of cooperatives or alternative

forms of production in Rojava?'

'We encourage people to try such things. For example in Kobani there is a women's cooperation in which around one hundred women work. Clothes are produced and sold there'. [62]

Öcalan's ideas for an alternative future society can be described as social-democratic: 'In my eyes, justice demands that creative work is enumerated according to its contribution to the entire product. Renumeration of creative work, which contributes to the productivity of the society, has to be in proportion to other creative activities. Provision of employment to everybody will be a general public task. Everybody will be able to participate in the health care system, education, sports and arts according to their capabilities and needs'. [63]

Potent vagueness

In a 2011, Öcalan stated 'marxist governments failed nonetheless because they attempted to implement a kind of government called "the dictatorship of the proletariat". This model of governance was the result of abstract and theoretical reasoning and could be interpreted in virtually any way. Our experience of real socialism shows that extreme class formation and state power structures were able to form under this proletarian model. The countries that applied this model in fact developed the most authoritarian and totalitarian structures in history. In the end, this kind of government devoured its own children. The societies concerned panicked and sought to rescue and protect themselves from this monster by turning to the embrace of capitalism and its class structures'. [64]

This quote is characteristic of Öcalan's texts. The confusing language is typical of much of his texts; 'a model' that could be 'be interpreted in virtually any way' but can still be implemented? The analysis of the collapse of 'real socialism' echoes liberal idealist ideas that the soviet-bloc collapsed because of its 'totalitarianism' - a historical and materialist discussion of this development is absent. It is clear from Öcalan's texts that he sees the Soviet ideology

as synonymous with 'marxism' and is not familiar with the marxist currents that developed outside of it or the marxist criticisms of it.

Öcalan's writings are repetitive and long-winded, something that cannot be blamed only on the confines he is subjected to in prison. Öcalan's texts are immediately recognizable by their meandering style. The juxtaposition of musings on the meaning of 'humanity' and 'freedom', with remnants of the old jargon can be quite bewildering. Terms familiar from marxism are used in ways that imply that for Öcalan their meaning is very different: the 'Second Manifesto' talks about 'feudal nomads', the prison writings declare the 'feudal' Kurdish leaders to be a 'comprador petty-bourgeoisie'. Terms are left undefined and vague. 'Democracy' for example has become both the goal and method for solving social problems and the defining characteristic of a new civilization. But in hundreds of pages, Öcalan does not offer a sustained explanation of what the word means to him. In brief, it is often unclear what Öcalan is trying to say.

The ideology of the PKK has undergone major shifts since its foundation in the late seventies. From its original marxism-leninism, that saw the conquest of state-power as liberation, there was a shift to conceiving of 'freedom' and 'independence' in personal terms. From a stalinist conception of socialism as state-ownership of the means of production, there was a shift to seeing socialism as the creation of a new man. From a 'united and independent Kurdistan' and the formation of a new nation-state, there was a shift to a 'free Kurdistan' which in one way or another could possibly exist inside the borders of the Turkish state. From seeing women as resource for the revolutionary struggle, there was a shift to seeing women as such as central actors in the movement.

The PKK was not only a political and military leadership, it would reorganize the new society. It would built not only social relations that would reflect the desired society but even create the new personalities that would characterize the future society. This principle of prefiguration, of building in

the present elements that will reflect the future society, is still present in the movement. Today, it is not only personalities but also the political structures of the future society that the PKK hopes to built in the present by organizing structures that supposedly carry the kernel of the new society. It is also clearly visible in its approach towards women's liberation when it demands that women and men 'unlearn' the attitudes that supposedly perpetuate patriarchy. 'We want to build a new society. Let's realize this new society, equality, freedom, esteem, and love among ourselves first', Öcalan, 2000. [65]

One constant throughout the PKK's evolution is the centrality of Serok Apo and his statements. When German activists went to North Kurdistan to 'see for themselves' how democratic autonomy is implemented, they were repeatedly told that activists were 'following instructions' of Öcalan, defenders of Kobani claim 'the thought of Apo' was what enabled them to defeat of IS, his picture is prominently displayed on t-shirts and banners. PYD representatives describe their ideology as 'the ideology of Öcalan', Kurdish women's activists say that they have learned everything they know about feminism from Öcalan. The continuation of ideological and political, if not anymore directly organizational, leadership by a single individual is at odds with the claims of self-emancipation of democratic autonomy. The PKK is an confounding case of a movement that supposedly has embraced a vision of 'bottom-up democracy' on instructions 'from above'.

In the 'old' PKK, gaps in the theory, subjects that were not dealt with or left unclear, were filled with a stock of received ideas from 'marxist-leninist' theories. The writings of Mehmet Can Yüce, one of the movement's more prominent ideologues from that time, could almost be written by an ideologue of another party from a similar current - as long as they they do not deal with the few topics on which the PKK had developed its own views like the history of the Comintern. The PKK programs and statements from the late seventies and eighties are in many ways interchangeable with those of other

marxist-leninist national-liberation movements. Now that the PKK defines itself as 'neither marxist nor anti-marxist', this stock of ideas has fallen away and there is less to fill the gaps.

The resulting vagueness and incompleteness has its useful sides. The liberal 'conflict monitoring' NGO International Crisis Group for example has suggested that what they call the 'unbearable vagueness' of the goal of democratic autonomy is a tactic to make it harder for the Turkish state to ban Kurdish groups for propagating 'separatism' but this underestimates the changes the PKK and the movement under its hegemony have gone through (it also does not take into account that the Turkish state has no problem banning Kurdish organizations under flimsy pretexts). But the vagueness does make the project open for very wide interpretations. Because of this vagueness, the PKK's political project can appeal to the sympathy from broad layers. From liberals to anarchists, people can recognize their own desires in it.

Even more than when he was the leader of the movement in a direct sense, and in contact with his followers on a daily basis, Öcalan has become a prophet-like figure'. And, like with the statements of other prophets, his words are open to interpretation. Activists on the ground have considerable space to maneuver, and to interpret his directives in ways that suit their circumstances. The incompleteness of the new ideology and the relative vagueness of Öcalan's texts make it possible to adapt it pragmatically to the local situation, while activists can still claim fidelity to 'the ideology of Öcalan'.

Decisive for the evolution of the movement is how activists interpret and shape this ideology. The less centralized approach towards building social organizations opens the possibility for a more open and progressive praxis than was possible in the 'old' PKK. The Kurdish movement has not only maintained itself against the Turkish state but also won concessions from it. A few decades ago, the Turkish state denied there existed something like a 'Kurdish minority', today it is forced to take the Kurdish

movement into account as a political force. This was made possible by immense sacrifices of	Kurdish fighters, guerrilla's and activists. It is them who will decide the future of the movement.
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SYRIA

We need to support forms of liberation struggle unconditionally

JOSEPH DAHER & MATTIA GALLO · 10 March 2015

The mainstream media have described the civil war happened in Syria from 2012 as a clash between religious groups present in the country against the Assad regime, effectively ignoring the dynamics from below. Have there been groups of revolutionaries who fought for social justice, equality, freedom?

For more than three years now, the majority of observers have analyzed the Syrian revolutionary process in geopolitical and sectarian terms, from above, ignoring the popular political and socio-economic dynamics on the ground. The threat of Western intervention has only reinforced this idea of an opposition between two camps: the Western states and the Gulf monarchies on one side, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah on the other. But we refuse to choose between these two camps, we refuse this logic of the "least harmful [evil]" which will only lead to the loss of the Syrian revolution and its objective: democracy, social justice and the rejection of sectarianism.

Lately, mainstream media, whether in the west or in the Middle East, and Western and regional governments, have been wanting us to believe that the Syrian revolution is dead and has transformed itself into a sectarian war between the Sunni majority and the religious and ethnic minorities on the other side, or in a similar trend, in an opposition between jihadists vs. the Assad regime. This last perspective has actually pushed many to join the camp composed of people who range from the conservative right-wing to ill-informed anti-imperialists, who argue that Assad is a lesser evil to the Jihadists. In fact we should oppose both, because they nurture

each other and are both seeking to establish an authoritarian system.

A number of examples can show the popular movement still ongoing in Syria pursuing the initial objectives of the revolution democracy, justice social and equality, against the counter revolutionary forces represented firstly by the Assad regime and its allies and secondly by the Jihadist and Islamist forces that have not hesitated to attack revolutionary groups. The Syrian revolutionary masses refuse any kind of oppression, whether from the regime or the Islamist reactionary forces, just as they refuse attempts to divide the Syrian people by using sectarianism or national chauvinism. We have to politically oppose both of these counter-revolutionary forces and continue to struggle for the original objectives of the revolution: "democracy, social justice and equality."

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

In some regions liberated from the regime's armed forces, civil administrations were also set up to make up for the absence of the state in taking charge of its basic duties in various fields, like schools, hospitals, roads, water systems, electricity, communications. Those civil administrations were implemented through elections and (or by) popular

consensus and have to provide civil services, security and civil peace among their main tasks.

Free local elections in the 'liberated zones' occurred for the first time in 40 years in certain regions, neighbourhoods and villages. This was the case for instance in the city of Deir Ezzor, in late February 2013.

Those local councils reflected the sense of responsibility and the capacity of citizens to take on initiatives to manage their own affairs relying on their managerial staff, their own experience and clean energy. Such initiatives took various forms, both in regions still under regime control and those that have freed themselves from it.

This does not mean that there are no limits to those popular councils, such as the lack of representation of women, or of certain minorities. One is not trying to embellish reality, but to establish the truth.

Another equally important element in the popular dynamic of the revolution was the proliferation of independent newspapers produced by people's organizations. The number of newspapers went from three before the revolution – all in the hands of the regime – to more than sixty written by these civic groups.

In the city of Deir Ezzor, in June 2013, a campaign was launched by local activists to encourage citizens to take part to the process of monitoring and documentation of the practices of people's local councils. Among other things, the campaign encouraged the promotion of rights and a culture of human rights in society. There was a particular emphasis on the idea of rights and justice for all.

It is also important to remind everyone of the meeting in Rihania, a city on the Syrian-Turkish border, where the Free Syrian Union was formed on October 13, 2013, gathering about 106 military, media, and civil formations under its umbrella. These were all calling for a Free and Democratic Syria in which all sects and ethnicities would be treated equally. Although limited in some regards (e.g. the name Syrian Arab Republic was maintained as well

as a call to return to the 'liberal' Constitution of 1950), this initiative must clearly be included in any account of the democratic stakeholders in the revolution.

A prominent example of self-management by the masses took place in the city of Raqqa, the only provincial capital that has been liberated from the regime (since March 2013), but is today occupied by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In the first few months following the liberation of the city and despite still enduring regular regime shelling, Raqqa was completely autonomous and it was the local population that managed all the local services for the collectivity.

These popular organizations, often led by young people, came on in leaps and bounds. They multiplied, to the extent that more than 42 social movements were officially registered by the end of May 2013. The people's committees organized various campaigns. The "revolutionary flag represents me" campaign consisted in painting the revolutionary flag in neighbourhoods and streets of the city, to oppose the Islamist attempt to impose the black Islamist flag throughout. On the cultural front, a play mocking the Assad regime was performed in the city centre and at the beginning of June, these organizations held an exhibition for art and local crafts. Centres were established to give the youth an occupation and to treat the psychological disorders resulting from the war. By the end of the year, Syrian baccalaureate exams in June and July were entirely organized by volunteers.

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

For instance, on June 18, 2013, in the city of Raqqa, a mass protest led by women was held in front of Jabhat al-Nusra's Islamist headquarters, where the protesters called for the liberation of incarcerated prisoners. Protesters shouted slogans against Jabhat al-Nusra that denounced their actions. The protesters did not hesitate to deploy the first slogan

ever used in Damascus in February 2011: "the Syrian people refuse to be humiliated."

The women's group "Haquna" (meaning 'our right') also organized many gatherings against the Islamist groups in Raqqa, chorusing among other messages, "Raqqa is free, down with Jabhat al-Nusra."

During summer 2013, solidarity gatherings called for the libération of kidnapped activists held in Islamist prisons. The protests enabled the liberation of some activists, but numerous others remain in jail to this day, like the famous Father Paolo, and others including Firas, the son of the intellectual Yassin Hajj Saleh.

In September 2013, following an attack ISIS against the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Raqqa, youth groups and activists organized a demonstration to condemn ISIS actions, in which they brandished a big cross in solidarity with the Syrian Christian community of the city. They also issued a statement saying that, "they demand the respect for all religions: Christian and Muslim are one: We have lived and will live as brothers. The people who practiced these actions only represent themselves and the Islamic religion is innocent of such acts."

In the people's organised resistance to the Islamist groups in the city of Raqqa, like elsewhere, women have played a leading role. Suad Nofal, a school teacher, for example, has been protesting nearly daily for months against ISIS's authoritarian practices, demanding the release of political prisoners.

Similar protests contesting the authoritarian and reactionary practices of the Islamists took place in Aleppo, in Mayadin, al-Qusayr and other cities like Kafranbel.

In the neighbourhood of Bustan Qasr, in Aleppo, the local population has protested numerous times to denounce the actions of the Sharia Council of Aleppo, which contains many Islamist groups. On August 23, 2013, for instance, the protesters of Bustan Qasr, while condemning the regime's use of

chemical weapons against the people in Eastern Ghouta, were also calling for the liberation of the famous activist Abu Maryam, once more jailed by the Sharia Council of Aleppo.

They continue to demand his release to this day. At the end of June 2013, in the same neighbourhood, the activists shouted, "go f*c* yourself, Islamic council," protesting at the repressive and authoritarian politics of the latter. Popular outrage was also expressed following the assassination by foreign jihadists belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria group (ISIS) of a 14-year old boy, who allegedly made a blasphemous comment in a joke referring to Prophet Mohammad.

A protest was organized by the popular committee of Bustan Qasr against the Islamic council and the Islamist groups. Activists cried, "what a shame, what a shame, the revolutionaries have become shabiha," comparing the Islamic council to the Syrian regime's secret police, a clear allusion to their authoritarian practices.

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

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

Coordination committees such as the Kurdish Fraternity Committee have accused ISIS of "occu-

pying cities and terrorizing citizens", equating them with the pro-regime group Hezbollah, which has been ruthlessly targeting civilians. Members of those committees demonstrated in Ashrafiya, Aleppo, on September 20, 2013 against ISIS with banners saying, "Syria will be free, free; ISIS, get out" and "We Syrians Reject Masked Fighters in Our Country," "ISIS is the Regime's State of Iraq and Syria", and "Our Syria is colourful. No to ISIS and its black flag."

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

More recent examples can be also be cited, such as the Statement of the Civilian Movement in Syria Regarding the Remarks of Mr. Zahran Alloush, Commander of the Army of Islam on October 14, 2013 in which groups and members of the Syrian revolutionary process stated their rejection « of any attempt by any party to impose authoritarianism upon decision-making and upon the work of citizens. We also reject any attempt to make compliance with any institution not elected by the people, no matter how powerful or wealthy the institution, a benchmark for the public good or a gauge of patriotism or an indicator of the ability to perform civic duty today ».

This statement was issued after Mr. Zahran Alloush (Commander of the Army of Islam) pronounced the establishment of the expanded Douma Civilian Council "divisive" because it ought to have taken the Consultative Council that is associated with him as its sole reference point.

In the eyes of the people, ISIS is yet another face of the Assad regime because of its authoritarianism, as expressed on a banner in a demonstration on

December 27 2013 in Maraat al-Numan in Idlib that said, "The majority of us have become wanted by two states (the Assad regime and ISIS)".

On January 3, 2014, demonstrations occurred in different locations where ISIS was present to demand its departure and overthrow. Chants such as, "Assad and ISIS are one" or "ISIS get out", widely used for a while now in liberated areas of Syria, were heard everywhere.

The Syrian revolutionary masses have proven for some time now that their revolution is not dead and never has been. But the world does not want to see this symbol. Pundits ignore the fact that, in a neighbourhood of Aleppo as late as Saturday, January 4, 2014, slogans are still being used against the Assad regime and against the jihadists – slogans such as, "our revolution is against all oppressors" or "the Syrian people will never submit".

On March 14 2014, many demonstrations were held across the country to celebrate the third anniversary of the revolution, and various campaigns have been organized in various liberated territories.

Activists in Aleppo distributed flyers in areas under the control of the regime that stated that the revolution continues until victory, until the downfall of the regime. This was part of the campaign "we resist despite the violence of the regime." The activists of this campaign also stated that peaceful means of resistance continue to be a tool of resistance in this revolution.

A number of events and actions took place in the free territory of Aleppo. An exhibition of pictures and of drawings by children in memory of the martyrs of the revolution was organised, in addition to a theatrical performance about the history of the revolution. Other actions included covering a square with the pictures of the martyrs of the revolution, and a campaign, "the wall tells the story of the revolution," in which drawings were made on walls in various neighbourhoods.

In the region of Idlib, a campaign has been launched by various groups of activists to com-

memorate the third year of the revolution. The campaign involves a variety of different events, including a demonstration with the songs of the beginning of the beginning of the revolution, painting walls in cities and villages with slogans of the revolution and the reasons why the revolution started, and a theater performance.

The Union of Free Syrian Students (UFSS) launched a new campaign called: "Pain and Hope: The Revolution Continues". For the commemoration of the ten years of Kurdish Intifada on March 12 2014, many demonstrations also occurred in various cities, including Amouda, Efrin, and Qamichlo. On March 8, the group Syrian Women's Initiative launched a campaign calling for a democratic and pluralist state in which the rights of women are guaranteed.

During April and May, actions were organized against the jihadists and Islamist groups. In the city of Minbej, near Aleppo, occupied by the IS, a general strike was declared in late May by the people of the city to protest against the occupation of the city by the IS. A group of Syrian activists have also launched a campaign to demand the release of four revolutionaries (including Razan Zeitouneh, Syrian activist, kidnapped with her husband and two legal colleagues], kidnapped in December 2013 most likely by the Islamic Front, which had threatened activists in the past. Demonstrations took place, for example in the town of Douma, near Damascus, and in the neighborhood of Salah el-Din in Aleppo under the slogan "Traitor is he who kidnaps the revolutionaries."

During the sham elections of June 2014, which saw the re-election of Bashar Al Assad, activist groups have distributed flyers and brochures, of course through hiding from the security forces, in cities and areas under the domination of the regime, such as in Damascus, Aleppo and Hama, condemning the crimes of the regime and reiterating their commitment to continue their revolution until victory. Meanwhile protests were held in many "liberated areas" to denounce these "elections of blood." We also saw some revolutionaries in the liberated ar-

reas, transforming trash bins into ballot boxes which were decorated with the following inscriptions: "You can vote here," "We'll throw you, Bashar" and "Bashar, that is where you reside." In the city of Qamishli, a demonstration was organized by the Kurdish youth movement condemning the election as a farce orchestrated by Assad and calling for a boycott of the latter.

During the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip, demonstrations of solidarity were held with the Palestinian people in the "liberated territories" of Syria, especially in various districts of Aleppo, in the town of Qaboun near Damascus, Deraa, etc.,

In the neighborhood of Salah el Din, in Aleppo, the protesters sent this message to the Palestinian people: "From Salah el Din to the people of Gaza, we are one, as is our fight against our enemy." A candlelight vigil was also held in Aleppo for Gaza, while groups of children demonstrated massively in the city of Qaboun in solidarity with Palestine. There have also been demonstrations in support of Gaza in the Palestinian camp of Yarmouk. On the Golan, Syrian territory occupied by Israel, protesters supporting the Syrian revolution have condemned Israel's attack on Gaza, with placards that required stopping the killing in Syria and Gaza.

In early August 2014, activists of the popular committees in some neighborhoods of Aleppo have launched a campaign to revive the peaceful protests against the regime of Bashar Al Assad while also opposing the Islamic state and the dangers posed by this latter as it was at the gates of Aleppo. The campaign is entitled: "peaceful activism is the pulse of the revolution."

The campaign brings together the revolutionary councils of the districts of Salah al-Din, Bustan al-Qasr, Kalasa and the ancient city of Aleppo, the Coordinating Committee of the district of Mashhad, and rescue teams of civil defense. The Free Council of the city of Aleppo, the Syrian Women's Association and a number of independent activists have also joined this mobilization.

On the first day of the campaign, the Revolutionary Council of Salah al-Din held a vigil. Participants carried banners in response to an article published in the American magazine *Live Wire*, calling Aleppo "the most dangerous city in the world." The protesters wanted to send a message reminding that their city is alive and deserves their affection despite the dangers of living there. In the east of Aleppo, the demonstrators took part in a march from the Salah al-Din neighborhood through Mashhad and ending in the Ansari neighborhood. The students participating in the event held up signs calling for a return to the values upheld at the beginning of the revolution of 2011, and for the unification of the Free Syrian Army.

We can see that the popular movement is still alive, despite all the dangers threatening it.

A banner raised in the city of Kafranbel in December 2013 summarized the situation very well: "The enemies are many...the revolution is one...and continues."

Do openly left-wing forces exist in the revolutionary movement?

Different leftist forces have been involved in the Syrian revolutionary process since the revolutionary process began. We can find numerous smaller leftist groups and youth in Syria participating in the revolutionary process, in popular committees on the ground, organisation of demonstrations and of the provision of services to the population. The left has mostly been engaged in the civil work, as opposed to participating in military operations.

There is a long tradition of Syrian leftist forces and currents. We must not neglect them. They range from communists to Marxists of various currents, to nationalists.

At the beginning of the revolutionary process, progressive political forces established a coalition called al-Watan, encompassing 17 leftist parties, which were playing a very important role in the mobilization on the ground far from the media coverage. The organisations belonging to this coalition

were targets of the regime and many were repressed. The coalition is not anymore functional, but some organisations are still playing an active role in some regions.

From the very beginning, despite our modest capacities, we, the Current of the Revolutionary Left has remained committed to the revolution, calling for democracy and socialism. We have struggled alongside the people and all democratic forces for the victory of this great popular revolution, just as we struggle for the formation of a socialist workers' party. We also established a small armed brigade in March 2014.

We can also talk of the National Coordinating Committee for Democratic National Change (NCC) – a group of Arab nationalist, Kurdish and socialist parties. The NCC gathers notably the National Democratic Rally, which is itself comprised of five parties, notably the Democratic Arab Socialist Union headed by Hassan Abdul Azim, the official spokesperson for the National Democratic Rally and chairman of the NCC. The Rally also included the Arab Revolutionary Workers' Party, represented by Hazem Nahar; the Communist Labor Party, represented by Abdul-Aziz al-Khair, (who was kidnapped in September 2012 by regime forces upon his return from a visit to China; his fate remains not known); the Arab Socialist Movement, represented by Munir al-Bitar; the Syriac Union Party; and the Democratic People's Party, which has not been represented in the Executive Bureau of the National Coordination Body. The National Coordination Body also included parties with Marxist leanings such as the Together for a Free Democratic Syria movement, founded by Mounzer Khaddam; and independent, civil society neighborhood committees.

As for Kurdish representation, the Coordination Body initially included four political parties represented by two members within the Executive Bureau: Saleh Muslim Mohammed representing the Democratic Union Party and Nasreddin Ibrahim representing the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria. However, with the exception of the

Democratic Union Party, the other Kurdish parties withdrew from the National Coordination Body in January 2012 to join the Kurdish National Council while the Democratic Union Party is very independent of any decision of the NCC.

Some key members and activists of the NCC have suffered repression from the regime, despite the fact that they have called for negotiations with the regime since the beginning of the protests in March 2011 and they refrained from calling for the overthrow of Assad. This moderate stance has cost them a lot of their popularity and rejection especially from democratic and leftists activists.

It is true that a mass socialist revolutionary party with tens of thousands of members might not exist in Syria, but this is something that is not unique to Syria. Similarly, there is no mass party expressing other political tendencies. The ban on political activity and the violent and perpetual repression for the past 40 years have prevented such developments.

This absence should not be an obstacle in supporting this revolution. It's the same in terms of participation in a revolutionary struggle – especially relocated as part of the regional political situation, which opened in 2011 – whose priorities are: democracy, social justice, and true independence! We do not choose under what conditions a revolution happens, as Karl Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, "Humans make their history themselves, but they do not do it arbitrarily, under conditions chosen by them: they make it under given conditions, directly inherited. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. "

What was the political and economic situation in Syria before 2011? Were carried out policies of neo – liberal in Syrian society by governments in previous years? What has been the impact of these policies on Syrian society?

The roots of the revolutionary process are the absence of democracy and increasing social injustice

as a result of neoliberal policies, especially as implemented to a high degree with the arrival to power of Bashar Al Assad in 2010.

But we should remember that the advent of Hafez Al Assad to power marked a new era in Syria whereby independent popular organizations from trade unions to professional associations and civic associations came under the regime's authority after harsh repression. Professional unions of doctors, lawyers, engineers and pharmacists were dissolved in 1980. They were the main organizations previously leading the struggle for the return of democratic freedoms and the lifting of the emergency rule. They were re-established but their leaders were replaced by state appointees.

In the school system, the regime targeted principally leftist teachers from different tendencies in the 1970s onwards, simultaneously allowing religious fundamentalist currents to develop.

No immunity was granted to university campuses, neither to teachers nor to students. Security agencies could actually arrest students inside lecture halls and/or on campus and they did.

In a similar manner, the regime imposed its domination on the bureaucracy of the trade union workers, and this is what hindered the labour struggle against neo-liberal policies pursued by the authoritarian regime since 2000, which has allowed the decline in the standard of living of the majority of the people, as well as political repression.

The regime's bourgeois credentials were clearly established in 1970, when Hafez al-Assad put an end to some radical policies of the 1960s of the left wing of his Baath Party. They were accelerated with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies when [his son] Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000. These policies have benefited in particular a small oligarchy which has proliferated since the era of his father, because of its mastery of the networks of economic patronage and their loyal customers. Bashar al-Assad's cousin, Rami Makhlouf, as we will see later, perfectly embodies this mafia-like

process of privatization conducted by the regime in favour of its own.

New monopolies have been created in the hands of Bashar's family while the quality of goods and services has decreased, particularly in the health sector and education where private institutions have multiplied. At the same time the financial sector has developed with the growth, from 2004 on, of the first private banks, dominated by Syrian capital and the Gulf oil monarchies, of insurance companies, the Stock Exchange of Damascus and bureaux de change. Bashar's coming to power has however restricted the circle of those who enjoyed the "spoils" of the regime; these were distributed more widely under his father, when several groups could conclude business and win the favour of the state.

The son of a former commander of the Syrian Republican Guard and second cousin of the new dictator, Makhoul thus controlled, on the eve of the uprising of 2011, nearly 60% of the economy of the country, thanks to a complex network of holdings. His economic empire includes telecommunications, oil and gas, as well as construction, banks, airlines and retail. He is also owner of the only duty free firm, as well as several private schools to which the children of the dignitaries of the regime and of the Syrian bourgeoisie are sent. The personal fortune of Rami Makhoul is estimated at close to 6 billion dollars. It is to be noted that at the beginning of 2011, the British magazine *World Finance* had extolled Makhoul's visionary leadership and his outstanding contribution to the Syrian economy, calling him a symbol of the positive change at work in the country. The Chilean case provides a good illustration of the link between neo-liberal policies and political dictatorship in the countries of the periphery.

The neo-liberal policies of the regime have satisfied various social sectors: the upper layers of the new bourgeoisie, which had developed within the state during the previous decades; the old bourgeois elites of the private sector, who had begun to invest again in the country; and foreign investors, in particular in the Gulf region, by opening the Syrian

economy to their operations at the expense of the majority of the population, hit hard by continuous inflation. The neo-liberal policies put in place during these last ten years have caused the collapse of the public sector and led to the domination of the private sector, which now accounts for nearly 70 per cent of economic activity.

To better reflect the impact of these economic policies and of their role in the triggering of the popular uprising, it is necessary to look also at the sectors that have benefited from these policies, be it the leaders of the security service and army apparatuses; the networks of the bureaucracy; the crony capitalists sponsored by different sectors of the public services, who have developed and enriched themselves still more within the private sector, particularly in the course of the 1990s, after the implementation of investment laws Number 10 of 1991 ; and the bourgeoisie of Aleppo and Damascus, which has benefited more particularly from the launch of the so-called "social market economy" in 2005 .

The growth of real GDP and real per capita income has decreased since the early 1990s. The process of economic liberalization has created an ever growing inequality within the country. The poorest people have difficulty in coping with this new economy due to a growing shortage of jobs, especially for the young graduates and the inhabitants of the peripheral regions, while the middle class, in particular civil servants and young people finishing their studies, are quickly approaching the threshold of poverty because their incomes have not kept pace with inflation, which reached 17 %, officially, in 2008.

On the eve of the uprising of March 2011, the unemployment rate stood at 14.9%, according to official figures – 20-25% according to other sources; it was respectively 33.7% and 39.3% among those aged 20-24 and 15-19 years. In 2007, the percentage of Syrians living below the poverty line was 33 %, which represented approximately seven million people, while 30% of them were just above this level. The proportion of poor was higher in rural areas (62%) than in urban areas (38%). Poverty is more

widespread, more rooted and more marked (58.1%) in the northwest and northeast (the provinces of Idleb, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh), where 45% of the population lives.

In addition, while privatisations have proliferated, the Syrian regime undertook to reform its system of subsidies, penalizing even more the popular classes and the poorest. This is accompanied by the reduction of the quality and quantity of public health services, which has forced the people to turn to the dearer private sector in order to enjoy basic services. The report conducted by the IMF in 2010 welcomed the many measures taken by the Syrian regime: "the unification of the exchange rate and the restrictions on access to foreign exchange for current account transactions appear to have been mostly eliminated. The private banks now lead the growth of the financial sector, and the Damascus stock exchange has recently reopened after a closure of 40 years. Taxes have been simplified and the trade regime has been significantly liberalized".

The development plan of the Syrian regime from 2006 to 2010 had the stated aim of "continuation of the deregulation of the market, as well as the deepening and the growth of its inclusion in the world market to attract private investment, with extensive structural reforms in order to ensure a good governance of the economy and an equitable growth".

Syria's economic growth, which was on average 5% during the years preceding the beginning of the uprising, has not benefited the working classes; in fact, inequalities in terms of wealth have continued to increase. For example, between 1997 and 2004, the Gini coefficient rose from 0.33 to 0.37. In 2003-2004, 20% of the poorest accounted for only 7% of total expenditure, while 20% of the richest were responsible for 45% of the latter. In agriculture, the privatization of land at the expense of several hundreds of thousands of peasants from the north-east, initiated in 2008 ostensibly because of drought, should not be perceived as the consequence of a simple natural disaster. The growth and intensification of the exploitation of the land by big

agribusiness companies – including lands previously retained for grazing, and even the illegal drilling of wells, as well as the establishment of lines of selective water meeting the requirements of the new major owners – facilitated the corruption of the local administration which accompanied the agricultural crisis. In 2008, 28% of the farmers were exploiting 75% of the irrigated land, while 49% of them had only 10% of the latter, which is evidence of the progress of inequalities within agriculture. In the same way, the regime has imposed its domination on the trade union bureaucracy, and this has hampered the fight against neo-liberal and authoritarian policies, particularly since 2000. The standard of living of the majority of the population continued to decrease, whereas political repression continued. For example, in May 2006, hundreds of workers protested within the public construction company in Damascus and clashed with security forces. At the same time, taxi drivers went on strike to Aleppo to protest their work and living conditions.

The neo-liberal reforms of the regime have encouraged a policy based on foreign direct investment, which went from \$120 million in 2002 to \$3.5 billion in 2010, particularly in the areas of export, services, and tourism. Before being shattered by the events that began in March 2011, the latter had become a flourishing industry: it represents 12% of current GDP, or approximately 6.5 billion dollars, and employed 11% of the labour force.

The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of large parts of Syrian society, in a climate of corruption and increasing social inequality, prepared the ground for the popular insurrection, which thus needed no more than a spark. As Bashar al-Assad put it at the end of January 2011, in an interview with the Wall Street Journal: "Despite more difficult circumstances than in most Arab countries, Syria is stable. Why? Because you must be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people." The Syrian leader was very wrong, as he would find out two months later.

What is your opinion on the attack of the United States and its allies in Syria against Isil?

The initial declared objective of the USA led coalition was to target Daech (the Arab acronym for ISIL) military facilities and training camps, but more particularly its oil facilities to try to stem a source of revenues for the group.

Before the military operation initiated by the United States, IS earned about 3 million dollars (2.4 million euros) in revenue per day through oil. But since the strikes began, pumping in the fields under their control virtually ceased. The USA led coalition targeted various Daech positions.

For example, on September 25, the USA led coalition targeted 12 Daech controlled modular oil refineries in eastern Syria.

On September 29, the coalition bombed the city of Tal Abyad, occupied by Daech, in Al-Raqqa province and struck Tabqa airport eight times, a former regime base which Daech fighters captured in August.

The USA led coalition has nevertheless targeted since the beginning of its operation not only Daech, but also Jabhat al Nusra (official al Qaida branch in Syria), the affiliated Khorasan Group in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, as well as civilians and civil infrastructures.

The U.S.-led air campaign has killed at least 233 persons, including 211 jihadists and 22 civilians, according to the Observatory in the first week of the bombing.

On September 29, coalition warplanes reportedly hit the city of Manbij, occupied by Daech, in the northeast of the city of Aleppo and one of the strikes may have mistaken the mills and grain storage areas for an IS base, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The strikes in Manbij appeared to have killed only civilians, the workers in the silos. The destruction of city's grain silos will provoke most probably a humanitarian

disaster, according to the pro-opposition Aleppo Media Center.

According to local activists in Hasakah, the international coalition targeted the IS-held Ash-Shaddadi and the towns of Margada and al-Hol as well as the surrounding villages in the countryside of Hasakah on September 28, provoking mass displacement among civilians following the unexpected strikes. The coalition's air strikes also targeted the village of al-Fadgami (near the town of Margada), killing six civilians and injuring others though no IS members were present. [1]

On September 28, coalition warplanes struck the Daech-controlled Conoco gas plant in the city of Deir Zor, which is according to an activist, critically important, as it feeds several electricity power stations in the country that produce electricity for approximately a quarter of Syria [2]. A raid also hit Kuniko gas plant, which feeds a power station in Homs that provides several provinces with electricity and powers oil fields generators.

On September 23 in the village of Kafr Deryan in northern Idlib, missiles (Tomahawk cruise missiles, which are in the US arsenal) from the coalition killed at least two men, two women, and five children. There is unverified information that the two men could have been members of Jabhat al-Nusra.

Once again civilians and civil infrastructure are the targets of a USA led intervention. They have actually bombed important oil installations and refineries, and recently targeted a key gas production facility in Syria's eastern province of Deir al-Zour.

In the same time, the Kurdish town of Kobani / Ain al-Arab near the Syrian-Turkey border, is still under the threat of the jihadist force. In the Beginning of October, Daech was actually within 3 km from the Kurdish town and were bombing it.

This is the closest Daech militants have come to the city since Daech started their offensive 3 weeks ago.

Despite some very few airstrikes by a US-led international coalition to stop Daech, the militants have made advances and captured 67 villages sur-

rounding the area near Kobani / Ain al-Arab. This has resulted in at least 160,000 people fleeing across the border into Turkey,

Meanwhile, Turkish security forces clashed with displaced Kurds protesting along the border deploying water cannons and tear gas. Turkish authorities have also been intermittently preventing people from returning to Syria, worried about members of its own Kurdish guerrilla group, the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, trying to join the YPG in the fight against Daech.

By attacking Kobane / Ain al-Arab, Daech is attempting to consolidate control over its territory between strongholds in Aleppo's al-Bab city and A-Raqqa city. Daech began fighting joint PYD and FSA forces in the Kurdish-majority area of Kobane / Ain al-Arab in July. It escalated its campaign mid-September by employing tanks, heavy artillery and surface-to-surface missiles, publishing photos of the heavy machinery in action on Daech-affiliated media websites.

These bombing are an attempt by Western imperialist forces and regional regimes led by Saudi Arabia to reimpose their hegemony over the region.

The only political groups that will benefit from these bombings are the two sides of the counter revolutions: the Assad regimes on one side and the reactionary Islamic and Jihadist political forces.

The Assad regime will most probably benefit on the short term from these bombings militarily with the weakening of strong military actors, Assad forces have actually continued its attacks on various areas of the country, but moreover the regime sees a chance to regain "legitimacy" with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism.

The bombing might probably weaken on the short term military Daech, Jabhat al Nusra and other reactionary forces, but will also most likely to prove counterproductive for the Syrian revolutionaries upholding the objectives of the revolution by increasing the popular support for IS, Jabhat al Nusra and other reactionary forces, driving even

more recruits to their ranks. These forces are already painting themselves as the only serious anti-imperialist movement, rather than the reactionary and sectarian outfit they have.

On September 26, more than 200 fighters had actually joined Islamic State in Syria's northern Aleppo province since U.S. President Barack Obama said the United States would strike the jihadist organization. Rami Abdelrahman, who runs the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said that the pace of recruitment in September was higher than average but below the surge in July, after Daech declared a caliphate in the territory it controlled in Syria and Iraq and called on Muslims to join a holy war. Most of the new men came from al Qaeda's Syrian wing, the Nusra Front, and were mostly Syrian. [3].

This of course affected Jabhat al Nusra as well, which has not stopped to radicalize even more its discourse to prevent the departure of its members, especially foreigners, to Daech. Following the bombing of their positions in Idlib, some members have claimed their will and readiness to fight with Daech.

This summer for example, before the strikes, Al Jolani declared that "We took up arms to uphold the word of Allah and its arbitration, and deter aggressors, as stipulated by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah", and in another recording he said "Either Sharia arbitration or fighting for the sake of Allah". It is at this period as well that Jabhat al Nusra withdrew from the legitimate bodies of Damascus and Aleppo, working individually to expand its influence, and also launched campaign in Idlib's countryside to "deter corruptors", mainly targeting pro-revolution activists.

On September 27, following the strikes targeting them, the leader of Jabhat a-Nusra actually threatened to target the West.

"The battle against our countries will come to you," said Nusra chief Abu Mohammed al-Jolani. "You won't be safe in your own countries unless you resist the decision of your leaders" to bomb Syria."

Jolani's threats come a day after Nusra said that nations participating in the alliance have become legitimate targets for mujahideen "all over the world," describing international airstrikes as an "ugly crime against Syrians" and a "war against Islam" in a statement released by official spokesman Abu Firas a-Suri.

These bombings have definitely strengthened relatively the support of Jabhat al Nusra and other Islamic political forces on the ground as we can see in several demonstrations such as in Aleppo, Idlib, and Homs, demonstrators chant "We are all Nusra" or "Jabhat al-Nusra came to support us when the world abandoned us".

This increase in popularity will most probably be temporary, but will definitely strengthen these organizations.

The opposition to the strikes in Syria by the coalition and against Daech, Jabhat al Nusra and other Islamic reactionary organizations in no way should make us forget that increasing and multiple popular protests occurred against these counter revolutionary forces because of their authoritarianism and reactionary practices.

It is interesting to note that the Syrian regime has welcomed the strikes from the USA-led coalition. In a statement from the official news agency SANA, Bashar Al Assad, although without specifically mentioning the bombing, said he supported "all international counterterrorism effort".

In addition, Ali Haidar, Syrian minister for national reconciliation said that "As for the raids in Syria, I say that what has happened so far is proceeding in the right direction in terms of informing the Syrian government and by not targeting Syrian military installations and not targeting civilians".

The pro-regime news network Damascus Now hailed the strikes since the beginning as a historic moment, in which "happiness was etched on the faces of the majority of Syrians, because they found international support towards eradicating a cancer

which has been rooted in the diseased Syrian body," referring to the revolutionaries.

On September 29, Syria's foreign minister said that his government is satisfied with the U.S.-led bombing campaign against the Islamic State group, adding that the airstrikes should be expanded to include all other militant groups in Syria. In an interview with The Associated Press, Walid al-Moallem said the fight against terrorism has aligned Damascus with Western and Arab opponents in fighting the same enemy. Al-Moallem said the U.S. does not inform Syria of every strike before it happens, "but it's OK."

As a reminder, the Assad regime only started to target Daech forces in mid-August 2014. Previously, it had let it spread to various areas while targeting democrats and the FSA battalions mainly. Prior to August, no military conflicts had occurred between Daech and Assad forces.

On the other side, these bombings have resulted in wide range of opposition from groups on the ground and the popular movement, while also mounting strong suspicions of the objectives of the USA-led coalition. The Syrian National Council and of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces have supported and welcomed the USA led coalition bombings.

Colonel Riad al-Asaad, Founder of the FSA opposed USA-planned airstrikes before the beginning of the operations and declared that it will eliminate Syrians' revolution as it will strengthen Bashar al-Assad and his key ally, Iran. Al-Asaad called on moderate rebels to mass efforts for more unity to revive the Syrian revolution after saying that this latter was being kidnapped by radical Islamist groups and West-backed agendas.

Harakat Hazm, a FSA battalion composed of few thousands men and that operated mostly in Hama, condemned the US led coalition bombing on September 23. They denounced the strikes as "an attack on national sovereignty" and work to "undermine the Syrian revolution". They added that foreign intervention "will harm the revolution, es-

pecially seeing as the international community continues to ignore revolutionary forces' calls for weapons," the group said, adding that "the only side to benefit... is the Assad regime, without any real strategy to bring about its downfall." see full statement [here](#).

Regarding armed groups, Abu Ammar al-Halabi, former leader of the Islamic Front in Aleppo, expressed his condemnation of the coalition's strikes because they do not target the regime, "which used chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta -southern Syria- in 2013, killing 1400 people in one day".

A number of other groups have raised their opposition to USA-led coalition strikes, such as the Jaish al-Mujadeen, Abu Ratib, head of the Al-Haq Brigade, part of the Islamic Front, characterized the intervention "a total war against Muslims"; Suqour al-Sham, the main Islamic Front unit in Idlib, condemned the airstrikes and said they "will breed more extremism and terrorism"; the Army of Islam, the IF unit in Damascus, also condemned the strikes; the FSA Forqat 13 issued a statement condemning US-led airstrikes as "aimed at weakening the revolution" in Syria

A number of popular organizations and opposition armed groups have also opposed the international coalition bombings.

The LCC declared that "an end to the Islamic State needs to happen concurrently with an end to the equal terrorist threat represented by Bashar al-Assad's regime," and note that they "are herewith confirming their previous stances considering Assad's regime the foremost enemy of the Syrian people and assuring that extremism and terrorism were the products of the regime's crimes." See full statement

Several popular committees and organizations operating in Damascus and its countryside issued a statement rejecting the military operations of the international coalition led by USA and supported by some Arab regimes, which bombed several sites in Syria targeting civilians under the pretext of targeting the organization of the Islamic State. They

reject the strikes against jihadist groups that stood on the side of the Syrian revolution and the defense of civilians, while accusing these bombings of serving only the interests of the Assad regime, and not the interests of the Syrian people and the revolution. On September 27, a demonstration in Qaboun neighborhood of Damascus was organized to refuse the international military operations against Syria, and rejecting any kind of foreign intervention.

The Local Coordination committee of al-Hara City, in Daraa province, wrote on its facebook to condemn the bombings the following thing:" "Screw you (lit. screw your moustache) and screw every Arab leader who participated in the oppression of the Syrian people and declared them fair game... Really, Arabs no longer have any shame."

In the same time, LCC in Salqin, Idlib, wrote on its facebook page that "The international coalition will pursue the destruction of infrastructure—roads, bridges, electricity stations, different economic institutions—and the goal is to destroy the life and resilience of our people."

We can also see in video footage shot among Syrian refugees in Turkey that people oppose the bombings against targets other than Daech, that no illusions exist in the USA led coalition and these bombings are not in the interests of the Syrian revolution but of the countries of the region and of the Assad regime.

The Violations Documentation Center has also opposed these strikes arguing that: "The present air strikes against those groups raise concerns that civilians may also pay a heavy price, as such groups establish command centers in civilian areas, in various Syrian towns and villages. Furthermore, a number of the command centers have been converted by those groups to become detention centers. Thousands of inmates and persons who have been kidnapped, including many activists and journalists are now detained in such centers. Those groups also control installations containing dangerous materials, including the Conoco gas plant, in the Khasham village near Dei Ezzor. This plant

contains one of the largest ISIS centers. If its gas stocks are hit, this may cause enormous destruction as well as an environmental hazard of incalculable proportions."

We have also seen banners condemning the bombings or the hypocrisy of the regime such as "the planes coalitions showed the lie of those who support the regime on a so called "Resistant" and "anti imperialist" basis."

The Revolutionary Left Movement have opposed these bombing since the first day see statement.

The National Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change in Syria also rejects USA intervention in Syria, even with the Syrian government's approval.

At the same time, some Syrian revolutionaries in the city of Dazl have condemned the fact that UN security Council have adopted a binding resolution to stem the flow of foreign jihadists in Syria and Iraq, and oppose the threat they pose to their country of origin, while not a single word was said of foreign fighters on the said of the Assad regime, particularly of Hezbollah and Iraqis sectarian militias, Pasharan.

The YPG (People's Protection Units), arm branch of the PYD, recently sealed an anti-IS alliance with various groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), founding what they call the Joint Action Center. Its purported goal is to liberate all territories held by IS in Syria. The announcement was made in a joint statement in the Kurdish city of Sari Kani in northern Syria.

In the statement both groups call on the international community to assist them militarily so they can eradicate the extremist group.

In conclusion, the objectives of the USA led coalition are not to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or to protect them from Daech or the regime. The objective is to reimpose their hegemony over the region and guarantee a form of stability, especially to the reactionary regimes of the Gulf,

including Saudi Arabia, by putting an end to the revolutionary processes.

These strikes are also in the framework of reaching a Yemeni solution, as it has since the beginning, in other words reaching an agreement between the Assad regime (or a section of it) and the opposition linked to Western and Gulf regimes. The approval of the US Congress of the \$500 million to support President Barack Obama's plan to arm and equip five to 10,000 Syrian rebels, which Washington describes as "moderate" in their fight against the Islamic State and Syrian regime forces, goes in the same direction as we can see in the text of the resolution:

"The Secretary of Defense is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustainment, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

- (1)Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.
- (2)Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.
- (3)Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria."

The will of the USA to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests is nevertheless thwarted by the reality on the ground and the will of the opposition armed groups in their vast majority to collaborate only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Colonel Riad al-Asaad, the leader of the Free Syrian Army, for example said it would not join the alliance against the Islamic State unless it receives assurances on toppling the Syrian regime. He added that "If they want to see the Free Syrian Army on their side, they

should give assurances on toppling the Assad regime and on a plan including revolutionary principles." Other armed groups present in the Supreme Military Council of Syria, close to the USA, also expressed their resentment to the USA and other Western forces for their lack of support. In addition, they said that coalition airstrikes against ISIS targets were not enough. The strikes must also hit al-Assad's forces, they said. One of the commanders said that "we need to deal with this problem at its root cause: Assad, the gangs that support him, and Daech. Those are the three problems every Syrian deals with." Many armed groups were also critical of the way the strikes were being carried out and as we have seen many inside the country on the side of the revolution reject these bombings.

The Jihadist and Islamic reactionary forces are used by the Western imperialist and regional forces as the entry point for this new military intervention, but also because they have been judged by Western and regional imperialist forces to have gone too far in their process of expansion for Westernby ignoring state borders and creating unwilling instability for these powers. We should remember that Daech that was established in 2006 was of no interest to these powers when they were confined to specific geographic locations in Iraq first and later Syria and was even financially supported by some Gulf private networks in the beginning.

Although Daech and other sister organizations are a factor of instability for the global imperialist system, we should be clear they are in no way actors for the emancipation and liberation of the people of the region; they are very much the opposite.

The revolutionary processes are in a difficult period with the domination of two counter revolutionary forces, represented first by the old regimes supported by Saudi Arabia such as in the case of Sissi's Egypt, and Islamic reactionary forces, its best representative being the Muslim Brotherhood, supported by Qatar. We can nevertheless see once more that the rivalries between the various imperi-

alist and sub-imperialist forces can be overcome when they have shared and common interests, as it the case with the current bombings in Syria and Iraq by the USA led coalition and welcomed or at least tacitly by Russia and Iran.

A third progressive and democratic front gathering the objectives of the revolutions (democracy, social justice and equality) and able to oppose all foreign imperialist and sub-imperialist forces have not been able yet to constitute itself as a credible alternative political force until now for the masses on the regional basis. All efforts should be put forward to build this third democratic and progressive alternative.

We are living a revolutionary crisis on many aspects as described by Gramsci: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear". Daech symbolized on many aspects "this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear", while old regimes are far from dead.

In the same time, the bombings from the USA led coalitions have killed more civilians and destroyed much-needed civilian infrastructure.

These are the reasons why we should oppose these bombings.

In addition, to believe that Daech, Jabhat al Nusra and other similar organizations can be defeated with the same tools that created them is completely insane. These reactionary forces are indeed the consequences of the criminal authoritarian regimes (for example Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) and foreign international (mainly Western countries led by the USA at its head) and regional (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran) interventions. This new military intervention has indeed no objective of overthrowing the Assad regime.

As a banner held by a Syrian protester in Aleppo last week said: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results,

Albert Einstein" and below "Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014."

Only the popular mass movement is capable of confronting these reactionary forces and the authoritarian regimes.

We must support and express solidarity with all the democratic and progressive forces in Syria and Iraq as well as the Kurdish democratic forces that resist against the two actors of the counter revolution: the Assad regimes on one side and the jihadist and Islamic reactionary forces on the other side.

In this perspective, it is necessary to defend a local dynamic of self-defense rather than increasing stranglehold of imperialism and therefore we should also support the provision of weapons and arms to these democratic forces in the region to combat both counter-revolutionary forces. These are important element that could empower the democratic forces on the ground and give them the tools to defend them.

For the people who don't feel at ease with the fact of demanding arms and weapons with no political conditions attached from the West, I would like to invite them to read Trotsky's "Learn to Think" and cite this passage:

"Let us imagine that in the next European war the Belgian proletariat conquers power sooner than the proletariat of France. Undoubtedly Hitler will try to crush the proletarian Belgium. In order to cover up its own flank, the French bourgeois government might find itself compelled to help the Belgian workers' government with arms. The Belgian Soviets of course reach for these arms with both hands. But actuated by the principle of defeatism, perhaps the French workers ought to block their bourgeoisie from shipping arms to proletarian Belgium? Only direct traitors or out-and-out idiots can reason thus.

The French bourgeoisie could send arms to proletarian Belgium only out of fear of the greatest mili-

tary danger and only in expectation of later crushing the proletarian revolution with their own weapons. To the French workers, on the contrary, proletarian Belgium is the greatest support in the struggle against their own bourgeoisie. The outcome of the struggle would be decided, in the final analysis, by the relationship of forces, into which correct policies enter as a very important factor. The revolutionary party's first task is to utilize the contradiction between two imperialist countries, France and Germany, in order to save proletarian Belgium.

Ultra-left scholastics think not in concrete terms but in empty abstractions. They have transformed the idea of defeatism into such a vacuum. They can see vividly neither the process of war nor the process of revolution. They seek a hermetically sealed formula, which excludes fresh air. But a formula of this kind can offer no orientation for the proletarian vanguard."

This does not mean of course that we are uncritical of the leadership of the PKK and FSA democratic sections, which do not have a socialist leadership, but the Palestinian Liberation Organization or the National Liberation Front in Algeria did not have those either and this did not stop revolutionary support for them. We have to understand that the various International (USA and Russia) and regional imperialist powers (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have been trying to smash these revolutionary processes and these groups as well because they challenge the global capitalist and imperialist system by their struggle against authoritarian regimes and reactionary groups, which were part of this system.

As a fundamental principle of revolutionaries, we first need to support these forms of liberation and emancipation struggle unconditionally, before we are entitled to criticize the way they are led.

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