Greece- No to the diktats of the Troika, solidarity with the Greek people

The announcement by Alexis Tsipras of the referendum on 5 July, in which the voters will be asked to reject the draft agreement of the Troika, is good news for the Greek people and for all those in Europe who are fighting the policies of austerity. We hope there will be a massive “no” vote to the European diktats emerging from the ballot boxes on Sunday evening.

The leaders of the European Union have thus demonstrated once again their willingness to trample on the fundamental rights of the Greek people by attempting to impose a shameful agreement. In addition, they dare to say that the Greek government has crossed a red line for having announced a democratic consultation of the population in a referendum. The challenge for the coming days in Greece and in the whole of Europe is crucial. All the forces of the labour movement must stand in solidarity in the face of the frontal attack against the Greek people. To save their reactionary institutions and banks, the European leaders of the right and of social democracy will make every effort to combat the choice of no by the Greek voters and try to coerce the Tsipras government into capitulation or resignation.

For six months, the objectives of the EU and the IMF were simple: they could not accept that the Greek government did not bend to their demands, that it did not capitulate by applying to the Greek people new social cuts, a pension reform and an increase in VAT imposed on goods of daily consumption and energy. It is out of the question for the European leaders that a country should escape from the policy pursued by the capitalists, the banks and the governments that impose on the peoples an austerity without limit. Therefore, it was important for Merkel, Holland, Lagarde and Junker to show to the other peoples of Europe that there is no alternative policy, to show also that, regardless of their electoral choices in their respective countries, democratic rights stop where the all-powerful capitalist system starts. Therefore, it was necessary also to impress upon the Greek people that the choice by the majority of a party rejecting austerity could only end in failure or capitulation and that Tsipras should either resign or accept a shameful agreement, break up his party and ally himself with social democracy and the right.

In voting on 25 January for Syriza, the Greek voters clearly expressed their rejection of the rise in poverty and unemployment that have hit them since 2010.
A third of the population and two-thirds of pensioners live below the poverty line, 28% of workers, 60% of young people, are unemployed. This is the result of the policies imposed by the memoranda of the Troika: it is to this unbearable life that the Greek people wanted to put an end by rejecting the parties who had led them to this disaster.

For six months, Tsipras has pursued an impossible goal: obtaining an agreement with the EU, the ECB and the IMF that would not mean new suffering for the Greek people; paying all debt commitments on time without stepping up austerity policies; respecting the commitments made by Syriza to the electors and those made by previous Greek governments to the Troika. On 20 February, the leaders of the Eurogroup believed they had won the game, when Tsipras accepted an agreement of new austerity measures, after he had said that he would honour all the deadlines for payment of the debt to the ECB and to the IMF. Since then, the Greek government has manoeuvred through conflicting decisions: the commitments to return to the minimum wage of 750 Euros and the restoration of collective bargaining agreements have been postponed, the privatization of the port of Piraeus continues, but the government has reopened ERT, the Greek public television, whose closure under the Samaras government had symbolized the humiliation imposed by the European banks and the EU. And in March, the Parliament passed a law against the humanitarian crisis and another on the arrears of tax payments. But, in the face of the increasing arrogance of the European leaders, and taking into account popular pressure and the resistance of the deputies and members of Syriza, Tsipras has not accepted the demands of the Troika, notably a cut in pensions and increases in VAT.

Finally, no agreement has been signed between the Greek government and its “creditors”. After several abortive negotiations, on 5 June, for the first time, the government refused to honour the payment due of 300 million Euros to the IMF, also threatening to not pay the full amount of the June commitments (1.6 billion). The end of June was fixed as the deadline for both the payment to the IMF and settlement of the last instalment of the “rescue” plan with the payment of 7.2 billion Euros blocked for nine months by the ECB. Tsipras was finally unable to accept the complete capitulation that Lagarde, Holland, Merkel and Junker wanted to impose on him.

The announcement of the referendum is a slap in the face to the governments and institutions of the European Union. In November 2011, Sarkozy, Merkel and Barroso had vetoed the attempt by George Papandreou, then the Greek prime minister, to organize a referendum to try to obtain political support for his capitulation to the demands of the EU. Today, the European leaders have no way of preventing a democratic consultation which must conclude with a rejection of the new dictates of the Troika.

**Now a second act opens**

In Greece and in Europe, the political forces of the neoliberal left and right will combine their forces to ensure that this referendum does not open a new political course in Greece. The Greek government was ready for new compromises to avoid defaulting on payment and rupture. Above all, the Troika wanted that the agreement should have the political meaning of a capitulation of Greece before its creditors. The dynamics of the coming days may open another road, a break with the requirements of the Troika, a stop to payment of the debt, radical commitment to an alternative policy, an application of the programme through which Syriza a has been a majority. But this will require a broad unitive mobilization of forces of the Greek workers’ movement to quickly block the attempts at sabotage that have already begun. The pressure on the government and the Greek banking system will accentuate on the eve of the referendum. Already, in the last few days, the Director of the Central Bank of Greece, a former minister under Samaras, has released an alarmist report with the sole purpose of increasing capital flight from Greek banks, although between November 2014 and March 2015, more than 30 billion Euros had already been withdrawn and the amount of private investment of big Greek fortunes abroad is now estimated at more than 400 billion. Although it still does not speak of nationalization of the banking system, the government has just instituted capital controls.

The Truth Committee on the Public Debt, mandated by Parliament, reported on 18 June, proving the illegitimate and odious nature of this impossible debt, showing that less than 10% of the “rescue” loans went to current expenditure and that most of it helped the German and French banks to disengage from their credits contracted in previous years. [1] As a result of this report, 49 members of Syriza voted for a parliamentary debate in order to obtain the repudiation of the greater share of this odious and illegitimate debt. [2]

The challenge for the coming days is crucial for the Greek people, and for all those who in Europe who suffer austerity.

We must build a Europe-wide solidarity front with the Greek people. All our blows should be aimed against the leaders of the European Union and its governments who, with an acute sense of the interests of the capitalists, fear that the Greek people will on 5 July express a rejection of their policies of contempt and austerity that will be an example to the working class throughout the European Union. They also fear that this context will result in renewed popular mobilization in Greece, making it even more difficult for manoeuvres resulting in either a throttling of the Tsipras government or its overthrow. Just like the recent success of Podemos in the Spanish state with the election of anti-austerity mayors in several of the major cities of the
country, the Greek situation shows that social frustration in Europe can find a different political response to the despicable xenophobic and fascist solutions of the extreme right.

The Fourth International - an international organisation struggling for the socialist revolution - is composed of sections, of militants who accept and apply its principles and programme. Organised in separate national sections, they are united in a single worldwide organisation acting together on the main political questions, and discussing freely while respecting the rules of democracy.

**Greece- Why Europe Needs A Debt Conference**

After yet another summit on the Greek debt on 22 June, there are signs of an “extend and pretend” deal until winter. There is vague talk of a “debt relief” in the future, although it is unclear how much of the debt the Eurozone governments are willing to write off. Most importantly what are the conditions they impose in return?

According to the current proposals of the Greek government, even if there are elements of a left austerity with redistributive concerns, the primary budget surpluses imposed on them are too high to secure economic and social recovery; further privatizations are expected; the demands regarding minimum wages and collective bargaining are postponed, and the type of cuts in the pension system continues to be the sticking point.

But even if a deal is reached, there are other inconvenient facts about the increase in the public debt in Greece since 2010. The Truth Committee on Public Debt – an independent committee of experts from 11 countries set up by the President of the Hellenic Parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou – published its preliminary report on 18 June 2015. The report provides evidence that the Greek debt is largely illegal, illegitimate, and odious.

The programmes were based on clearly wrong assumptions; however this was not a mistake, their unsustainability was predictable and the main goal was the rescue of banks and private creditors. Particularly revealing is the testimony of Panagiotis Roumeliotis, the former representative of Greece at the IMF, on 15 June 2015 at a public hearing answering the questions of the Truth Committee. The IMF knew that the Greek debt was unsustainable and according to its own rules should not have agreed to a loan agreement without a debt restructuring in 2010, but the European governments and banks influenced the decision. Papandreou’s government helped to present the elements of a banking crisis as a sovereign debt crisis in 2009. In 2013 the IMF admits that “a delayed debt restructuring also provided a window for private creditors to reduce exposures and shift debt into official hands”.

Since the first Memorandum in 2010, private creditors managed to offload their risky bonds issued by the Greek state. In 2015, 80% of Greece’s public debt is held by public creditors: fourteen Member States of the Eurozone, the EFSF, the IMF, and the ECB. Only less than 10% of the funds have been destined to the government’s current expenditure. The conditionalities imposed further neoliberal reforms, which was not only an aim in itself, but also helped to create the illusion that they were designed to secure the future debt repayment.

However, the wage and pension cuts and fiscal consolidation led to lower GDP, tax losses, and higher public debt. Our estimates show that the fall in the wage share alone has led to a loss in GDP by 4.5%, and a 7.80% point increase in the public debt/GDP ratio. The fall in wages alone explains more than a quarter (27%) of the rise in the public debt/GDP ratio in this period. The conditionalities of the memoranda have not only been counterproductive in terms of its aims regarding debt sustainability, but also engineered a humanitarian crisis.

Philippe Legrain, advisor to the President of the European Commission Barroso in 2010, who spoke at a public hearing at the Greek Parliament on 11 June 2015, writes

*Why would Eurozone authorities be so cruel and foolish? Because they don’t really care about the welfare of ordinary Greeks. They aren’t even that bothered about whether the Greek government pays back the money that they forced European taxpayers to lend to it, ostensibly out of solidarity, but actually to bail out French and German banks and investors. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other Eurozone policymakers just don’t want to admit that they made a terrible mistake in 2010 and have lied about it since.*

The report of the Truth Committee demonstrates that the debt claimed today from Greece can be considered illegitimate, in the sense that it has not benefited the population but a small minority of private creditors, especially the large Greek, German and French banks. This debt is unsustainable not only from an economic, but also a human rights perspective, as Greece is currently unable to service its debt without seriously impairing its capacity to fulfill its basic human rights obligations regarding the right to work, a life with dignity, social security, health, education, and housing. Loans have been contracted in violation of the Greek Constitution and the EU law, and can therefore be classified as illegal. The debt may also be classified as odious, since lenders knew that the conditionalities attached to their loans violated fundamental human rights.

The report also confronts the myth of excessive public spending before the crisis. The increase in debt since the 1980s was not due to excessive public spending, which in fact remained lower than the public spending...
of other Eurozone countries, apart from excessive and unjustified military spending, marked by widespread fraud with contracts benefiting the armament industry of the creditor countries. The other reasons of the rise in public debt were the extremely high interest rates, loss of tax revenues due to tax evasion and illicit capital outflows, and finally the recapitalization of private banks.

On 21 June 49 SYRIZA MPs requested a plenary of the Parliament to discuss the report of the Truth Committee on Public Debt. Whether there is a deal or not, there will be people in Greece who will not forget these inconvenient facts and seek justice. Who owes whom after years of destruction? This concerns not just the people of Greece but also Europe. Europe needs a debt conference. In 1953, as a result of the London Debt Agreement, half of German debt was written-off. The winners of the financial crisis do not have interest in a debt conference, but the people of Europe have the right to learn that their taxes were used to bail out banks. The people in Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Latvia need to see the truth that their governments imposed on them the similarly wrong austerity measures.

The bill must eventually be sent to the private banks. Until then the people of Greece have the right to refuse to pay the debt. It is time that the Greek people have a clear discussion about what the debt means, and what are the options outside this straightjacket. Greece needs policies to achieve decent jobs with decent wages for both women and men, structural change, sustainable development and a caring society for both the young and the elderly. Solutions to these problems are incompatible with payment of the debt and austerity policies likely to be attached to further agreements.

A unilateral debt default surely requires capital controls, but despite the scaremongering, the Greek people need to be reminded that most countries had capital controls until the massive financial deregulation of the late 1970s and 1980s. To counterbalance the blackmail of the ECB, the Greek government can introduce IOUs for internal payments. Will this lead to an exit from the Eurozone? Staying in or exiting the Euro cannot be a taboo, and exit is a possible outcome of confrontation, but it is not the only outcome.

After default, the ECB would cut the supply of liquidity, since the government bonds held by the Greek banks would cease to serve as collateral, but according to Willem Buiter of Citi [1], European authorities could recapitalize the Greek banks, and the ECB could continue funding the banks until a political decision is reached to avoid being the institution to pull the plug. But this approach sees the transition period from the perspective of the bankers; from the perspective of the Greek government, the more important issue is to take control of their banks rather than leaving it to the ECB.

The degree of financial contagion to the rest of Europe after a Greek default is yet to be seen, as the calm in the government bond markets seem to be more fragile than the ECB and the European governments hope for. But the political contagion of a Greek default, as people choose dignity over blackmail, is what the people of Europe can hope and prepare for. The political and financial contagion will mutually reinforce each other in the medium run as more questions are asked by the people of Europe about the legitimacy of the so called bail out programmes.

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### Spanish State- Catalonia: earthquake in common

While awaiting the next Catalan parliamentary elections, the municipal elections of 24 May 2015 have confirmed the profound transformation that the Catalan party system has experienced since 2012, an accelerated melting of traditional loyalties and the emergence of new references among young people who never had the old ones. Without doubt, the most interesting thing is the success of the convergence candidacies around Podem, the CUP or, in the case of Barcelona, Ada Colau and her team, which have shattered the local political landscape and, in doing so, shaken up the whole Catalan political map on the eve of the crucial elections on 27 September 2015, which Artur Mas did not want and that he postponed as much as he could after the 9 November 2014 referendum on independence.

The results of the convergence and the new candidacies show the enormous potential of the situation and record some notable successes, with Barcelona at the head. [1] We must not forget, however, that apparatus interests and some “sectarianism in common” have led to missed opportunities in many locations. This is something to bear in mind in the decisive months that lie ahead, in which breadth of vision and strategic ambition should govern the movements of all the actors fighting for another model of society. As an orientation compass, one equation stands out: unity (or convergence) and a an aspiration of rupture. Which, in turn, has a reverse negative to exorcise: sectarianism and the mentality of routine institutional management. Each of the two sides of the equation (and of its antithesis) combines separately, but without a synthesis between the two any strategy is lame.

The victory of *Barcelona en Comú* has highlighted the great hidden truth about Catalan politics: the historic weakness of CiU, its narrow social support and the vulnerability of its hegemony, despite its electoral rebound after the referendum on independence.
The Catalan popular forces (like those in the rest of the state) face a double strategic challenge: governing Barcelona and the other areas conquered in a spirit of rupture and, at the same time, articulating a majority alternative in the country as a whole. These are interrelated actions. Entrenching oneself in municipalism and neglecting the national level would be a mistake in the long run that would weaken the transformative potential at the local level, while focusing on how to beat Mas without taking into account the new realities of local convergence would be to deprive ourselves of powerful levers rooted in the territory that allow us to “go up” with more force than ever. Let us be frank: we are in uncharted territory.

The Barcelona earthquake, resting on other local success, can be replicated at the Catalan level. Not by mechanically copying models, but by being inspired by its goals and looking for appropriate formulas. After 24 May we face a challenge which is both complex and perhaps unrepeatable, so urgent and historical is it: articulating an alternative to Artur Mas, that definitively dynamites the moribund party system for the benefit of those at the bottom and changes all the coordinates of the political debate. Two strategic axes should guide us: an anti-austerity programme and the opening of a constituent process. Both are sufficiently important to generate convergences, both are flexible enough to accommodate diverse identities.

The Catalan popular forces are crossed by a double contradiction that must be faced: the tension between a culture of rupture and an institutionalist culture, and the position to take in relation to the independence process. Its non-resolution would give new life to Artur Mas, who seems to govern more because of the inability of others to build an alternative than his own capacity to refund his political space and articulate a new instrument (the “party of the President”) to ensure a new and lasting Catalan rightist hegemony as he has done with the CIU for two decades. There are multiple possibilities, various combinations, and many proposals, for moving forward and undoing existing obstructions. But they are either trying to articulate a comprehensive block (with Podem ICV, CUP and so on) as proposed by the Proces Constituent of Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres; or working with the idea of two differentiated political blocs: one, that of the majority, in the wake of Barcelona en Comú, for which the candidacy of Albano Dante in the Podemos primaries can be the embryo for going further and articulating the necessary convergences; and the other, around the CUP. Seeking a post-election collaboration appears as an impossible challenge.

Within the pro-independence campaign the situation is particularly fluid. In 2014 Artur Mas seemed drowned out by an ERC that progressed in last year’s European elections and was emerging as the new hegemon of the centre left, playing on a rupture at the national level and on continuity at the social level. The 9 November referendum marked a turning point, in which ERC was sidelined and Mas began to regain ground, capitalizing on the success of the consultation. A comeback that, however, does not contradict the historical decline of CIU and does not eliminate the need to “refund” and expand its political space through the failed unitary list. Another phenomenon emerged after the consultation: the rise of the CUP, which had been converted to a relevant actor for the management of the referendum, and propelled politically and in media terms by false friends interested in using them either (unsuccessfully) to curb Podem and Ada Colau, or by claiming (with success in places such as Barcelona) to outflank the ERC from the left.

The result is that ERC, despite consolidating important political space in the 24 May elections where it scored remarkable results, sees its claim to contest Mas’s leadership undermined. The rise of the CUP is a positive factor that strengthens the forces of rupture, while in the short-term serving to weaken ERC as Mas’s only competitor in pro-sovereignty camp. In the long term, it is only going to increase the instability of the pro-sovereignty process and leave Mas in a blind alley, as he can hardly lead a parliamentary majority post 27S that depends upon the CUP. This raises a possible scenario in which all false friends can become deadly adversaries: what to do before the investiture of Mas if the latter wins the elections and if the parliamentary majority depends on the CUP.

Ada Colau’s victory destabilises the official political story built in Catalonia, all attempts to analyse Catalan politics based solely on the independence process, without seeing that this overlaps, in a way that is inconsistent and not rhythmic, with 15M and its legacy of Mareas of all kinds. There are many problems in Catalonia, with many political expressions, many contradictions to solve. Catalonia cannot be read in a single dimension. In its cartography, politics intersects with the social and national, and both are driven by a desire for democracy.

How does Ada’s victory affect the independence process? This is the big question that torments politicians and commentators these days. The question, basically, is quite terrifying: why should an independence process that seeks a better country be disturbed by the victory in Barcelona of a candidacy which is not pro-independence but favourable to the right to decide, with a head of list who votes yes-yes, and which embodies a project of social justice? In reality, the question itself shows the structural defects of the independence process and its political and strategic limits – the absence of an explicit social content accompanying the demand for independence, the stagist prioritization of the latter over everything else, and the uncritical assumption of Mas’s political leadership.

A double strategic lesson emerges from the process opened by the 11 September 2012 Catalan independence demonstration and, primarily, for all its components except CIU: broadening its social basis, incorporating an emergency social plan against the crisis, and a proposal for a detailed popular constituent process that opens the door to a real discussion of the model for the country. The generic references to social justice with which
the Asamblea Nacional Catalana (ANC) increasingly associates its message evaporate into nothing if they
are not specified in an explicit programme of social minima for the national transition process that, according
to their road map, should be opened by September 27, with clearer demarcations from the economic policy
of Mas.

May 24 marks the beginning of an open situation, undoubtedly with unexpected turns and twists. It bodes
well for a scenario of fragility of the party system, fissured by growing gaps which can only open opportunities
for change from below. The victory of Barcelona en Comú allows people who are opposed to Mas's Catalonia
go to on the offensive in this final stretch of the agonizing journey up to the parliamentary elections of
September 27. What is key is not to lose the political initiative and to complete what began on May 24. To
do this one thing seems necessary. To ensure that Artur Mas ceases to appear as the indispensable man,
the only one who has a credible narrative, and make him appear as what he is: one of the major obstacles
to a sovereign Catalonia from all points of view in which the term could be construed seriously.

Translated by IVP from Tiempo roto blog.

Josep María Antentas is a member of the editorial board of the magazine Viento Sur, and a professor of
sociology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Spanish State- ‘Perhaps with unstable governments the citizens will win’

Teresa Rodriguez is the general secretary of Podemos in Andalusia. She was interviewed by Carmen Torres
for El Mundo on May 30 2015. Hurrying to take the C1 bus which takes her to the Santa Justa station in Seville
to go by train to Cadiz. Teresa Rodriguez, secretary general of Podemos in Andalusia and spokesperson of
its parliamentary group, has given up the official car. “If you live in a housing estate and you are going in
an official car to Parliament and then back home, I imagine that you don’t feel the pressure from the street”
she explains. Of the 4,254 Euros which correspond to her post she takes only 1,730, the salary she had
as a teacher. The rest is donated to social causes. The carpets of the Parliament are trodden with care, to
prevent the “seduction of the institutions” from trapping Podemos.

Will Podemos govern in Cadiz?

I guess that the PSOE will be thinking that it would be quite difficult to explain to the locals that it will let
Teofila Martinez govern for four more years after such a big electoral upheaval, and when there is hope of
change in the city. What if we would like to see is that beyond voting for the inauguration because they
have no choice, there would be a prior level of agreement to have a stable mandate , where we can exercise
the action of government, agreeing sometimes, and with discrepancies at other times, but seeking the
governability of the city. We want them to be responsible and if they vote in favour this project goes ahead.

Does that mean that the PSOE would enter the municipal government?

No. In Cadiz, the comrades are going to have a debate with two political forces. With the PSOE and with
“Ganar Cádiz en Común”. Not with the PP , because we are proposing an alternative to Teofila Martinez. And
not with Ciudadanos either because its economic programme is too similar to that of the PP. We understand
yes there is confluence and coincidence in action with the other two parties, despite how different we are.
The PSOE brings too heavy a burden with the policies that have been developed and because we know how
the forces that govern with them behave. We have seen it in Andalusia in the last three years...

What is the objective of Podemos with the municipalities? IU, for example, wants to dislodge the
PP to the maximum extent possible. Are you looking for the same?

Each candidacy will take its decisions and is autonomous. We can have a common approach for those
registering for candidacies based on three points: Throw the PP out of the institutions because we understand
that it has a special responsibility in what has been done in the past few years in this country, which has
resulted in the suffering of many people. As the PSOE unfortunately has also formed part of that strategy
for a long time, we are not going to be part of governments with the PSOE. That is to say, what we are
going to put in the centre, as in Madrid, Barcelona or in the Parliament, are what we understand as urgent
measures related to corruption and transparency, evictions and public services. That is what we are going
to put on the table, and not the exchange of parcels of power.

So in principle tripartite deals are ruled out?

That is our position, but each candidate will make their decision. We will be opposing shortcuts and aiming
to squeeze the full potential out of the parliaments, to regain ownership in relation to the governments.

There are parties that warn that this situation creates a dangerous instability in the institutions

I think we have seen that the more stable the governments were, the more instability citizens suffer in
their daily lives. In the councils of ministers, absolute majorities approved Friday after Friday the toughest
measures against the people. Every Thursday half of Spain wondered what would be taken from them on
Friday. There was stability in the institutions and instability among the people.
Employment reforms, social cuts, worse conditions in schools, in the health centres ... If it now appears that instability has moved to the spaces of public representation, maybe we can have stability for the citizens. That is to say, governments have only been stable for cutting social and employment rights. If they now have to deal with an internal resistance to continuing to pursue their plans concerning social rights in Europe, those who gain will be the citizens. In Belgium they were a year and a half without government and all the indicators improved. Because there was no government to implement the austerity measures that cut wages and that leave people unable to consume. Therefore, they maintained a few minima for a year and a half. And I would not say that there is no government. In addition, the regional government is in office.

To what extent does Podemos look to the general elections and can you influence the voting in the municipal and regional pacts?

In our case no. In Andalusia we have had very clear conditions from the start, since the meeting in San Telmo after the regional elections. We are now bound to our words. We cannot now change our approach. Among other things, because no one has told us what we can or cannot do. We haven’t even managed to persuade our socialist interlocutors to respond on whether we can close some of the Junta’s bank accounts.

Do you think that the PSOE has kidnapped the Parliament?

There is a certain desire that the Parliament does not work. But anyway, from what I see here every day, I have the impression that it has never been especially productive. We hope that when the commissions are set up they will be places of intensive work. For us it is so unusual to be members who want to show intensive dedication to a task of the first level, as is to legislate for nine million inhabitants. I am surprised to see the Parliament empty and the lack of basic rules of respect that there is in the plenary sessions. I believe that there is little respect for the Parliament in general. Right now we are meeting with groups that have disputes with the Junta of Andalusia.

You have said that before entering the Parliament it is necessary to deal with the “seduction of the institutions”. What do you mean?

It is very important to do that - among other things, because the people require me to do so. When they look at me in the street, on the bus or train they want me to begin to do things for the Andalusians, that we resolve the situation and that we continue to work. This means that you will not forget. It is easy to settle in this space, because it is a place of recognition, suddenly you’re the “honourable member”, working in a nice place, the people in the street know you because you appear in the media ... I believe that it is relatively easy to settle in and not understand that what we’re doing here is exceptional for the citizens. To manage collective life is a very special opportunity that has been given to us.

Are you concerned about the threats from Susana Díaz to call new elections in Andalusia if you do not support their investiture?

No, but we want to continue talking and it amazes us that the PSOE does not want to do so. Resuming the dialogue is serious, sensible and mature. The rest is just game playing.

Teresa Rodriguez is a leading member of Izquierda Anticapitalista in the Spanish State; In May 2014 she was elected to the European parliament on the Podemos slate.

Britain- What position should the left take on the EU referendum?

In the run up to the British general election on May 7, Conservative leader and Prime Minister David Cameron promised the Eurosceptic right wing of his party and the even more rightwing UK Independence Party (UKIP) that if he won the election he would hold a binding “in, out” referendum on whether or not Britain would remain a member of the European Union. Those forces to his right want to leave the EU, while he himself does not. The commitment is that the referendum would be framed as “should Britain stay in the EU”, thus a “yes” vote is for staying in, and a “no” vote for leaving.

Having won the election, to most people’s surprise, he is moving ahead with plans for the referendum for which a firm date is not yet set, but the commitment is at least by the end of 2017, and possibly in 2016. We publish the article below by a leading member of Socialist Resistance considering
For the British capitalist class the referendum raises a major strategic issue in terms of Britain’s place in the world—Europeanism or Atlanticism. This is something they have grappled with, and been bitterly divided over, for over 40 years.

Michael Heseltine famously walked out of Thatcher’s cabinet in 1986 over the purchase of US rather than European helicopters. Heseltine and the pro-Europe wing of the Tory party looked towards the European market while Thatcher—despite her signing of the Single European Act of 1986—looked across the Atlantic to the USA and world markets.

This reflects a long standing divide between manufacturing on the one hand, which tends to look first towards the European market, and the City of London that looks towards the USA and a world role. Such Atlanticism has long been a cause célèbre of the Tory right because it feeds into British nationalism and the loss of Empire.

For Cameron, however, the issue is less about the strategic location of British capitalism and more about the management of the way this division is reflected in the Tory party—which has become increasingly toxic — and the need to deal with the rise of UKIP.

The referendum was a pre-election pledge to win UKIP voters over. Whether he would have made such a pledge had he realised he might get a Tory majority we will never know. What we do know is that it is a high-risk strategy that could split the Tory party whichever way the vote goes.

Nothing that Cameron has any change of getting from the EU elites will placate the Tory xenophobic right —the ‘bastards’ as John Major famously called them. They want real change in terms of British sovereignty and the free movement of peoples within the EU—which is not going to happen. They have little interest in restricting a few benefits to EU migrants, however reactionary that might be, and regard the ‘negotiations’ as at best a charade. [1]

They suspect (and they are right) that Cameron’s real agenda is to play for time and use the referendum to endorse continued membership. Whatever ‘concessions’ he gets from the EU he will claim as an historic victory and then call for a Yes vote with governmental resources behind it—and with government ministers bound by the line. Cameron (unlike Osborne) has always avoided saying that he would call for exit in the event of failure.

This growing reality has led in recent days to the main strands of the xenophobic right—UKIP and the Tory right-wing—breaking cover to set up the No campaign before Cameron’s negotiations have even started. In the Tory Party unity has only lasted a month.

The first move on this was from Farage who called for a campaign to be set up as soon as possible. Then the Tory right set up a campaign called For Britain in order to start the campaign for a No vote. It has the initial support of over 50 Tory MPs and is led by the likes of Owen Patterson, Bernard Jenkins, and John Redwood.

It is chaired by Tory MP Steve Baker, who warned that unless Britain regains sovereignty over its own laws and power to trade freely in the world they will campaign for a No vote. It appears to have the potential to at least double its membership once the campaign gets off the ground.

This means that the shape of the main ‘official’ No campaign is already clear. Its central components will be UKIP and the Tory right who will compete for the leadership role within it.

As things stand, of course, the most likely outcome of the referendum is the Yes vote that Cameron recommends. This is far from guaranteed, however. It will depend on events at the time and how Cameron plays his hand.

How democratic will the referendum be?

The first thing to say about the referendum itself (as set out in the Referendum Bill) is that it is deeply undemocratic in at least two important ways.

It excludes from the vote of over 2 million EU citizens living in the UK, EU citizens who have the right to vote in British local elections as well as European elections. This is a big issue, in London in particular, where a quarter of disenfranchised people live. This is clearly a concession to the Tory right rather than something Cameron would want himself. The right would be in open revolt if EU citizens were allowed to vote.

In the Scottish referendum all those living in Scotland were given the right to vote—as were the 16-17 year olds who are also excluded by the Referendum Bill. In Scotland, of course, including everyone in the vote suited the outcome Cameron wanted.

Labour supports these exclusions having reversed their opposition to the Referendum Bill and voted for it. The SNP are strongly opposed to them. Labour has made it clear that they will campaign to stay in the EU whatever the result of the ‘renegotiations’.

The other issue to which the SNP is strongly opposed is the UK-wide nature of the referendum vote, which could drag Scotland, and indeed Wales, out of the EU against their will. Nicola Sturgeon is (rightly) demanding individual votes in the four nations of the British state and is warning that a No vote could trigger a second independence referendum in Scotland.
The role and nature of the EU

The fundamental nature of the EU is determined by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (with its single currency) and the Nice Treaty of 2001. This is to act as a supra-national authority charged with ensuring that the member states comply with the neo-liberal agenda, which is at the heart of the EU, in order to increase the rate of exploitation and compete more effectively in world markets.

The implementation of this agenda involved huge attacks on living standards and welfare across the EU, and was met by five years of remarkable mass struggle in the 1990s: 1994 saw strikes and demonstrations in Italy and Greece and mass strikes and huge demonstrations in France against cuts in education.

1995 saw a huge confrontation in France, which shook the government to its foundations. Millions of workers struck and demonstrated in a wave of action, which in some ways exceeded the events of May and June 1968. There were mass strikes in Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Greece, and in Germany—where the government was forced to retreat.

1996 saw the biggest wave of struggles in Europe for 20 years. There were mass strikes in Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Greece and Spain.

1997 saw millions of workers in action across the EU, mostly against the introduction of the single currency.

It was the outcome of these battles—in the end the single currency was established—that shaped the real nature of the EU as the austerity imposing welfare busting machine that we see in operation in Greece and elsewhere today. These mechanisms impact most directly in the Eurozone but not only in the Eurozone since neo-liberalism is fundamental to the whole of the EU.

Maastricht and Nice also deepened the democratic deficit that had existed since the early days of the European project. Today the EU is in fact it is less democratic than its member states where government can be removed and replaced by elections from time to time—however inadequate these elections might be.

This is not the case within the EU as an institution. Every constitutional treaty since the Single European Act of 1986—Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon—have degraded democracy further. The European Parliament was established to give an impression of democracy which does not exist.

Power in the EU lies with the Council of Ministers and the Commission—neither of which are elected bodies but both of which are dominated by the biggest and most powerful member states. All this means that internal reform is impossible.

TTIP

On top of this we have the prospect of TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), currently being negotiated in secret between the USA and the EU. There will be no vote on TTIP in any of the member states. It has been agreed in the European Parliament’s trade commission and will come before the European Parliament later in June.

TTIP would mean that the countries covered by it would become one big market for big corporations, that public services like the NHS would be fully open to competition. Companies would be able to sue governments if those governments’ policies cause a loss of profits.

It is similar to other free trade agreements in place or being negotiated elsewhere across the globe. If Britain were to leave the European Union then the Tories would undoubtedly be negotiating a bilateral trade deal with the US—and this could easily be just as reactionary as TTIP.

Greece

Today the real face of the EU is the Troika—a tripartite enforcer mechanism comprised of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the IMF.

The brutal role of the Troika in Greece over the past 6 years—which has been to use Greece as a test bed for extreme neoliberal measures which have imposed pauperisation on the Greek working class for the first time since World War I—is therefore entirely consistent with the role the EU under the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency.

The banking crisis of 2008 compounded the contradictions within both the EU and the Eurozone and threw them into an existential crisis. The response of the elites was austerity and then more austerity—and as a result the EU as a whole has remained in stagnation ever since.

Since Greece elected an anti-austerity government led by Syriza earlier this year, the Troika has been dedicated to destroying it as quickly as possible, and in the most humiliating way, in order to warn others what will happen if they take the same anti-austerity road.

In fact it has been the reluctance of the Syriza government in Greece to contemplate leaving the Eurozone (and probably therefore the EU) that has handed the initiative to the Troika and allowed them to dictate terms—although this is far from a completed process. At the moment the Syriza government is trapped between maintaining Greece’s EU/Eurozone membership and sticking to their anti-austerity policies—a contradiction that they will have to resolve.
Although prior to the election Syriza stood on ‘no sacrifice for the Euro’ (a correct position) they have not subsequently been consistent on this.

**The struggle against Maastricht in Britain**

The Tory Government of John Major backed the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, though it was split down the middle over it.

In Britain there were two campaigns against the Maastricht—from the opposite ends of the political spectrum. One comprised the bulk of the left, led by Tony Benn. The other comprised the Tory right.

The leftwing campaign was based on national sovereignty, the defence of the pound, and a strategic alliance with the USA.

The left campaign called for ‘a different Europe, a Europe of the people and not of capital’, and had a big public resonance. Benn argued that Maastricht was about “the liberation of capital and the enslavement of labour. We have to have a programme, he argued, for the control of capital and the liberation of labour—and it has to be done on an internationalist basis.

The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) was a part of these campaigns but its politics were significantly different. It focused on the defence of national sovereignty and even the defence of the pound—which reflected its support for the nationalist Campaign against Euro-Federalism.

The International Socialist Group (ISG), as we were at the time, was a part of these campaigns both against Maastricht and the single currency. The Fourth International (FI) was very much a part of them at the European level and was central to the European Marches against the single currency.

The weakness of the left campaign was the unions. At the time of Wilson’s referendum in 1975 the bulk of the unions had been against membership of the EEC (as it was then). The defeats of the 1980s, and the rise of Blairism, however, brought a big change. The TUC invited Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission to address its 1988 Congress and fully supported European integration under Maastricht. Many individual unions followed suit.

This was partly because they hoped that the Social Chapter would give them a few crumbs without the need to fight for them. Its provisions, however, were pitifully weak. It included the right to strike, for example, but in Britain this was subordinate to the Tory anti-union laws and therefore worthless. The British government secured exemptions from key elements of the Social Chapter, and took many years to phase in the Working Time Directive’s restrictions on weekly hours of work for staff in the NHS.

**The British Left and the EU**

The left in Britain (in its broadest sense) is more pro-EU today than at any time since Britain joined the project. This has been due, at least in part, to the fact that politics here in Britain have shifted to the right to the extent that some aspects of EU policy are progressive in relation to it.

The Green party in England has always been pro-EU, though it opposed the Maastricht Treaty in the 1990s. Today it is more strongly pro-EU than ever.

The SNP—which is not part of the left but well to the left of Labour—supported a No vote in the 1975 referendum, but switched as long ago as the late 1980s to being strongly pro-EU—as did Plaid. Both Scotland and Wales (as nations) see themselves as beneficiaries of EU regional development assistance, which has been more accessible to them than investment from Westminster.

Part of the SNP and Plaid’s motivation seems to be the need to appear more internationalist than the ‘Westminster parties’, though the danger of independent Scottish and Welsh states facing ever increasing centralisation within Europe sits uneasily with opposition to centralisation within the British state.

What is more surprising, however, given the current role of the Troika in Greece, is that the trend on the radical left has been the same. It is harder today, amongst the radical left, to argue that the EU is a bosses club than it has ever been. And even where this is accepted, as in Left Unity for example, there is probably a majority against exit under any circumstance—leaving the current referendum aside.

Some ultra-left groups such as the CPGB and Workers Power have long held similar positions. They have argued that EU membership –rather than international solidarity – was the best way to unite the European working class. They argue the same against Scottish independence—that it would disunite the working class.

The Scottish Socialist Party has recently published a pamphlet on the referendum that not only calls for a vote to stay in, but argues that it is right to be in the EU per se and (specifically) that the task is to reform it from within.

It is true that austerity in Britain since 2010 has not been driven by the EU institutions but by a Tory-led government with its own hard line neo-liberal agenda. It is an agenda, however, that coincides with the EU’s own framework of austerity. If Britain elected a government that broke from austerity to any degree (or failed to implement it effectively) it would be a very different matter, the EU would be down on it like a ton of bricks.
It is also true that the free movement of peoples within the EU is something socialists should support. This, however, has to be seen against the racist Schengen ‘fortress Europe’ policy—which is to have free movement internally but to erect increasing strong barriers around the perimeters of the EU, against immigrants and asylum seekers who attempt to get in. The reality of this is being played out as tens of thousands of people drown in the Mediterranean trying to get to European shores as they flee persecution and starvation.

Taking all this into account, regarding the EU as in some way progressive as against the member states or against the British state, can seriously disorientate the movement.

It is often argued that whilst it is true that the EU is a bosses club, the British state is also one. This is true but it misses the point. EU membership gives you two bosses clubs, one at the domestic level and the other at the supra-national level which backs up the national government against the working class when support is needed and pushes it to attack the working class harder under conditions where it is holding back.

How should the left vote in the referendum?

We can say with confidence when it comes to the referendum campaign itself that it will reach new heights (or plumb new depths) in terms of xenophobia, nationalism and racism. It will be a carnival of reaction. Most (if not all) of the ‘reforms’ being demanded by Cameron (to the extent that he has been prepared to reveal them) are reactionary demands. They involved putting barriers up to foreign workers or depriving them of benefits.

The main No campaign will be totally dominated by UKIP and the Tory right wing. This poses something of a dilemma for those on the left (like ourselves) who see the EU as a reactionary institution designed to ensure that the national governments impose the austerity agenda and increase the rate of exploitation more effectively but have no wish to be associated with the right in any form it might take.

SR has not yet taken a view on this. In my opinion, however, the right way to vote in this referendum will be Yes.

This could change over the next two years—we don’t know what is going to happen to Greece for example—but given the xenophobic politics that will dominate the main No campaign it is difficult in my view to do otherwise as things stand today. Any No vote is going to be seen as lining up with the racist elements that will be demanding this. It will be very difficult to avoid this.

A left-wing Yes campaign, under these conditions, should be based on a strong statement that recognises the real nature of the EU and explains why it is necessary to vote Yes under these conditions.

The conditions for a progressive and credible No campaign (i.e. on the basis of socialist and working class politics and significant forces) do not exist in Britain today.

With previous struggles around the EU—the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency in the 1990s for example—it was possible to be part of broad left wing No campaign that was based, at least to some extent, on socialist and working class principles and represented something significant. It did not imply any alliance or common “national” interest between British workers and “British” capital: while resisting global ambitions of capital it also resisted spurious notions of a common interest in British “sovereignty”.

Those times were very different. The fact that a progressive campaign for a no vote was possible then does not mean it is possible now. Today the political conditions and left forces that created such campaigns no longer exist and the xenophobic right —the Tory right and UKIP—are very much stronger.

There will be a left-wing No campaign, of course, but it is likely to comprise the same forces as No2EU: i.e. the SP and the CPB (and maybe a few from the Labour left) and it will have the similar politics based on national sovereignty. It will also be drowned out and marginalised. We could not be a part of such a campaign.

The 1975 referendum was completely different. Then there was a majority Labour government with left wing ministers like Benn and Heffer, a powerful grassroots in the party and a youth section led by the left. More importantly the trade unions had over 13 million members and controlled the majority of votes at Labour Party conference and we’re overwhelmingly anti – EEC.

Not everything about the No campaign in 1975 was good of course. Whilst it was significant because it embraced the bulk of the left and the unions, had also had reactionary nationalistic elements including immigration and import controls.

In terms of today, however, defining the EU as a reactionary anti-working class institution does not mean that we are obliged to vote for exit whatever the circumstances and whatever the consequences. We need to be guided by what best serves the interests of the working class in terms of creating the best conditions to build the fight back against austerity and win some much needed victories. Nor is it the end of the matter, or mean that we would not vote for exit under conditions where it would strengthen working class struggles.

A Yes vote in the coming referendum would be consistent with positions SR has taken for some time regarding EU exit: i.e. not to make this an agitational demand. This was one of the reasons why we refused to join the No2EU campaign last May because it advanced it exit as an immediate agitational demand. The other reason
– which would have excluded us anyway – was because No2EU was also based on national sovereignty and opposition to the free movement of people in the EU.

There is also the rather important matter of the consequences of a vote for exit at this time and under these conditions—and this is clear. It would strengthen both the Tory right and UKIP and could even bring about a dangerous realignment between them. It would be taken as a mandate for the introduction of a range of new restrictions on immigration and not just from the EU.

The Tory right, in the form of the ‘free market’ Institute for Economic Affairs, have already published scenarios that they would expect a Tory government to follow after British exit. These scenarios involve realignment of the UK state with the other major reactionary elements of the international bosses clubs – the World Trade Organisation, NATO, the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), the EU Customs Union and the European Economic Area (EEA).

The Tories would repeal the Working Time Directive that limits (however inadequately) workers’ hours and remove the EU restrictions on introducing genetically modified crops, as first steps in a long series of reactionary policies. Reactionary Free Trade Agreements would be negotiated and the possibility of signing the UK’s own version of TTIP or even joining the USA in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is proposed.

Today we need an internationalist, not a nationalist opposition to the EU: one based on resisting the strengthening of British, European and multinational capital, resisting austerity and opposing racist barriers to access and migration. We need an alliance not with British capital or the right wing fringe of UKIP, but with workers and working class organisations in Europe and beyond. And we need to revive and strengthen working class and socialist organization in Britain to ensure that we have the basis to challenge austerity at home as well as its imposition on other countries.

[1] Since the elections David Cameron has made a tour of European capitals to see whether he can get other governments to agree to his demands for reforms BBC News.

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**France- The changes in the political landscape in France**

The French situation has often been approached as an "exception" in Europe. We speak of the French exception, referring to a history still marked by the French Revolution of 1789. This term covered, in fact: a certain type of social gains, a strong public service, a strong state, a strong and dynamic worker's movement, a high level of class struggle, social rights and democratic and secular freedoms won through historic popular mobilizations. [1]

Although the strong state has been maintained, all the social conquests have been challenged in recent years.

The long period of liberal counter-reforms from the mid-1980s in France, their acceleration with the open crisis in 2008, the austerity policies and corporate social demolition implemented by the Socialist government of Holland, have deconstructed and dismantled what constituted this French exception. It is not a collapse, but a deconstruction, a gradual dismantling.

**Socio-economic upheavals**

The austerity policies conducted in recent years have not been just the umpteenth austerity policies; they have a completely different magnitude. They have two objectives: The first is to liquidate what remains of the "French social model" which is considered by the ruling classes as a major obstacle in global capitalist competition. The second is to reorganize society, moving from the "generalized market economy to the market society", privatizing, deregulating and rendering economic and social existence precarious. Hence the centrality of "reforms of the labour market", with a deregulation of social relations and a deconstruction of the Labour Code that weaken the positions of workers and reinforces those of the employers. These policies are also accompanied by massive unemployment - in reality, nearly 20 per cent of the working population – by a decline in purchasing power with the blocking of wages and pensions and by substantial tax increases. There has been an explosive growth of precarious work.

The policies of reduction of social spending, of central government funds allocated to local authorities, of the budgets for the health system and public education, exacerbate the living conditions of the working classes. The policies of aid and hand-outs to employers have resulted in a transfer of wealth of tens of billions of euros, from ordinary households to capitalist profits. Admittedly, the consequences of the crisis are not as severe as in Greece, Portugal or Spain. France is the sixth world power: it still has significant positions in the world market; faced with the crisis, it has been able to make a series of social shock absorbers function, but the effects of austerity policies are devastating. The economic recovery experienced in Europe and in France is not being felt on the level of employment and purchasing power. There is an impoverishment of the working classes, and indeed processes of social decay in certain working-class suburbs and neighborhoods.
To austerity policies have been added authoritarian tendencies; in the name of counter-terrorism policies, basic democratic rights are being undermined. We had not seen in France such a situation, where the Left mounts attacks on civil liberties, since the Algerian War.

But to the economic and social crisis there has been added a political crisis, precisely because it is the Left (the Socialist Party, PS) which is conducting these policies, which has attacked the workers, which has lost a part of its social base and which therefore can only rely, to govern the country, on a very much diminished social and political base.

**The bourgeois transformation of the Socialist Party**

In 2012, the Socialists occupied all the positions of power in elected institutions: the Presidency of the Republic, a majority in the National Assembly, the Senate, in the main cities, in the departments and in almost all regions. Today they have lost them or are going to do so. In the last departmental elections, where the rate of abstention was almost 50 per cent, the PS was only the third-biggest party, with 21 per cent of the vote, behind the National Front with 25 per cent and the conservative Right with 29 per cent. They went from 280,000 members in 2006 to 130,000 in December 2014. Only 70,000 "active members" voted for the upcoming congress of the party. But the French PS is not experiencing "Pasokisation". They still have more than 20 per cent of the vote. There is no collapse. France is not Greece. That relates to differences in the level of the crisis in the two countries. But there is a considerable weakening of the PS and above all a change in the fundamental nature of that party. There is what could be called an acceleration in the bourgeois transformation of social democracy. A process that started a long time ago, but which is speeding up. This transformation has led to an unprecedented integration of the apparatuses of social democracy into the leading circles of the state and the globalized economy. The socialist parties have become "less and less working-class and more and more bourgeois." The brutality of the neoliberal policies endorsed by social democracy is undermining its social and political bases.

Some theoreticians of the PS in France - the leaders of the "think tank" Terra Nova – drew the conclusion that it was necessary to change the social target audience of social democracy. Blue- and white-collar and technicians had to be replaced by managers, the liberal professions and the upper layers of wage-earners. In short, it was necessary to "have a change of people." The composition of the leading bodies has also been modified: teachers, trade union bureaucrats, lawyers, (the "café-owners", Trotsky added in his time), have given way to "énarques" [2], technocrats and financiers. To a point where socialist parties are experiencing a kind of devitalization, a break with whole sections of their history. Adherents are replaced by professional politicians: elected representatives and their assistants. The policies of the European Union (EU) have aggravated this qualitative change. In different forms, the socialist parties are being transformed into bourgeois parties. Does that mean that they have become bourgeois parties like the others? Not quite, the practice of parties alternating in government demands that the socialist parties mark out their differences with other bourgeois parties. They remain linked, by their historical origin, to the workers’ movement, but it is only a question of traces that are fading away in the memories of activists. This nevertheless creates contradictions and oppositions in these parties. They can maintain a certain relationship with the "people of the left", although it is increasingly distended. This qualitative change, if it was carried through to its conclusion, would transform these parties into "American-style democratic parties."

This neoliberal bourgeois transformation – it is more correct to call it neoliberal than social-liberal, because there is not much that is social in the evolution of social democracy - is now crystallized, but it is not sufficient for the most right-wing current of social democracy. In France, for example, Manuel Valls (Prime Minister under President François Hollande) has stated several times that "it was necessary to liquidate all social democratic references." Emmanuel Macron, a banker and Holland’s finance minister, went further, calling also to abandon "all the old-fashioned ideas of the Left." What they want is to transform the changes that are underway into a finished process, even if it means breaking the Socialist Party. This is an approach that, if there is another debacle at the next presidential election in 2017, could win a majority in the PS. The right-wing currents of the PS are now on the offensive, but it has to be recognized that faced with the advocates of a forced march towards neoliberal transformation, the various oppositions are not reconnecting with classical reformism and still less with the ideas of the historic left currents of social democracy. Neoliberal policies are rectified only at the margin. The leaders of the internal opposition in the PS voted for the "European Fiscal Compact" (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance, signed in March 2012.) They voted in the National Assembly for the ANI (Agreement on competitiveness and security of employment) – a deregulation of social relations - and the increase in the retirement age. The years of neo-liberal counter-reforms and the setbacks experienced by the workers’ movement in Europe have left their mark. The horizon of those within the socialist parties who are opposed to the most glaring "betrayals" is bounded by the fundamental tenets of neoliberal policies.

**The Right and the far Right on the offensive**

As a result, this policy leads to electoral defeat. At this stage, the Right and the far Right are on the offensive. It is always risky to embark on predictions. But what is most likely, for the next presidential election in 2017, is a second round between the candidate of the Right and Marine Le Pen. The Socialist candidate will be eliminated in the first round. The PS can only rely on "judicial affairs" that can liquidate Sarkozy or on
divisions of the Right, such that it would not be able to take part in the second round of the presidential
election. These divisions are a real problem for the French Right. In almost all European countries the Right
has the wind in its sails, but in France there is the National Front (FN), which is exerting all its influence – 25
per cent of the electorate - on the traditional Right, and which is producing cracks. There are thus two main
currents within the Right. A current embodied by Sarkozy that goes hunting on the political terrain of the
FN, “in order to contain it and win back voters”. There is also in a series of regions a real porosity between
the electorates of the Right and the far Right. This part of the Right takes up the racist and authoritarian
themes of the FN. And then there is a current of the Right and centre that keeps its distance from the ideas
of the FN. Both currents place themselves in the framework of the EU, unlike the National Front. Up until
now, the Right has contained the rise of the far Right, but how long will that last?

The National Front already occupies a central place in political life. With 25 per cent, it has sunk roots. It
now has a popular electorate. One question remains open - what are the consequences of the present crisis
in its leadership and in the Le Pen family, because today the global political crisis is affecting the National
Front. This crisis expresses the interests of clans and cliques, and also financial conflicts, but it is also the
expression of an internal political struggle. The National Front is not a fascist party as existed in the 1930s,
because we are not in the 1930s. The origin of its leadership is fascist, its national-socialist themes repeat
the classic themes of the far Right, the national preference (priority for French people), the anti-immigrant
and anti-Muslim racism, are central to its policies. It is not a fascist party, but it is not a bourgeois party like
the others. With 25 per cent, it is faced with the problem of power. And there is obviously a violent debate:
there is the old Jean-Marie Le Pen, for whom coming to power is linked to the collapse of the system and
its replacement by the nationalist movement. And there is another strategy, which has a majority in the
FN, presently grouped around Marine Le Pen, that aims to conquer positions in the system in order to split
the traditional Right and make it explode, so as to subordinate a large part of it to itself. But it is not, as
in Italy, a project of the type of Gianfranco Fini. The latter, coming from the Italian Social Movement and
then becoming the founder of the National Alliance in 1995, joined in 2009 Berlusconi’s party, the People of
Freedom, before separating from it in 2010. He was a minister in Berlusconi’s second and third governments.

The majority of the FN does not want to make alliances where it would be in a subordinate position. Its
leaders want to break the Right and replace it. As a result, they are in an impasse, because by not making
alliances they cannot go beyond a certain threshold, unless the crisis worsens and the traditional Right
explodes. For now the Right is containing this pressure, but for how long?

Of most concern, beyond the electoral phenomena, is a far-reaching change in French society. A whole system
of social, cultural and ideological representations is exploding. There is frenzied individualism, the rejection
of solidarity, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, the war of the poor against the poor, with a hysterical
denunciation of “handouts”. A few years ago, the PCF used a formula to express the rise of reactionary
phenomena, "society is shifting to the right." We could argue about the formula, but there is a movement of
this type that is the consequence of the bankruptcy of the Left. Thus, although the protests (on 15 January
2015) against the attack that hit “Charlie” (7 January) sparked a democratic and humanist reaction of several
million people in the streets of the country, it did not result in a decline of racism. Encouraged by the attitude
of governments and of the European Union, the reactions towards the migrants in the Mediterranean, as
recorded in opinion polls, are quite dreadful. They clearly show the degree of "inhumanity" that has been
reached among sectors of the population.

Suggestions for an anti-capitalist alternative

"You do not want classes or their struggle? You will have the plebs and the anomic multitudes. You no longer
want the peoples? You will have bands and tribes. You do not want the party? You will have the despotism
of public opinion! "(Daniel Bensaïd, Eloge de la politique profane.)

And in this context, what is the situation of the workers’ movement: a deterioration of the relationship
of forces. The curves of the class struggle are turning downwards. In France today we are at one of the
lowest points since the 1960s. The membership of trade unions and left parties – all of them – is declining.
The CGT (General Confederation of Labour), the biggest union organization in the country, has experienced
an enormous leadership crisis around questions of corruption. Nevertheless, social resistance exists: there
are struggles on wages, on jobs, there are demonstrations of teachers and health-workers, and ecological
mobilizations. However, up until now they have not been able to block the neoliberal counter-reforms and
the attacks of the employers. Yet when all political and institutional ways out are blocked, there can be
social explosions; but as the quote from Daniel Bensaïd indicates, the problem is the meaning of these
explosions. The class struggle continues. It is now mainly being conducted by the employers. It gives rise
to elementary resistance; it can lead to brutal social eruptions. The problem is in its political expression, in
terms of consciousness and organization. And here there is a real problem in the present situation in France.

There is a difference with Greece and Spain. There is no Podemos or Syriza in France, taking into account,
of course, the political and historical differences between the two formations. Since 1995, there have been
three political-electoral experiences, and I insist on the electoral form of these experiences. In 1995 with
Arlette Laguiller and Lutte Ouvrière; in 2002 and 2007 with the LCR - then the NPA - and Olivier Besancenot;
and in 2010-2012, with the Left Front and Jean Luc Mélenchon, who received in 2012 more than 4.5 million
votes. Three experiments that have shown the potential for political reorganization to the left of the Left, but also its limits and its failure and. That also explains the space left free for the National Front.

The radical Left is fragmented, in retreat, divided over its relationship to the PS. The French Communist Party (PCF) relaunched itself with the Left Front, but it continues to decline. It has fewer than 40,000 members. Especially, it does not manage to break with the PS. Admittedly, it refuses to follow the neoliberalism of François Hollande and Manuel Valls, but it is willing to relaunch a "union of the left" with the Greens or the internal opponents in the PS, who voted the main counter-reforms of the government. Mélenchon occupies a position more to the left, more clearly defined, than the Socialist Party. But some of his positions are marked by anti-German nationalism or sympathies for Putin in the Ukrainian conflict, which makes the conditions for discussing a political alternative more complicated. How can we rebuild a social and political anticapitalist alternative? That is the difficulty that we have, trying to avoid sectarian pitfalls or adaptations to the dominant left reformist forces. Let us try to respond to them:

• By building social struggles or mobilizations, trying to get partial victories on social questions, particularly on wage issues, where there has been a series of struggles over the last period. The terrain of the democratic struggle against all forms of racism as well as the fight against the FN - especially against the effects of discriminatory policies in the cities it controls – must be taken up by activists. By engaging in all the new configurations of social movements: urban spaces and not just factories, squares, occupations. In the 1990s, Daniel Bensaïd warned against "the social illusion" and the underestimation of political questions. Today, while taking advantage of all possibilities on the political and institutional level, we must rather be wary of "political and electoral illusions," and remember that any process of radical transformation must rely on self-emancipation of the workers, on their self-organization, on direct action.

• By a unitary policy in struggles as well as in political action, to bring together all the forces that break with the PS. This is a serious question. In a situation of confusion, of rejection of the PS, we must at the same time put forward an anti-austerity emergency programme with an anticapitalist dynamic and maintain a clear demarcation from the PS, even if it's difficult.

• We have no experience of the kind of Syriza or Podemos - although we must stress that these two phenomena are not identical - but there is a strong idea there, which is the necessity of rebuilding a social and political movement, something new, which is outside the old traditional organizations of the workers' movement, a new political representation. This will involve a series of unitary actions and debates, for which we are not always prepared, or which are refused by the sectarians.

Some conclusions...

The combination of the long period of the neoliberal counter-reforms that began in the late 1970s – and which deepened with the crisis of 2008 - the destruction caused by Stalinism, the effects of the "balance sheet of the century" for the workers’ movement, including all of its components, the very partial reorganization of a new movement, its differentiations, its fragmentation: all of this adds up to the end of the historic workers’ movement. This is related to the end of a type of capitalism that shaped the workers’ movement over a period of decades, which is in a certain fashion the end of an era ... Not the end of the class struggle, which continues, but which will give rise to new expressions, to new organizations, with the admixture of segments of the old and the new.

We must therefore participate in this process of rebuilding, in a situation of the deterioration of the relationship of forces, but especially in a period of history that is unstable, in a situation of "what is already no longer there" - post-war capitalism, the workers’ movement of the last century - and "what is not yet there" - social struggles and policies of a breadth and magnitude that generate politics, but especially new experiences of building social and political movements.

France- Liberation Through Vacation

Reducing working hours is more than a path to full employment. It could help millions live more fulfilling lives. Since its introduction at the end of the 1990s, France's statutory thirty-five-hour workweek has been a source of ongoing controversy. Originally developed as a job creation measure by the then newly elected "plural left" government of Lionel Jospin, the proposal for a mandatory cut in working time for private-sector employees generated such a furious backlash from business that its implementation (via the two Aubry Laws, named after Labor Minister Martine Aubry) led to the wholesale reorganization of France's main employers' lobby.

Upon the Right's accession to power following the 2002 parliamentary election, a succession of conservative administrations sought to chip away at the thirty-five-hour workweek through a variety of reforms that eased overtime restrictions and limited the law's application. Just from 2002 to 2008, the Right implemented seven substantial measures relating to working time.

And yet, partially restrained by the widespread view that the thirty-five-hour workweek is an "acquired social right" (as former President Jacques Chirac once put it), even committed neoliberals like Nicolas Sarkozy have been unable to fully repeal the statute.
Scrapping the law remains a central plank in the policy agenda of France’s vocal business representatives. Last year, Pierre Gattaz, the head of MEDEF, the powerful national employers’ association, called for greater flexibility in determining employee work hours. “Today, the thirty-five-hour uniformly applied, it is no longer relevant,” Gattaz said, adding, “I’m not saying you have to work forty-eight hours per week. But if companies need some employees to work forty hours and other to work thirty-two hours, they must be allowed to organize them.”

Attitudes on the French left have tended to be more ambivalent. For the social liberals who dominate the governing Socialist Party, reforming the working-time law fits neatly into their larger project of restructuring the French labor market along neoliberal lines.

Thus, the Finance Minister Emmanuel Macron — an ex-investment banker and free-market ideologue widely loathed by the radical left — echoed Gattaz’s call for increased latitude, arguing that “the legal framework of thirty-five hours is insufficient, since employees, like companies, need more flexibility.” It was only in the face of substantial union opposition that the government, headed by the historically unpopular President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls (darling of the Socialist Party right), agreed to back down, at least temporarily.

This attitude represents a major shift from the view prevalent in the less radical sections of the French left before the passage of the Aubry Laws. Initially, the proposal for a legal reduction in weekly work hours for full-time employees was suggested to Jospin by Dominique Strauss-Kahn — future head of the International Monetary, now disgraced due to sexual assault allegations, and hardly a radical figure.

Support for the plan was traditionally strongest in the CFDT, the more conservative and less militant of France’s two biggest union confederations, rather than the traditionally Communist-aligned CGT. Indeed, the idea of using working-time reduction as a means of generating new employment was not limited to the Left during the 1990s.

Even on the Right, which never accepted the idea of making the shortened workweek mandatory, there was widespread backing of efforts to use financial incentives to encourage a reduction for full-time employees: for instance, the 1996 Robien Law offered subsidies amounting to as much as 50% of employers’ social security contributions if they reached agreements with employee representatives to cut working hours.

The Right’s lack of antipathy made the radical left hesitant about supporting the hours reductions legislation. This ambivalence was exacerbated by the two Aubry Laws, which were seen as reinforcing the long-term trend toward greater flexibility in employment relations and the decentralization of wage bargaining. For example, the far left objected to rule changes that allowed for the calculation of working-time on an annualized, rather than weekly basis; they were concerned that the measures would effectively undermine existing rules governing working conditions.

Some of these fears have been borne out: the workweek law has accorded employers more latitude, at employees’ expense — especially after the series of post–Aubry I reforms.

But this shouldn’t blind leftist observers to the radical promise and possibility embedded in the plan for a mandatory decrease in working time. In important respects, that policy offered a genuinely egalitarian and sustainable avenue for creating large numbers of full-time jobs, not through deregulation of the labor market or with the loss of pay, but through a redistribution of work hours — a vehicle for generating job growth that both boosted labor’s power at the expense of capital and lessened intra-class disparities based on gender and occupation.

It in this sense that the relevance of a shorter workweek extends far beyond the borders of France. In the following article, translated by Emal Ghamsharick and Selma Berg from the French journal Contretemps, two left-wing economists in France make the case for the thirty-five-hour workweek as a non-neoliberal path to full employment.

Reduce working time to gain full employment

The question of working-time reduction is central to the history of capitalist exploitation of labor and worker resistance. Today, employers understand well that it is a crucial battle, as shown in an October 2012 editorial by Denis Kessler in Le Monde.

France’s largest employer federation, MEDEF, keeps pushing to reconsider the thirty-five-hour workweek set forth in the Aubry Laws (though they do have limitations), and even wants to abandon any reference to a collective legal limit to working time. The national collective wage agreement (ANI), passed as a law by government majority, opens this opportunity through “competitiveness agreements.”

Even if working-time reduction has been a historic battle of the labor movement and a prominent claim of the Left for much of the twentieth century, today this battle has reached a standstill; we have collective difficulties reaching a mass scale, to resume the offensive on this question and to respond to employers’ offensive. This battle has not been fought by part of the Left and the labor movement in the age of the Aubry Laws, which have negative outcomes for a significant number of salaried workers (increased flexibility, lack of compensatory hires).
The impression that real working-time reduction requires a balance of power out of reach today (while unemployment continues to rise and redundancy plans are multiplying, apparently condemning labor struggles to remain defensive) nurtures a feeling of helplessness. Additionally, we face an ideological assault, also within part of the Left, proclaiming that we must choose between employment and wages and that the current distribution of surplus value is not negotiable.

So it is essential to find ways to overcome this situation and resume fighting, including ideologically, for working-time reduction.Contrary to widespread ideas, true full employment is possible. But it requires confrontation with employers.

Nothing could be further from the truth than claiming that greatly increased productivity is the cause of unemployment. Yet it is a common misconception, especially among those who support the “End of Work” thesis, which claims that productivity is growing so fast that full employment is moving further beyond the horizon. According to this thesis, we should replace the right to work with the right to a universal income. This is a farewell to struggle and a dangerous illusion (particularly dangerous for women).

Things do not work like that. Just compare two periods: the “Trente Glorieuses” (1945–1975), with low unemployment (around 2%) and the neoliberal phase, which began in the mid-1980s, where the unemployment rate was high (around 10%). Now the first saw a very high growth of labor productivity (around 5%), which then slowed sharply to around 1 to 2%. In other words: when productivity gains slow down, unemployment explodes.

This paradox disappears if we remember that employment depends not just on the overall level of production and the productivity of labor, but also on working time. In the medium term — and this is true for both of these great periods — labor productivity increases at about the same pace as production, so that net job creation depends mainly on the reduction of working time.

We can illustrate this process by broadening the scope over the entire twentieth century: in this period, hourly labor productivity increased by a factor of 13.6. How were these productivity gains distributed? By raising the standard of living (GDP multiplied by 9.7) and reducing working hours, which decreased by 44%. Employment, meanwhile, increased by only 26%, and the total number of hours worked fell by 30%.

In short, we are working part-time compared to our great-grandparents, and if it was not for this, unemployment would have reached insurmountable levels. This does not happen “naturally”: social struggles ensured that productivity gains were distributed in the form of lower working hours, not just as wage increases. The history of social struggles is permeated by conflicts about working time.

A second example is the experience of the thirty-five-hour workweek in France. It developed in socially unsatisfactory conditions, but it would be absurd to dismiss it as “anti-economic.” Indeed, over the past two decades, all new net jobs in the private sector were created during the transition to the thirty-five-hour week. This rebuttal of conventional wisdom becomes apparent if we observe the private-sector employment curve (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Employment in the Private Sector in Millions (Source: Dares)](image)

In the two decades before the thirty-five-hour week, good and bad economic years even out, and employment in 1997 is at about the same level as in 1978. Between 1997 and 2002, we see a spectacular boost: almost two million jobs are created. Then employment hits a ceiling, picks up a little, and drops with the crisis. The result: in the second quarter of 2013, there were 15.93 million jobs in the private sector, compared to 15.9 million in the second quarter of 2002 — eleven years lost for employment.

For thirty years, excepting this break, work has been distributed “liberally” and unequally, mostly as part-time work, mostly forced, mainly on women. Recall that in France, women entered the job market as full-time workers. Part-time work has never been a gateway to full employment, as in some countries in Northern Europe. Almost nonexistent before the 1980s, it expanded as a direct result of public policy (mostly by exempting employers from social security contributions).

Today, 30% of women employees work part-time, the vast majority involuntarily, and 80% of part-time jobs are occupied by women. In some sectors (retail, foodservice, cleaning), all created jobs are part-time, with extremely flexible hours and very low salaries. Part-time effectively means partial salary (even though most
of these jobs already earn minimum wage) and partial pensions. The growth of part-time work reinforces the sexual division of labor, as we shall see.

The question is not so much if working hours will decrease, but how. The reduction can be general, with or without retention of monthly salary and compensatory hires; it can be targeted (precarity and part-time); or it can be extreme (unemployment).

Working-time reduction, collective and enforced by law, is an alternative to the expansion of part-time. Both fundamentally contradict each other.

There is a close link between working-time reduction and distribution of income. There are many ways to do it, each with obviously different effects on the distribution of wealth. The thirty-five-hour week has left wages unchanged, contrary to employers’ complaints, which accuse it of increasing the costs of labor. This result was achieved in two ways: by reducing social security contributions and by raising work intensity, which has reduced the policy’s potential for creating new jobs.

In other words, employers never stopped skimming productivity gains, thereby maintaining or even increasing their profit margins. These profits were not used to invest more, but to pay out more dividends. In 2012, an employee worked an average of twenty-six days per year for shareholders, instead of nine days in 1980.

What is not paid out to employees in the form of wage increases or job creation through working-time reduction is directly seized by the shareholders. This is why the rise and solidification of mass unemployment and this form of shareholder takeover (a good indicator of financialization) are two sides of the same “medal.”

This is also why any proposal to reduce unemployment without touching income distribution is an illusion. Here the crisis reveals the violence of social relations: while employees are laid off and 90% of new hires have fixed-term contracts of less than a month, dividend growth, interrupted in 2010 at the height of the crisis, is resuming with a vengeance.

In opposition to full employment in the neoliberal or social-liberal sense, we are actually defending a type of full employment compatible with low inflation, accompanied by cyclical unemployment (called “equilibrium unemployment” in dominant theory); this is the famous NAIRU, or non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment.

In reality, this produces an industrial reserve army, which today exists not only in the strict sense of unemployed labor, but also as cyclical unemployment: odd jobs, precarious employment, etc. This notion of “full employment” is the root of so-called workfare policies, which force the unemployed to accept any job under any conditions and at any price. We must distance ourselves from this notion of full employment to avoid misunderstandings and create the conditions for an alliance between unemployed, precarious and employed workers.

As shown, the Aubry Laws have created permanent jobs, but almost nobody, at least in the Socialist Party, defends this record. In addition, the rules adopted at the time have worsened the living conditions of broad segments of the working class.

The crucial point is that lowered social security contributions were not accompanied by any requirement for compensatory hiring. The Robien Law, although making it optional, demanded “10% working time reduction = 10% new hires”; Aubry I did not require more than 6%, and the Aubry II required nothing at all.

Critics of working-time reduction speak of simplified arithmetic, but it is easy to show that the math worked — and that employers know how to use a calculator. Going from 100 employees at 39 hours (3,900 hours) to 106 employees at 35 hours (3,710 hours) reduces total hours by 5.1%. To avoid having to hire more, it is “sufficient” to intensify the pace of labor and increase hourly productivity.

This is exactly what happened: hourly productivity rose by 5.1%. But since the monthly salary was stabilized, the total payroll still increased. In return, employers got a relative wage freeze and the famous social security exemptions.

The devil is often in the details, and we could cite other mechanisms that reduced the impact of the thirty-five-hour week on labor, especially the exemption of small businesses and overtime. We know that when the Right returned to power it failed to undo the thirty-five-hour week — which despite everything, is taken for granted by the French public — and thus attempted to circumvent the very concept of statutory working time.

The foregoing analysis allows us to better define the essential conditions for working-time reduction to reach its full potential. It is obviously necessary to stabilize the monthly wage, but also to create jobs proportional to the decrease in working hours. Such conditions would obviously increase total payroll expenses.

The reaction should not be new reductions of “charges,” which gradually asphyxiate the social security budget, but to proportionally reduce the cost of capital, i.e. dividend payouts and interest payments. This implies a twofold reallocation of profits: firstly, from capital-intensive sectors to sectors with a high labor component, and, secondly, from large companies to small and medium-sized enterprises.
Reducing forced labor time opens up various prospects for human and social emancipation. The possibility of emancipating ourselves from forced labor cannot be dissociated from the possibility of reducing exploitation in forced labor. This is the meaning of Simone Weil's sentence: "No one would accept to be a slave for two hours; to be accepted, daily slavery must last long enough to break something in a human."

The pressure of unemployment also guarantees that employers can intensify conditions so much that they seem impossible to challenge. In contrast, real working-time reduction that fulfills all necessary conditions can only be achieved under the control of the employees on the job. It must be verified if the created jobs really exist — a hiring plan must be established that is not simply a copy of the initial jobs, but takes into account actual needs, relative hardship, and the necessity of reducing precarious employment.

Part-time work reinforces the unequal sharing of domestic labor and parenting and the societal view of women's wages as supplementary income. Sociological studies show that women switching to part-time reduces the (already low) participation of men in the household.

Even if it is a "choice," as in civil service, part-time remains a forced choice (insufficient childcare facilities, public shaming of mothers who work). The goals that it purportedly serves (more space to breathe, do other activities, spend more time with family) can and should be achieved by collective working-time reduction — for everyone and without reducing wages.

But even if collective working-time reduction is a condition for challenging social roles and gendered task division (and also for greater political participation), it is obviously not a guarantee. Habits and social perceptions do not disappear automatically: under the thirty-five-hour workweek, in cases where wage-earners actually have more free time, this free time is divided by gender roles (men spend more time on leisure or educational/playful parenting, while women spend more time on domestic tasks or reproductive parenting).

So to make any impact, we must challenge sexist education, develop public services, etc. But egalitarian working-time reduction, together with the prohibition of forced part-time, is nonetheless a prerequisite.

Contrary to certain assertions (notably in the de-growth movement), talking about the distribution of productivity gains does not mean obedience to productivism, but its abandonment.

For two reasons: first, productivity gains should not be confused with increased work intensity. Historically, the first, enabled by technical innovation, is intended to liberate humans from their burdens, while the second means heavier (and potentially longer) work. The two often overlap in practice: technological innovation is often accompanied by reorganization and intensification of labor. Technical progress also serves to increase surplus value, not to liberate humans from labor — as it would, if its purpose was to reduce working time.

Second, besides this political issue, there is also a theoretical issue: the notion that human labor is the only creator of value and that labor is the capitalist's sole source of profit (employers never overlook this in their campaigns to extend working time). Neither capital nor nature as such are creators of value, as advanced by mainstream economics and certain currents of deep ecology.

Working-time reduction is the means to creating massive employment and meeting social needs without necessarily undertaking further GDP growth. In all cases, it is a condition for controlling goods and services whose growth is necessary (childcare centers, schools, hospitals, social housing, public transport, renewable energy, etc.), and those which need to be reduced (advertising, packaging, weapons, etc.), i.e. for controlling the qualitative content of growth.

It is crucial to the fight for emancipation, in its various aspects.

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**Turkey- HDP’s poetic call for 'Great Humanity' and the Parliamentary elections in Turkey**

The parliamentary elections in Turkey will take place this Sunday. 54 million people can vote for a new parliament on June 7th. The electoral scene is focused on the HDP, the Peoples’ Democratic Party. In this article I will try to explain how this phenomenon came into being, and what the dynamics are that made it a prominent actor in the elections.

The HDP was founded in 2012 as a direct successor to the Peoples’ Democratic Congress, a union formed after the 2011 parliamentary elections by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), various socialist parties, groups from various segments of civil society like feminist movements, LGBTQ movements, branches of trade unions, and other progressive groups such as the organization of young leftist Armenians, Nor Zartonk among others. In 2011, the last pro-Kurdish party of its kind, the BDP, made it into parliament as part of the umbrella group of independent candidates, Labour, Democracy and Freedom. This allowed them to bypass the infamous 10% electoral threshold required to get elected under Turkish law. More than half of the Bloc's candidates, 36 out of 65, were elected to the Parliament in 2011. The founding of the HDP was therefore an attempt to solidify this solidarity, and success.
Since the 1980 coup modern Turkish politics has witnessed the formation of various political parties stemming from the Kurdish movement, which were successively banned and re-formed under new names. Accordingly, there have also been solidarity initiatives from various leftist political parties, ranging from social democrats to revolutionary socialists, in their electoral struggle.

The parliamentary quest of the Kurdish movement started with People’s Labour Party, HEP in 1990. 18 HEP -rooted deputies were elected to the parliament via the Kemalist, Social Democrat Peoples’ Party, SHP. One of them, Leyla Zana, a 30 year old Kurdish woman activist, added a Kurdish sentence after her parliamentary vow: “I take this oath for the sisterhood of Turkish and Kurdish peoples.” She was wearing a yellow, red and green head band and was booted in the parliament. After three years her parliamentary impurity was stripped, and with three other Kurdish deputies she was charged with affiliation with the PKK, spending ten years in prison.

Being aware of the political climate, the Kurdish parties worked with a back-up system. Upon realising that the HEP would be banned, the Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖZDEP) was founded, only to be banned in 1993. It was followed by Democracy Party (DEP), which was banned in 1994. Then Democratic Change Party (DDP) was banned in 1996, Democratic Mass Party (DKP) in 1999, People’s Democratic Party (HADEP) in 2003, and Democratic Society Party (DTP) in 2009. Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), was founded in 2008, and merged with the HDP in 2014. Therefore, since the 1990s, there have been 7 political parties that were formed as a part of the organized Kurdish movement with attachment to its leader Abdullah Ocalan’s line, and then were outlawed in Turkey.

The formation of the HDP and the dissolution of the BDP into it have a slightly different story though, and that explains the halo of interest around this newly formed party. Firstly, its public appearance as a political party out of the People’s Democratic Congress took place in the political climate of the Gezi protests of 2013, the biggest mass protests in Turkey since the 1980 coup. The heterogeneity of the protesting groups, and ad hoc alliances at the barricades created a milieu that made oppositional alliances relevant. The conventional parliamentarist reflex of reaping the product of a mass movement at the ballot box found its setting in two consecutive elections after Gezi Protests. In March 2014 municipal elections took place, and in August 2014 the President was elected.

HDP made its first appearance in the March 2014 elections. Four well known deputies of the BDP, Ertugrul Kurkcu, Levent Tuzel, Sirri Sureyya Onder and Sebahat Tuncel resigned from BDP and joined HDP. Onder was a well-known face in the Gezi protests since they began, and became HDP’s municipal candidate for Istanbul. However, Onder’s personal connection with Gezi movement could not provide HDP with more than a synthetic connection with the June 2013 Gezi movements, despite its claim. The drawback was one that still haunts the HDP in the general elections, namely the Kurdish organized movement’s complicated relationship with the Gezi movement. One of the most important reasons for this was the high and one-sided expectations of some of the participants of the latter.

In addition, revolutionary leftist movements of Turkey had gone through various alliances after the coup and lately, since 2007, supported various blocs, lead by the organized Kurdish movement, for independent candidates, and results have caused internal strife and splits among others. Digging a tunnel to the parliament, as the saying went through the campaigns, did not bring a new dynamic to the revolutionary struggle and the connection between the selected independent candidates and the grassroots movements could not be formed. Parliamentarism led to the formation of personality cults, sometimes used as a tactic by some segments of political left to provide visibility for campaigns. As a result, HDP got 4.8 per cent of the votes in Istanbul where Onder was a candidate. It is hard to say that his candidacy broadened the base of the party, which was formed by the organized Kurdish movement. At previous elections, its predecessor, DTP, had 4.7 per cent of the votes. Therefore, this first appearance of HDP was not a breakout. However, a clear demonstration of the will to establish the HDP as a party that goes beyond its Kurdish and pro-Kurdish base became visible with the decision of the BDP to leave western cities to the HDP and run in elections in Kurdish majority regions of the east.

The second appearance of the HDP came with the Presidential election in August 2014. This time was different from its first appearance, which had been mostly based on Onder’s personality, the taken for granted “united front” dynamic of the Gezi movement and a politics of being against the AKP and its opponent, the Kemalist social democrats, CHP. This time Selahattin Demirtas, the co-spokesperson of HDP, came with a “new life declaration” as the presidential candidate of the HDP. The declaration began with greetings in 15 languages spoken in Turkey and introduced “radical democracy,” as the alternative to the current system.

According to the declaration, the new life would grow on the same the side as the oppressed, and those discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, religion, class and gender. It envisioned a system that was based on decentralization and forming peoples’ assemblies for democratic, participatory governance. The leading role in this new life was given to women. Abolishing the religious affairs directorate that was based on the promotion of Sunni Islam, strengthening social welfare rights of workers, fighting against homophobia and transphobia were among many non-conventional axes of political intervention that were drafted. In accordance with the current stance of the Kurdish movement, the declaration defined the solution...
of the Kurdish issue as a part of the total democratization process of Turkey. This new life declaration would form the basis of the “great humanity” document prepared for the parliamentary elections of 2015.

This second appearance of the HDP was a success. Demirtas got 9.76 per cent of the total votes (3.9 million), increasing the HDP and BDP’s combined votes (2.9 million) in the local elections that took place five months before.

The Presidential elections gave visibility to the HDP and its co-spokesperson Demirtas. When the party declared that this time it will not use the backdoor to the parliament by organizing a left-wing libertarian bloc that would support “independent candidates” to by-pass the ten percent threshold, and instead participate in the elections as the HDP, it was considered to be a risky maneuver. However, the last few months proved otherwise. Basing its campaign not only on the illegitimacy of the ten percent threshold, but also on its election manifesto, titled “great humanity,” this time the HDP worked on communicating the alternatives to the oppressive, ten-year old AKP rule, and went beyond the call for solidarity with the unrepresented Kurdish constituency.

The 28-page call to great humanity starts with the statement that the absolute power of the state and capital destroys society and nature, and that it does not recognize our existence, identities, desires and necessities. The election manifesto states that empowering the society means empowering the oppressed segments of the society, it means secure work conditions for workers, rights to preserve and use our mother tongues, supporting women in their fight against male dominance, freeing the youth from anxiety for the future, ending poverty, ending the state’s imposition of forced identities and acknowledging that nature is not a resource but life itself.

The manifesto argues for a new democratic constitution that would replace the 1980 Coup constitution and argues clearly against the concentration of power, as would be created by the presidency system that Erdogan is fighting for. The new constitution would guarantee a number of fundamental rights, such as the right to peace, the right to truth, the right to organize, strike and be covered by collective agreements, social security, a basic income, the right to respectful accommodation and transport, disability rights, the right to clean water and sufficient food, conscientious objection, cultural identity rights, the right to use mother tongues, the right to education, the right to a fair and just trial, rights of children, rights of elderly people, animal rights, freedom of expression and organization, and religious freedom.

A number of the HDP’s arguments were considered to be un-pragmatic for a political party that aims to broaden its base and pass the ten percent threshold. These included clear cut positions on historically taboo issues like the Armenian genocide, abolition of obligatory religious (Sunni) classes at schools and the directorate of religious affairs, and acknowledgement of the legacy of the Kurdish struggle and the movement’s leader, Ocalan. But in fact, this became a point of strength for HDP. The clearer their positions were declared, the more trustworthy the HDP became. In a political climate where the trend is concentration of power in few hands and impunity of the leader from any criticism, the co-spokesperson of HDP, Demirtas emerged as a figure who answered all questions with clarity and sincerity. He clearly rejected the assumption that the HDP would support or form a coalition with Erdogan’s AKP after the elections, and stated unequivocally that what happened in 1915 was a genocide. He also acknowledged the role of Ocalan in the making of HDP’s political line. Having been a human rights lawyer and activist for many years, and coming from the legacy of the Kurdish movement, the 41-year old politician represented a new face in the Turkish politics, where successful politicians were associated with patriarchal authority figures. Demirtas was not embraced as a father or an elder brother, or the future omnipotent leader of the country; he made it clear that the HDP was not there to create new leaders, but to empower grassroots democracy. It did not claim to be a socialist or revolutionary party, but a party of the broader left, a snowplow that would open the way for socialists and activists from other political tendencies.

Revolutionary socialists who did not endorse the HDP’s political line totally nevertheless organized their own pro-HDP campaigns inside and out of Turkey. In Turkey, two main campaigns, 10’dan Sonra (after 10), which refers to the 10 percent threshold and +1, which builds its campaign on being an extra vote to HDP, testifies to the aura that the HDP has created for itself. Critical of parliamentarism, these initiatives not only campaign for strategic votes to the HDP to help end the one party rule of the AKP, but also helped disseminating HDP’s message for the “great humanity.” Progressive groups outside Turkey, such as the federation of democratic workers’ association, DIDF, have openly declared solidarity with the HDP for the elections as well.

Mathematical calculations about the election point to the importance of voting for the HDP to weaken the AKP. One of the videos of the 10’dan sonra campaign shows that if the AKP gets 44 per cent, CHP 25, and the nationalist party MHP 16, AKP will have 333 deputies. However, if HDP passes the 10 percent threshold, the AKP will be the most effected, with a loss in their number of deputies. In the latter scenario, the HDP gets 60 - 70 deputies, while AKP loses around 50. If the HDP gets more, and AKP gets around 40-41 per cent of the votes, the AKP will not be able to form the government by itself and will have to go for a coalition.

Whatever the results turn out to be, this is an election that has inserted hope, and proved that despite former frictions in attempts to form “united fronts”, collective working practice is still possible for the broad left in Turkey. It is also impressive that a guerrilla force (PKK), with 40 years of armed struggle behind it, has paved way to the formation of a self-critical, modest, inclusive and cheerful political party. Supporting the
HDP in this election does not necessarily mean endorsing its legacy and political line totally, but supporting their bid to stop the AKP’s will to concentrate power in its hands, which would sever the conditions for social and political movements to spring up and exist.

Moreover, issues raised in the “great humanity” manifesto, if put on the agenda and discussed in and out of the parliament, will provide stimulus for progressive, revolutionary change. The fact that this political phenomenon came into being with the initiative of the Kurdish movement, with its years of organising, sturdy social movement and guerrilla force in Turkey, should not be seen as an obstacle but the icing on the cake.

The title of election manifesto, which is a direct reference to Nazim Hikmet’s poem named “Great humanity”, breaks the clouds of disenchantment lingering on Turkish society for a period, which predates AKP’s rule. Nazim ends the poem like this:

The great humanity has no shade on his soil
no lamp on his road
no glass on his window
but the great humanity has hope
you can’t live without hope.

**Turkey- Kurds, Labor, and the Left in Turkey: an Interview with Erdem Yörük**

The results of the Turkish elections on Sunday 7 June, giving the HDP 12 per cent, have provoked a lot of interest in this new formation. After our previous article on HDP’s poetic call for “Great Humanity” and the Parliamentary elections in Turkey we are publishing an interview with Turkish political commentator Erdem Yörük first published on LeftEast on 6 June 2015.

With Turkey’s parliamentary elections on Sunday fast approaching, all eyes are on the Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) contesting its first ever election as a party, rather than a coalition of nominally independent candidates: a momentous decision on the part of the party leadership, which stands to gain clout in parliament and solidify its position as the electoral standard-bearer of the radical Left—or fall below the constitutionally mandated 10% barrier and be excluded from parliament entirely. At issue is whether the party has succeeded at building a leftist coalition including, but not limited to, its base of support in the Kurdish national movement. At stake is whether or not the party will play a key role in a successful effort to block Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) from gaining the number of seats necessary to rewrite the constitution and transform Turkey into an executive republic with Erdoğan as its quasi-omnipotent head.

The importance of the relatively new left-wing party in this election has not gone unnoticed by those whose tactic is violence. In the last few days assaults on HDP activists and others working for the party have mounted, with four people killed in a party rally in Diyarbakır yesterday, most likely by far-right forces, in an apparent attempt to assassinate party co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş, who was standing about thirty meters from where the bomb exploded.

Over the last few decades violence both physical and structural has played a major part in the creation of a sociopolitical terrain in which, in proletarian sections of many major cities, the AKP and the HDP are now the two parties fighting over votes. Recently we sat down with Erdem Yörük, sociologist at Koç University in Istanbul and expert on the recent history of the working class in Turkey, to discuss these historical developments and assess the HDP’s chances of making history in this critical election.

LE: Your work provides some perspectives on the changing face of the labor movement in Turkey in relation to the plight of Kurdish workers displaced by the state’s war with the PKK in the 1980’s and 90’s. Could you briefly sketch for us the direction that your work takes in this regard?

E.Y.: It was in the aftermath of the shift in economic planning that happened around 1980, that the whole face of the working class in Turkey changed. In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, the developmentalist economy featuring tariff protections, state-owned enterprises and an emphasis on agricultural self-sufficiency gave way to an export-economy fueled by low-wage labor by a new class: the informal proletariat. The plans for this shift were laid early in 1980 and solidified under the military regime and in its immediate aftermath. These reforms weakened the position of small farmers in the overall economy, necessitating internal immigration to the cities in search of wage-labor—and other forces augmented this trend.

As far as the labor movement is concerned, of course the general suppression of the Left during the 1980 coup played a role here, but a still more significant factor in the decline of organized labor and the rise of the informal proletariat was the war between the state and the PKK. Internally displaced Kurds who left villages that had been destroyed by the army or an economy generally ruined by war were desperate, and willing to do even the worst jobs, without social security or job security, often on a temporary basis, in what came to be known as the informal sector. These people swelled into the big cities, which were on every level—in terms of housing, infrastructure, health—barely able to accommodate them, and everything in their daily...
lives became a matter of makeshift solutions and negotiation. Without these wage-laborers at the bottom of the economic pyramid, the industries that have grown in Turkey over the last few decades would not have gotten off the ground; the country's economic growth that has gotten such press internationally is due to their labor.

The huge changes to the class landscape brought about by neoliberalism were bound to have political consequences as well. The 1980's were a time of political tranquility in Turkey, but in the 1990's ideological competition in Turkish politics really intensified, with political Islam on the ascendant. Because political Islam was able to organize social aid on a local and communitarian basis, it filled the vacuum left by a retreating Left that had not adjusted to the new realities of the informal economy, and managed to address the destitute workers of the cities and earn their loyalty. The Kurdish national movement did similar things. Meanwhile the labor unions, which were unable to absorb the huge influx of internal immigrants and in any case restricted in various ways by anti-union legislation, went into decline.

Your dissertation concerns welfare policy as an instrument of social control. How does this work under the AKP?

The distribution of charity by the representatives of political Islam—not only the AKP but also its predecessors including the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) going back to the 1980's and 1990's, has had two goals: not only to maintain control through dependence, but to cultivate political support. The party cultivates support from impoverished workers by distributing aid on the understanding that membership in the right cultural and religious community positively affects the chances of getting aid. The goal is to foster a sense of community and common belonging among these people that translates into support for the party. Since coming to power, the AKP government has specifically targeted Kurdish citizens as recipients of its strategic generosity, while still ruthlessly combating other forces, such as the Kurdish national movement, which might become rivals for these people's loyalty.

Since 2002 the government has very skillfully built up a system of patrimonial charity to substitute for the kind of working-class solidarity one finds in the labor movement; it has increased non-pension welfare spending while attacking the unions. What can or should the Left do in response to this strategy?

Many leftists in Turkey have traditionally opposed welfare provision, arguing instead for more structural solutions. Of course they are right to insist that structural solutions are necessary, but in the meantime people are hungry and want to know who is going to help them. I think this has been a serious problem for the Left in Turkey. When someone is hungry, telling him you have a structural solution to that is just not going to be convincing. You have to give him something in the short term while continuing to work on your structural solutions for the long term. Right now many in the informal proletariat are dependent on aid from the government, which is being given out as a favor that can be revoked at any time. What the Left should do is to develop the notion that such aid is not a favor but a right. This is what has to be done.

President Erdoğan recently declared that “there is no longer a Kurdish problem in Turkey,” as if the Kurds or their condition had been a problem but that his government had solved it. This kind of negationist rhetoric was the standard discourse on the Kurdish movement for Turkish governments before the AKP; both the center-left Bülent Ecevit and the Islamist Necmettin Erbakan embraced it. What do you think the return to this rhetoric signals as far as policy in the near future is concerned?

Such statements are purely tactical. Erdoğan is approaching an election and he knows that the nationalist votes outnumber the votes in favor of a peaceful solution to the conflict. Later he may move back. He has made such tactical moves before, and he will probably make them again.

Many international leftists now see the Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) as the great hope for a revival of the Left in Turkey. Do you think these hopes are well placed?

I do, and I’ll tell you, I am a member of the party and active within in, and I believe very much in its promise; in short I believe that the HDP can break the impasse Turkish politics is currently in and help democratize the country. I am not Kurdish myself, I am an ethnic Turk, and I joined the party because of the principles it espouses. It is not only a Kurdish party but rather aspires to be a broad coalition for the Left in Turkey. They have reached out to various minority communities, to the LGBT’s...

Yet at the same time some of its parliamentarians, for instance Altan Tan, have said that they did not like this outreach and, if I remember correctly, refused to be photographed with the LGBT activists at the event that the party leadership had organized for them.

Yes, Altan Tan took that stance, and he represents a reality among conservative Kurdish constituency. We have to remember that the political and social composition of the HDP coalition is quite heterogeneous. Yet the party is working not only to advance the rights of the Kurdish people, but also to expand the hegemony of the left in whole Turkey and among the Kurds alike, and by doing that they are taking a risk. They are allying themselves to the LGBT’s, the Alevi’s and other excluded groups, even at the risk of alienating more conservative, religious elements within the Kurdish constituency. Let’s remember that both conservatism and religion are more prevalent among the Kurds than among the citizens of Turkey taken as a whole. And some of those conservative Muslims are very active and important figures in the party, and so you have...
Altan Tan. And Altan Tan is a Muslim; Altan Tan is pious. And he is a very important figure in Kurdistan. Yet at the same time the party has been joining forces with the LGBT’s, feminists and other groups. What the party does deserve our respect: trying to raise the hegemony of the left while forming alliances with all progressive forces, Muslim or non-Muslim.

Recently there was a poll bandied about in the Turkish press that purported to show a large portion of the Kurdish residents of Istanbul, a majority of whom voted for the ruling party in 2011, now supporting HDP. Do you think such reports are accurate and if so, do they signal a nationwide trend?

Yes, I think such reports are accurate. I think a similar shift is taking place elsewhere in the country as well. Kobane is the turning point. Polls show that before Kobane, %50 of Kurds in Turkey voted for the AKP, and %40 for the HDP. Now it is %60 for the HDP and %30 for the AKP. Kurds felt extremely disappointed and threatened during the battle for Kobane.

Many in the ulusalcı or left-nationalist camp suspect that the HDP may be willing to suspend its opposition to Erdoğan nationally in return for a successful conclusion to the negotiations between the state and the PKK. Turkey would then be left with an all-powerful Erdoğan presidency along with regional autonomy for the Kurdish regions. What do you think of such fears?

First of all, a couple of months ago, the ulusalcı solcolar, the nationalist leftists said that the HDP had decided to join the election as a party because they had made a deal with the ruling party: that they would stay outside the parliament intentionally in order to support the AKP. This was the conspiracy theory, and it was a most stupid one, a racialist one as it blames the Kurds for being stupid....and now that the HDP is organized so deeply in the elections, this kind of conspiracy theory has just disappeared, but another one has taken its place. This second conspiracy theory holds that the HDP would support the presidency of Erdoğan. And Selahattin Demirtaş said, seni Başkan yaptırmayacağız! “We will not make your president!” So this conspiracy theory too has disappeared. So now the third one: that the HDP will make a coalition with the AKP. Demirtaş said “We will not make a coalition with the AKP.”

So the party will respond to this conspiracy theory and next week another conspiracy theory will emerge, because there is a big sense of distrust, a structural distrust of the Kurds. The nationalist Left sees the Kurds as terrorists and they see the HDP as the party of the Kurds. There’s this logic: Kurds have their own particular interests, and these interests can be traded with the AKP at the expense of the interests of the Left and of the other components of the country. But this kind of logic misses the fact that the HDP itself is a huge coalition of different groups. Kurds are the largest part, but in terms of the administrators, the activists, and the supporters of the party, half of the party consists of socialists, LGBT people, women, Alevis, etc., and these groups know that if Erdoğan gets what he wants, I mean if the authoritarian tendencies of the AKP increase, they will become the first targets of this tendency. This other part will never let the party ally itself to the AKP. This is the structural guarantee of the impossibility of this kind of an alliance. So this too is complicated but to make a long story short, this kind of an alliance is only a conspiracy theory.

Also, there is one more concrete thing to falsify these conspiracy theories. During the last couple of months, the AKP has based its elections campaign almost exclusively on developing hatred towards the HDP. This has manifested itself in several physical attacks on the party. Yesterday, in HDP Diyarkabır meeting, bombing killed 4 people. Before Adana and Mersin headquarters of the HDP were bomb-attacked. So far during the campaign, 175 of our election bureaus have been attacked. One of our campaign staff was first tortured and then killed, one of them was burned and he is still in intensive care in the hospital. Many of ballot observers have recently been taken into custody. These are systematical attacks on the HDP and many people find the government responsible.

Do you think that the traditional center-left opposition, for instance the Republican People’s Party (CHP), has any role to play in the construction of a more just and democratic Turkey, or have they missed that chance?

They have lost that chance for the last eighty years, actually...but it seems that they have taken some lessons in the last couple of years. With pressure from the HDP they have moved to the left. They have made some proposals that appeal to the working class and some members of the CHP have said they would consider making an alliance with the HDP as well. These are positive things that are good for democracy in Turkey. I don’t think that the CHP is a real candidate for government in this election, as the polls show them with only 26%-27% of the vote, but in the future things may change.

...in which case the CHP’s new openness to work with groups like the HDP would be of benefit both to them and to the country.

I think so.

One more question. What relation, if any, do you think ruling party’s conservative cultural agenda bears to the class struggle in Turkey?

I think that during the last ten years AKP has hijacked the class struggle in Turkey. They have mobilized all the class-related grievances of the working class with an anti-elite discourse, a populist discourse, and populist policies also—the social policy etc.; the AKP has presented itself as the representative of the working class, the millet, and it claims that the CHP represents the elite, the upper class and westernized people, and
the West. There is some kind of reality behind this, because when you look at the statistics, there’s a positive correlation between income level and CHP voting and a negative correlation between income level and AKP voting. The AKP is a bourgeois party that pretends to represent the working class. It’s like Louis Bonaparte...

...which as we know in the Marxist tradition tends to be seen as the anticipation of fascism, right?

Yes. So what do they say about history? The first time a tragedy, the second time a farce, and the third time...I don’t know!

So the classes have formed their identity between these two parties: the lower middle class supports the AKP and the upper middle class the CHP; the HDP is trying to break down this polarization and become the party of the working class of different ethnic and religious groups and democratic factions of the middle class. Because insofar as political discourse continues the way it has been going, it is really difficult to conduct a real class struggle in the country. Religiosity increases among the working class, and conservatism increases among the working class, and the AKP has tried to eliminate any other kind of discourse among the working class. So this is why I think the first agenda of the Left in the country is to struggle against the government.

### Indonesia- The forgotten massacre

On the morning of September 30, 1965, a small group of army officers and Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) members attempted a coup against the Indonesian army leadership. Six army generals were killed, but the coup failed and was crushed by surviving army leaders in a few days. Together with other right-wing forces, the army, under the command of Gens. Suharto and Abdul Haris Nasution, retaliated.

Hundreds of thousands of real and suspected communists were massacred, and a new, military-dominated regime under Suharto was installed. Western powers like the US, Britain, and the Netherlands condoned and often actively supported the massacres.

Indonesia's military junta took control of the media on October 2, using it to spread its own version of the events. In the junta's version, the killing of the generals was the spark that ignited popular anger against a party that was hated for its violence, its disregard for religion and its lack of patriotism. Supposedly, PKI plans for a violent revolution and elimination of anyone who opposed it were stopped by a wave of spontaneous popular anger against the treacherous communists.

For decades, this version of the mass killings of 1965–66 has been reinforced by state propaganda and parroted by Western experts who saw the “spontaneous” eruption in murderous violence as confirmation of pre-existing racist ideas about fanatical and irrational “orientals.”

Historical research has demolished this version of events. The failed coup was not an initiative of the PKI as a whole, but of a small number of PKI leaders working with sympathetic army officers who wanted to remove several right-wing army leaders — not take state power. The massacre that followed was systematic, organized by right-wing nationalist politicians and militia, religious organizations, and, most of all, the Indonesian army. This coalition for murder received political and material support from Western powers.

Within days of the coup, US and British officials began making plans to exploit the political situation. The coup offered them the chance to crush the PKI, a party that Western officials feared was getting dangerously close to state power.

In the years leading up to the coup, the PKI tried to establish itself as the fiercest anti-imperialist party in the country, mobilizing against the influence of foreign capital, especially of the Dutch and British variety. It supported Indonesian President Sukarno in his demand that the Dutch hand over Irian Jaya (West Papua) to Indonesia and in his campaign against Malaysia, which it denounced as an instrument of British imperialism.

For a time this strategy was successful. In the parliamentary elections of 1955 — the last before Sukarno adopted his authoritarian system of “guided democracy” — the PKI emerged as the country’s fourth largest party with 16.4 percent of the vote. Party membership had grown from less than twenty thousand in 1954 to over 1.5 million. Millions were organized in PKI-allied trade unions and mass organizations of peasants, women, students, and other groups.

It was not just the growth of the PKI that set off alarm bells in the West. In the late 1950s, the US backed right-wing rebellions against Sukarno, but this backfired when the rebels were defeated. American support for his opponents drove Sukarno further away from the Western bloc and damaged US relations with the most powerful force on the Indonesian right: the army.

Meanwhile, the communists’ contribution to the fight against the rebels won them popular sympathy and growing favor from Sukarno. By the early sixties, the PKI was the world largest Communist party outside the Soviet bloc, and Indonesia was the largest non-bloc recipient of Soviet economic and military aid.

After the failure of the regional rebellions, the US adopted a different strategy. With the help of philanthropic foundations like Ford and Rockefeller and institutions like the World Bank, the US restored its relationship with the Indonesian army and the country’s right by providing material assistance and training to Army officers and pro-Western intellectuals.
But the US government’s ability to influence Indonesian state policy ultimately depended on President Sukarno. Sukarno, the historical leader of the Indonesian independence movement, was very popular and essentially ruled by decree. He was not a communist, but he was a fervent anticolonialist who dreamed of a powerful, fully independent Indonesia that would play an important role on the world stage.

Sukarno increasingly clashed with Western powers — especially the UK and US, whom he denounced as neocolonialist. In early 1965, Indonesia withdrew from the United Nations and expelled the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

As a result, Western officials were pessimistic about their ability to manipulate the political landscape in Indonesia. In early 1965, the Dutch ambassador to Indonesia, E. L. C. Schiff, said in a wire to the minister of foreign affairs that the consensus among his colleagues was that Sukarno would remain the country’s leader until his death and that “it is no longer possible to keep Indonesia from slipping into the left.”

The US had also decided by then that Sukarno could not be pressured to abandon the PKI, and in August 1964 decided to overthrow Sukarno. This decision was in accord with the covert plans of British officials to foment civil war or the collapse of Sukarno’s government.

The UK established a “director of political warfare against Indonesia,” based in Singapore, and the CIA proposed expanding its own operations in Indonesia to include “covert liaison with and support for existing anti-Communist groups, black letter operations, media operations, including the possibility of black radio (propaganda radio stations) and political action within existing Indonesian institutions and organizations.”

The expectation was that if Sukarno was removed, a power struggle between the PKI and the army would follow. The (now pro-US) Army leadership was confident about the outcome of this struggle: in a confidential meeting with the Dutch ambassador, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ahmad Yani (one of the generals killed on September 30) said the army was “reliable” and already making preparations for confrontation should the ailing president die.

But as long as Sukarno was protecting the PKI, crushing the communists was impossible. British Assistant Secretary of State Edward Peck suggested “there might be much to be said for encouraging a premature PKI coup during Sukarno’s lifetime.” The failed coup gave Peck what he wanted.

The killing of the generals was a boon for the army’s propaganda campaign against the PKI and, indirectly, against Sukarno. Sukarno’s refusal to condemn or ban the PKI, as the Right demanded following the failed coup, was exploited by the army to discredit him. In the following months, Sukarno was forced to hand more and more power to the army.

The theory that the violence was a sudden eruption of popular anger is belied by its gradual escalation. After the failed coup, the army supported anti-PKI demonstrations with transport and protection, and roughly a week after the death of the generals, mobs ransacked PKI offices as security forces looked on. Houses of PKI members followed.

The killings of (suspected) PKI members and supporters didn’t start until weeks after the September 30 coup attempt: massacres took place in Central Java in late October, then East Java in November, followed by Bali in December. In each instance the arrival of the Special Forces, commanded by Major Gen. Sarwo Edhie, preceded the killings.

Many victims were first arrested by militia groups supported by Edhie’s Special Forces. Prisoners were put into makeshift prison camps in remote locations and were often slain in groups, often by getting shot, stabbed, or having their skulls crushed with rocks and clubs. Much of the killing was done by young militia members of groups like Ansor, the youth wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, the country’s largest Muslim organization.

Ernst Utrecht, a left-wing supporter of Sukarno and former parliamentarian, estimates up to fifty thousand Indonesians participated in the massacre. After decades of propaganda and cover up, the number of victims cannot be precisely determined. Most historians assume the number of dead to be somewhere between five hundred thousand and 1 million, though Edhie himself claimed the number was 3 million.

Western powers supported the army in its campaign against the PKI. On October 17, the CIA worried the army might not go “all the way,” settling instead for action against those directly involved in the murder of the generals and permit[ting] Sukarno to get much of his power back.”

To prevent this the CIA gave lists with the names of five thousand PKI members to the generals and organized the delivery of small arms and money to the army. The US embassy provided its own lists with two thousand names. In a meeting with British officials, Gen. Sukendro requested help for the army to “consolidate its position.” The meeting minutes reported on the “Army’s strategy” against the PKI and how “considerations [were] being made to meet the clamor of the nationalists and the religious elements for arms.”

Other Western powers also aided the massacre: the West German foreign secret service delivered arms and communication equipment worth DM300,000, while Indonesian refugee Osman Jusuf Helmi reported that Sweden had signed a contract with Suharto and Nasution “for an emergency purchase of $10,000,000 worth of small arms and ammunition” in December 1965.
Dutch ambassador Schiff reported on October 8 that the army was conducting an “intensive smear campaign” against the PKI, and concluded that the situation was “the best — and maybe last — chance of the army to assert itself politically.”

By the end of October, the US embassy received reports of violence against masses of PKI supporters in East, Central, and West Java. The US ambassador noted that the army was “moving relentlessly to exterminate the PKI.” A month later Schiff reported that “whole kampongs [villages]” had been slaughtered, supposedly as a result of local feuding.

The bloodshed achieved its aim of destroying the Indonesian left. In April 1966, Schiff’s minister of foreign affairs, future NATO Secretary Gen. Joseph Luns, noted “the blow dealt to the Communists (from which they are not likely to recover in the foreseeable future).” In July 1966, Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt remarked in a speech in New York that “with 50,000 to 1,000,000 Communist sympathizers knocked off, I think it is safe to assume a reorientation has taken place.”

A few weeks earlier the US State Department had rejoiced that, due to the killing of “up to 300,000 Communists” and another 1.6 million Indonesian Communists renouncing their membership, the number of communists in non-bloc countries had dropped by 42 percent in one year.

The aid Western officials gave the army in late 1965 and early 1966 was a crucial political signal to Indonesia’s new de facto rulers that the US and its allies were willing to support them. This backing was vital for the nascent regime because the Indonesian economy was in crisis, and Western capital remained hesitant to invest in Indonesia after Sukarno’s takeover of British and Dutch companies and calls to expropriate Western capital.

The military exploited the economic crisis to undermine what was left of Sukarno’s authority — British and US companies like Caltex, Goodyear, and US Rubber cut a deal with the army to channel corporate revenues into unnamed bank accounts, robbing the Indonesian state of an important source of foreign currency, further crippling Sukarno.

At the same time, the army was quick to placate its Western supporters. In December, Suharto reassured Western oil companies that the army “would not stand for precipitous moves” against them, and just days after Sukarno officially handed power to Suharto on March 11, 1966, the US mining company Freeport was allowed back into the country to extract the rich mineral resources in Irian Jaya.

A new foreign investment law that granted extremely favorable conditions for outside capital was drafted in close cooperation with the IMF, and starting in 1967 the new regime received $450 million annually from the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI).

The IGGI included the Asian Development Bank, the IMF, the UN Development Program, the World Bank, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United States, and was chaired by the Netherlands. The Dutch chairmanship was suggested by US officials who hoped to divert attention from US (and Japanese) involvement in the deal.

Indonesia’s large cities were prioritized as aid recipients to stabilize the political situation. By 1968 the Suharto dictatorship was comfortably established and committed to pro-Western economic policies.

The Indonesian government still refuses to admit the killings were systematic violations of human rights. No one has ever been held accountable for the hundreds of thousands of deaths, and not a single one of the many known mass graves has been fully excavated to give the victims a decent burial. And in April it was announced that Sarwo Edhie would be declared a “national hero” for his deeds.

Above all, the massacres achieved their goal. To this day, the Indonesian left has not recovered.

Philippines- Teduray: Lumad struggle for identity, territory is consistent, even without arms

Manila – “Our struggle to assert our rights as Teduray to our identity and territory has started long before the MILF-GPH peace talks, and we have been very consistent about this,” says Jennevieve Cornelio, a Teduray woman leader of the Timuay Justice and Governance (TJG). “Kahit wala kaming armas.” (Even if we do not have arms.)

Cornelio said that the indigenous peoples have been eased out of the peace talks, “because we are not armed.” This, however, does not mean the Lumads or the indigenous peoples in Mindanao do not have legitimate concerns. “Our territory is part of what is being proposed as Bangsamoro Territory. Our distinct identity as Teduray, Dulangan Manobo and Lambangian is being subsumed as Bangsamoro people. We cannot allow this.”

Cornelio was speaking as part of the panel in “Tapatan sa Aristocrat”, a media forum held on June 8. The other members of the panel were Mohagher Iqbal, Chair of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Atty. Christian Monsod, as part of the Peace Council.
“The indigenous peoples have representatives in the drafting of the Bangsamoro basic law (BBL),” according to Iqbal, referring to Teduray members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) – Ms. Froilyn Mendoza, appointed by the Philippine government, and Melanio Ulama, appointed by the MILF. Monsod also stated that the OPAPP (Office of the Presidential Affairs on Peace Process) held 32 consultations with indigenous peoples.

“But what was done by the OPAPP were IEC (Information, Education, campaign) and not consultations with the indigenous communities,” countered Cornelio. She acknowledged, however, that there were indeed two Teduray representatives in the BTC. But only one actually held consultations with the indigenous people communities. “Comm. Mendoza held several community consultations, and we participated in those.” Cornelio said that it was through these consultations that they were able to discuss and propose indigenous peoples’ provisions in the draft BBL.

“We originally had 145 proposed provisions.” However, Cornelio narrated, after Comm. Mendoza brought these to the BTC, it was reduced to 69, then later, 13 provisions. “Now, none of our substantive proposals – not on indigenous peoples identity, on our ancestral domain and the articulation of Rep. Act 8371 or Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) are there; but what can she do, Comm. Mendoza was the only one in the BTC fighting for our rights.”

Comm. Ulama, who appeared towards the end of the media forum, intervened and said that IPRA has not been implemented in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) since the indigenous peoples’ law has been enacted, 17 years ago. According to him, the indigenous peoples do not need IPRA anymore, and BBL as it is, is enough. Ulama further questioned the representation of Cornelio, and said that he did not know her, and where she was from.

Cornelio then said, “You would not know me, as I am just an ordinary Teduray woman from the community of Brgy. Looy, South Upi, Maguindanao. I’m active in the assertion of women’s rights. You however, we know very well, as the Teduray representative appointed by the MILF.” Cornelio is currently in Manila as part of the Lumad delegation, representing the indigenous peoples from the core territory, as they push for the full inclusion of indigenous people rights in the proposed BBL.

9 June 2015

India- Caste violence

We condemn the decision taken by the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras), on May 22, to ‘derecognise’ the Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle (APSC), an independent student body of the institution. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) in New Delhi claims to have received an anonymous complaint about ‘the distribution of controversial posters and pamphlets’ by APSC in the IIT Madras campus. The nature of this allegedly controversial material was simply anti-Modi views. This got the government’s hackles up, as it is determined to silence all critical voices, especially voices from outside the spectrum of parliamentary parties, Following this, the HRD ministry wrote to IIT Madras and asked the institution to respond about the above matter. The Dean of Students (DoS) of IIT Madras decided to derecognise the student group even before APSC got a chance to explain their end of the story.

The APSC was created in April 2014 to foster conversation and raise awareness about Ambedkar-Periyar and rampant caste violence in the country. In June 2014, the Dean of Students, Dr. M.S. Sivakumar, directed APSC to change the name of the group; because according to him ‘Ambedkar Periyar’ are politically motivated names, and student organisations should be apolitical and should not have names of individuals. No such decree for right-wing organisations operating under the name of ‘Vivekananda Study Circle.’ Consider this one gem of an example from the Vivekananda Study Circle website: The title of the page is ‘Is Kali Black?’ and has the following quote claimed by them to be from The Gospel of Ramakrishna—"Is Kali, my Divine Mother, of a black complexion? She appears black because She is viewed from a distance; but when intimately known She is no longer so. The sky appears blue at a distance; but look at it close by and you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance, but when you go near and take it in your hand, you find that it is colourless.”[1].

India is a society replete with caste violence. Some estimates claim that each week: 13 Dalits are murdered; 5 Dalit homes are burned down; 6 Dalit people are kidnapped or abducted; 21 Dalit women are raped. It is not a coincidence that majority of manual scavengers are from the downtrodden classes. There are systemic and structural issues in Indian society why such violence happens on a regular basis and are under-reported in the mainstream media. It is important that such issues are talked about more, and we stand in solidarity with every initiative that raises awareness about caste violence, Ambedkar and Periyar. The egregious politics of skin colour, as the example cited above suggests, and violence towards the downtrodden caste is prevalent in Indian society. We cannot eradicate caste distinction by not talking about it, by avoiding to name organisations after Ambedkar-Periyar—it is exactly the opposite—we need to confront caste politics head on as a nation, admit the historical injustices meted out to dalits, adivasis and other lower castes, and admit that a lot of it are ongoing.
We understand that this current action by the HRD ministry to pressurise IIT Madras, and the subsequent actions taken by the Dean of Students to be a continuation of the brahminisation project of the hindutva forces in the Indian polity, whose most recent manifestations have been in the spate of ghar-wapsi, church violence and increase in incidents of communal violence across the country. We decry all such efforts by the hindutva forces, the direct involvement of the government in arm twisting anti-brahminical endeavours and condemn IIT Madras, the premiere institution that it is, for the shameful decision to intimidate and muzzle conversation on caste.

We also condemn the failure of the so called liberal oppositions. It is significant that only after two days of hue and cry in the Social Media did the liberal mainstream media report on the issue. For mainstream politics, there are certain shared premises. While the alleged upholders of political liberalism and secularism condemn actions of the Sanghis, they do not desire to challenge the upper caste dominations. We call upon all Marxist and socialist forces to recognise that without a serious attack on the oppression of the lower castes, the unity of the toilers cannot be achieved, and therefore, fighting for the rights of dalits is a vital part of any genuine Marxist politics in India.

Finally, we stress that the ban on the APSC is part of the increasing violation of democratic rights. It is therefore necessary for the APSC and their supporters, as well as for any organisation fighting for democratic rights, to link up this specific struggle (the restoration of the rights of the APSC) with the general struggle for democratic rights.

30 May, 2015

Pakistan- A defeat that generated feelings of victory

It was one of best votes for any left candidate in decades during any general election held in Pakistan, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. The imprisoned Baba Jan, a candidate of Awami Workers Party, got around 4641 votes and came second in the list during the Gilgit Baltistan legislative assembly elections held on June 8 2015.

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) candidate got 8245 votes and won the seat. He is the former ruler of Hunza estate with billions of rupees at his disposal. Pakistan Peoples’ Party which had won this seat in the 2009 election trailed behind Baba Jan with 3201 votes and the most popular newly established bourgeois party of cricketer Imran Khan Tehreek Insaaf (Justice Movement) was in fourth position with less than 2291 votes. The religious Shia party Majlis Wahadat Muslimeen (MWM) was in fifth position 1041 votes, and the candidate of the party established by former dictator General Musharaf, called All Pakistan Muslim League, was on 254.

Baba Jan has been in jail since September 2014 and is serving a life sentence announced by an anti-terrorist court. His real crime was to help the victims of climate change in the area who had protested for fair compensation for all effects of Atta Abad artificial lake created by the land slide on River Hunza in 2010. Baba Jan led a mass movement as leader of Progressive Youth Front, where the town of Ali Abad was under control of the locals for four days. They were demanding the registration of murder case against the police officer who killed a protesting father and son.

Baba Jan was arrested in 2011, spent two years in jail before being released on bail and was arrested again after a brief period when a life sentence was awarded to him. A second life sentence was awarded to him few days later. The Appellate Court (Supreme Court GB) has acquitted Baba Jan and his 12 comrades in one case and an appeal is being launched against the second life sentence.

Baba Jan was allowed to take part in the election of 35 seat Gilgit Baltistan legislative assembly, 24 seats were to be contested directly and the rest filled through different quotas.

Baba Jan hails from a working class family. He had no billions of rupees at his disposal to spend on the election campaign. However, he had led the mass movements and was known throughout the most scenic Hunza valley bordering China, India and Afghanistan.

No party before

When Baba Jan and his comrades decided to take part in the elections, there was no formal structure of Awami Workers Party. AWP had decided not to build AWP in the valley because constitutionally Gilgit Baltistan is not part of Pakistan. And AWP respected the independent views of the comrades residing in the valley who were fighting for greater autonomy and rights.

However, if comrades in the valley decided to build a party on the name of Awami Workers Party GB, we would have no objection. It was already decided by Baba Jan and other comrades in the valley to name the new party as AWP GB but the process was still underway to establish the formal structures.

At the founding congress of AWP in September 2014, two slots on the federal committee were allotted to the comrades of Gilgit Baltistan. Two were elected including Baba Jan who was in jail and other was residing in Islamabad for his professional duties. Who would run the campaign?
A great comradely discussion started within AWP about what to do. The view that without the party, the election of Baba Jan was not much of benefit had quite a weight. The other view was “let’s build the party during the election campaign”. To start with, we must establish an organising committee of AWP in Hunza. This was agreed after a lot of informal meetings and discussions among the top leadership of AWP in consultation with Baba Jan and the other FC member from the area.

The organising committee was elected at the first AWP membership meeting in Hunza at the beginning of May, a month before the election. A broader election campaign organising committee was established with the main activists of nationalists, progressives and AWP comrades led by veteran left activist Engineer Aman Ullah.

Baba Jan is a towering left activist with no hint of sectarianism. He had built great respect among all the progressive with his full time revolutionary work over a decade. As a student leader, he was the top leader of PPP youth. He left them to join Labour Party Pakistan in 2001 and became part of the top leadership of the party. His main contribution was to build Progressive Youth Front, a youth organisation started by supporters of LPP. LPP merged to form AWP in 2012 and Baba Jan became the first vice president of AWP.

Now after the elections, we have an AWP organising committee with new membership, and 1000 membership forms have been distributed among the youth. We hope to expand the network to other areas of the valley as well.

**Personalities do matter**

Baba Jan participated in all the mass movements in the valley along with the nationalist forces but still kept his socialist ideas intact and never joined a nationalist group. He took up the issue of the artificial lake and toured around Pakistan addressing press conferences, organising youth meeting to warn about the great dangers of climate change. The Atta Abad Lake became a national issue because of great personal initiatives.

He was also one of the main leaders of Awami Action Committee which organised a mass movement against the withdrawal of state subsidy on wheat. He was part of the sit-in for weeks and addressed thousands every day. He is a great orator. The movement forced the PPP government in 2013 to withdraw the suggestion of removing subsidies.

Baba Jan was always for the organisation of a left party, and is not an individual who is keen to promote himself above the party building process.

Baba Jan’s name is very sweet, Baba literally means an old wise person and Jan means life. During the election campaign the most popular slogan with a great rhythm was “Teri Jan Meri Jan Baba Jan Baba Jan”. It means your life and my life is Baba Jan.

**Campaign**

We had no amount in our party account that could be used for elections. The decision was not calculated as the sudden announcement by PMLN government to go for election had surprised everyone. The PMLN government had just signed a 140 Billion dollar agreement with the Chinese to build an economic corridor from Gwader port to China which would pass through Gilgit Baltistan. An impression was created that the valley would be the main beneficiary. They wanted to be on the receiving end of this political mileage. An immediate donation appeal was sent to all friends and comrades inside and outside. However, AWP had been raising funds again and again on several initiatives during the year. So there was not much hope.

The posters, flexes and party flags were printed and sent from Lahore. It takes nearly 48 hours to send things to Gilgit from Lahore. Several students from Gilgit who had been working along with Baba Jan had already announced they would go back home to take part in the election campaign. This was a great beginning. Young students from elite private universities opted to carry all this printed matter with them all the way to Gilgit. As the first batch of students with printed matter arrived, it was snatched within hours by supporters who wanted to take this to their own areas.

The constituency is spread over hundreds of miles around the mountains and valleys; it was one of the largest constituencies with 36,000 voters. “Send us another 1000 AWP flags and 10,000 posters” was the call we received on the day.

Flag making also takes time. Within three days another round of printed matter was sent. The first great rally was taken out on May 24 which surprised everyone. People of the area brought their own vehicles, motorcycles and tractors for this rally. The second rally that I participated in on March 31 was an historic one. Never in the history of this constituency had so many people with hundreds of cars, motorcycles and tractors participated in a very charged rally. We had the largest public meeting in the home town of PMLN candidate and challenged his royal authority.

Here is what one young socialist and member AWP Islamabad Ammar Rashid accurately wrote about the election campaign after his return from the area.

“It just returned from Hunza after the conclusion of Baba Jan’s election campaign, where I was witness to some truly remarkable sights. In the middle of the majestic Karakorams, thousands of young working class
men and women have staged a revolt against the political and economic status-quo under the leadership of AWP’s socialist candidate for the GB Assembly, Comrade Baba Jan.

Baba Jan remains a political prisoner but his decision to run for election from behind bars has unlocked the floodgates of pent-up disaffection among the young and working poor of Hunza. The already-acknowledged popularity he enjoyed has now spilled over into visible, effective mass support the likes of which has been seldom witnessed in this most remote of regions. The red and white colors of the AWP now dot the landscape of Hunza from Nasirabad to Chipursan.

This was no run-of-the-mill election campaign. Something that started off without any funds organisational experience transformed into a mass uprising in a matter of days. People donated their homes and shops as campaign offices across the valley. Others gave whatever little they had for arranging transport and logistics for rallies, often on the spot as organisers appealed for assistance. Several others contributed with original poetry and music that became the mainstay of the public gatherings.

For the first time in Hunza’s history, women were at the forefront of a political campaign, opening their own election offices, organising their own rallies and leading the fray with their own improvised, heavily-charged slogans and speeches. Compared to the patronage-based political logic of all other parties in Hunza, this was a movement truly started, owned and sustained by the people.

This was not empty-minded, hero-worshipping populism either. Among all the activists involved, serious questions were being debated, from the nature of class exploitation, to Gilgit-Baltistan’s place in the federation, to debates on national identity, to the reality of state hegemony, repression and exclusion, to the legitimacy of the heavily classist electoral process, to the significance of gender equality, to the need for inter-faith, inter-sect and inter-ethnic solidarity. There was a palpable sense of an opportunity to critically engage with contradictions of society and state that are all too often brushed under the carpet.

As Gilgit-Baltistan votes today, the imprisoned Baba Jan will be up against the combined might of the traditional Hunza royalty, established bureaucratic mandarins, and the political and financial might of the heavily-moneyed mainstream parties. For his working class supporters, even arranging transport for remote voters on election day will be nigh impossible, much less competing with the millions in election handouts being distributed by the likes of Marvi Memon of the PMLN and others.

Whatever the election result though, Baba Jan has, through his defiance, commitment and ideological perseverance, laid the foundations for genuine political transformation in Gilgit-Baltistan and created space for the flowering of a renewed Leftist political consciousness. It is merely a start and one with a potentially deeply hazardous future, especially in the face of severe human and financial resource constraints. But it is this peerless example from Pakistan’s ignored periphery that progressives must look to if we are to resurrect the Left in Pakistan.”

**After the defeat**

After the defeat of Baba Jan, there is no unpleasant feeling of defeat. The defeat has generated more energy among the comrades. It has provided comrades an unforgettable experience of mass mobilisation without real resources. Everyone I talked to spoke of a great campaign and that we have not lost anything, more than that there is feeling of victory underneath the defeat. All supporters of the campaign congratulated each other.

The mood was set by Baba Jan himself from behind bars.

“There is a victory in the defeat. No one has challenged the former royalty as powerfully as we did. I had no block vote of a tribe, cast, and area or on religious basis. I came second at almost all polling stations. I got votes from everywhere unlike my billionaire opponents who had block votes in some areas. It was working class and working people everywhere who rose from the shackles of slavery of the corrupt capitalist system and voted for me fearlessly. It was the youth who had no votes but were seen everywhere chanting slogans of revolution. May be good that I did not win, because of the massive expectations that have been generated from my campaign, and maybe I would have not been able to meet those. Now we have more time to prepare. I have won the hearts and soul of my class and that is a victory and not a defeat”.

He told me a day after the election campaign. “Please convey my thanks to our friends abroad and inside Pakistan that supported my campaign anyway they could”. He repeated it several times.

A political and organisational follow up is being discussed. But the most important task is to strengthen the campaign for the release of all three climate change victims who are still behind bars, including Baba Jan.

**Argentina- Electoral amnesia in Argentina**

In the run-up to Argentina’s national elections in October, a scramble for power has divided the incumbent Peronista party into warring factions. Founded by Juan Perón in 1946, the Partido Justicialista ruled through sometimes radical nationalism, state intervention in the economy, clientelist patronage and control over trade unions, and the loyalty of sections of the bourgeoisie and an elite political class of bureaucrats. After
the dictatorship of the 1970s, the party emerged as the main beneficiary of the return to democracy, only to be buffeted by a severe depression in 2001, accompanied by the mass uprising known as the Argentinazo.

Nestor Kirchner’s 2003 election restored the party to power, and the subsequent appointment and reelection of his widow, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (popularly referred to as CFK) after his death in 2007 cemented Kirchnerismo’s dominance over the party for more than a dozen years. But a series of scandals—including the mysterious death of Alberto Nisman, a special prosecutor who the right alleges planned to implicate CFK’s administration in a cover of a terrorist bombing of a Jewish cultural center—and a slowing economy have cast a pall over the Kirchner’s contribution to Latin America’s “Pink Tide”—so named for the string of left and center-left governments that have ruled most of South America for more than a decade.

This year’s election will present Argentine voters with a dizzying array of choices, especially at the local level, but also in the fight for the presidency. Daniel Scioli, whose career has included stints as a professional powerboat racer and Nestor Kirchner’s vice president, hopes to carry on his political patron’s administration under the Justicialista-led Front for Victory (FpV) electoral alliance. But a series of splits have divided the ruling party into a multitude of factions. One of the most successful is headed by one-time Kirchnerista Sergio Massa, who served as Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers in 2008 and 2009 for Fernandez de Kirchner. Massa is running on the dissident Justicialista Renewal Front.

On the right, the current mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri, heads a coalition of strange bedfellows composed of Macri’s own conservative PRO party (Propuesta Republicana) and the longstanding social democratic Radical Civic Union (Unión Cívica Radical, or UCR). The pact is justified on opposition to the Kirchnerismo’s supposed authoritarian tendencies, but smacks of rank electoral opportunism.

Meanwhile, the collapse of any credible mainstream challenge to the left of Kirchnerismo has opened the door for the Left and Workers Front (Frente de la Izquierda y los Trabajadores, or FIT). This coalition came together in 2011 in response to a new electoral law raising the threshold for small parties to win seats in Argentina’s generously proportional system. Initially composed of the Socialist Workers Party (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas, PTS), the Workers Party (Partido Obrero, PO) and the smaller Socialist Left (Izquierda Socialista, IS), the Front won 2.5 percent of the presidential vote in 2011 and won three seats in the National Congress. The Front and its constituent groups command a significant following among students, workers and the poor. But it has incorporated only a minority of the existing revolutionary left organizations and is now engaged in a discussion about whether to open the coalition to broader left-wing forces—and if so, how.

In an article originally published at Rebelion.org and here abridged slightly in translation, Claudio Katz, widely published Argentine author and member of the Economists of the Left collective, dissects the economic and political landscape, putting the upcoming elections in the context of rising social tensions and the beginnings of a potentially historic political reorganization of the country’s revolutionary left. — Todd Chretien

Daniel Scioli

ARGENTINA FINDS itself in the midst of an unusual electoral sequence. On very few occasions have there been so many opportunities to vote in so little time, and the electoral calendar isn’t letting up. Between national, local and primary elections, people will go to the polls five or six times this year.

This succession of elections has involved lots of voting, but not much debate. The main candidates promote similar agendas and even look a lot alike. You have to use a magnifying glass to find the real differences between Mauricio Macri, Sergio Massa and Daniel Scioli. It has never been so clear that the three candidates in play are really all the same.

The presidential administrations of first Nestor Kirchner and then his widow Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (popularly know as CFK) of the last decade are coming to a close at long last. They are ridden with merely artificial polarization and stacked with clearly right-wing proposals. The only thing that is in question is who will get to lead the conservative turn that is coming down the road.

---The Trio’s Similarities---

The tremendous similarities between Scioli, Massa and Marci are confirmed by the stampede of political operatives racing from one camp to another. These sorts of jumps are common to Justicialismo, but the practice has now been extended across the political spectrum. Right up to the filing dates for candidates, it’s been hunting season for party insiders and financiers.

Once in motion, the candidates competed over who could say the least in a flood of ads set to pop music. All of this has prompted laughter and thousands of jokes. This vacuous parade has stoked cynicism from many commentators who offer up the candidates’ patent lies as the common sense of these electoral battles. Everyone assumes that former presidents Carlos Menem’s or Fernando de la Rúa’s broken promises would be repeated, and that no candidate would carry out their pledges once elected. The principles of bourgeois government are on full display.

Another indication of the charade was the rush to conjure up candidates. Publicists sought out well-known figures to attract votes. The precedent that was inaugurated when the Justicialistas recruited singer and actor Palito Ortega and Formula One racing star Carlos Reutemann to run for office and has now been
adopted by all competing parties. And in the province of Buenos Aires, the ballot lines are headed by models, boxers and experts in frivolity.

Given all of this, Argentina’s most popular TV host Marcello Tinelli set the tone for the campaign, making imitations, dancing around stage and sharing crude jokes prerequisites for any candidate wanting to appear presidential. A quick glance affirms that this clowning around tells you all you need to know about of our hopeful future heads of state. In fact, they have already been filtered through the establishment’s selection process at the provincial or municipal level, and the only question left for the public is if they retain a certain degree of sympathy or charisma to win elections.

Cynics justify this circus by blaming society at large. They argue that the people “don’t want to see reality,” but they are forgetting how the powers that be (and not the people in general) manipulate the electoral choices available.

Their empty phrases are just another indication of the fraud underway. Scioli emphasizes "continuity," Macri stresses "change," and Massa promotes something in between which is equally indecipherable. Meanwhile, the men of the PRO drone on about the need for "dialogue in place of confrontation." They deploy all manner of bells and whistles, offering up happy thoughts to stamp out pessimism.

It’s the same marketing that the Latin American right has used to reinvent itself based by inventing new social discourses, promises of assistance, and youthful candidate profiles. They emphasize the centrality of management and proclaim the dissolution of all ideologies.

This degradation of politics fits right in with PRO’s plans, which looks to absorb not only the traditional right wing that organized the cacerolazos—the pot-banging protests against the Kirchners—but also the minions of the privatizing NGOs. These sectors are more comfortable with apolitical messages than with the old reactionary anti-communist line.

Massa’s operators have opted for a suitably accommodating slogan "Change within continuity," which allows him to "preserve the positive" and "change the negative." He hopes to use these concepts to obscure his ultra-conservative stance, which he nonetheless put on full display during his visit to the United States.

Scioli doesn’t need any advice on how to maneuver without saying anything of substance. He managed to climb to the highest posts in the Menem and Kirchner administrations without ever once speaking a single sentence that meant anything.

The government’s publicists try to fill in this gaping hole with Scioli’s main campaign message: defend what has been gained against a return to the 1990s. But this supposed contrast to the past must omit Scioli’s whole political trajectory and his striking similarity to the other candidates, all of whom have traveled the same path designed by the establishment.

No one knows who will win the trophy in October. Most current opinion polls have been conducted by campaign operatives and offer unreliable data, leading to a constant reevaluation of who is out in front. Recently, the populist Massa’s numbers have been in a free fall, and this is adding to pressure on him to drop out of the race. But reaching an agreement with right-wing Macri will be difficult because the posts up for grabs extend beyond the heads of each ticket.

The establishment finds itself in its traditional dilemma. Its most reliable man (Macri) isn’t the person who will guarantee them their tightest control over the state (Scioli). Thus, the powers that be are handing out campaign contributions to both candidates, incentivizing Macri to converge with sections of the Justicialistas (Reutemann and Massa), while Scioli is encouraged to build bridges to the right-wing elite.

The real problem for these power brokers is not who is going to win, but how the eventual winner will deal with the social-economic crisis waiting in the wings.

--- Preparing for Economic Adjustment

The current government has managed to cover up the conservative economic turn it made this spring. By maintaining the link to the dollar (it would have risen by 15 percent) in the face of inflation (not less than 25 percent), consumption was restructured over the course of the year, and all adjustments have been passed along to the incoming administration.

This trick is par for the course and has been used before elections in the past. As this strategy required coming to rapid agreements with joint labor-management boards, government officials negotiated strict ceilings on wage increases with the union bureaucracy.

On the one hand, the union leaderships acceded to the wages lost during the year, but on the other hand, they stabilized purchasing power for the months leading up to the elections. The same end was accomplished by adjustments announced for taxes on profits, which provide benefits for the unemployed.

The cosmetics applied today only go to shield the blows that all three candidates are preparing tomorrow. All aim to reduce the fiscal deficit, reduce wages and apply steep tariffs on energy and transportation. Their programs include devaluations to eliminate the currency black market. Macri wants to eliminate this immediately, Massa talks about doing it in 100 days, while Scioli suggests a longer period. This convergence
of goals also extends to substituting investment for consumption as the government’s priority. But this turn requires enticing the capitalists who supply the money and implies offering them bigger subsidies in a period of large budget cuts.

The trio plans to finance their new model with international borrowing. Fortunately for them, the current government has already headed down this path, signing agreements with the Paris Club, renationalizing part of Argentina’s oil fields (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales, or YPF) and settling disputes through the World Bank (specifically, the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes).

CFK has pursued this course by securing credit from China and issuing bonds on the international market. These new bond issues will not go to finance productive projects. They pay three times the interest offered by the rest of South America and are solely aimed at guaranteeing currency reserves and consumption during the election season.

The financing secured so far will also allow the winner in October to build a bridge to settle with the so-called vultures—U.S. speculators who have refused to settle outstanding Argentine debt, insisting on being repaid $5.4 billion for junk bonds.

An agreement with Thomas Griesa, the U.S. judge appointed to oversee restructuring of Argentinian debt, will be the precondition for a significant influx of dollars, which the incoming president will use to implement structural adjustment. This pending agreement, if it can be reached, will signal a truce with the markets. So far, the vultures have failed to block Argentina from obtaining credit, while the government has failed to win the change of venue to Buenos Aires to settle repayment of the bonds in dispute.

Macri, Massa and Scioli are all eager to settle this conflict, putting into practice some of the initiatives promoted by CFK (changing the law on guarantees, writing off part of the balance, issuing new bonds).

While preparing this turn, the candidates promise a flood of dollars that will make any adjustment painless, and they are competing to show who can sure up the most market confidence to accelerate the bonanza. But none of them explain what will be offered to the potential providers of all this foreign exchange.

Money never flows in because of sympathy with a new president. The lords of finance always first verify that the new head of state has the ability to bestow favors on their business. The great Argentine capitalists are eager to add to their fortunes under the next administration. They are hiding some $70 billion inside the country and another $300 billion abroad.

The failure of fiscal money laundering—tried again and again by the government—illustrates the shortcomings of amnesties in encouraging evaders to repatriate their money.

The rich require stronger official measures to guarantee capitalist profitability. Macri, Massa and Scioli are all disposed to offer them this protection, arguing that "we need their dollars," as if the lack of liquidity were somehow natural instead of arising from paying off illegitimate debts to the vultures and others, and tolerating currency flight.

All of this notwithstanding, the same government which allowed this offshoring will finish up its time in office by launching a parliamentary investigation into the illegal loss of these funds. During the elections, it will attempt to air some aspects of the fraud it has accepted for a decade, but don’t hold your breath. A similar commission—which investigated financial maneuvers conducted during 2001-03—eventually shelved its conclusions.

At any rate, the bankers all have confidence in the services they will get from Macri, Massa and Scioli, which is why the price for both public bonds and private stocks are rising in all Argentine markets. They are especially hopeful for big business in the petroleum sector because of a new hydrocarbon bill which the government called on Chevron to design.

The partial nationalization of YPF will not allow the state to recover sub-soil profits; on the contrary, it reinforces the profitability of its associated companies by adjusting the prices, which the state enterprise sets. These additional profits have long been demanded by the companies that extract conventional crude oil, as well as those aspiring to exploit shale deposits. And this same trend holds for all projects in the pipeline, especially in the fields of communication, mining and soybeans.

There is a lot of talk about the speed of the coming adjustment. Some expect that Macri will aim for shock therapy, while others believe Scioli will proceed more gradually. But both will be forced to act under the conditions in which they find themselves upon taking office: one either defined by offers of international relief or one much less favorable. Experts are inclined towards the latter. Forecasts predict falling prices and shrinking export purchases, in a context of a rising dollar and interest rates.

Another critical factor will be the level of popular resistance. Each of the presidential candidates can be seen testing the waters when they appeal to "dialogue and negotiation." Some analysts foresee a pact with the trade union leadership, while others predict a coalition government.

However, unlike what occurred under presidents Raúl Alfonsín and Menem, no one expects a sharp economic collapse. The fiscal imbalance is limited, the banks are stable, and the international picture is even manageable.
Still, there is a strong pressure on the establishment to accelerate the adjustment. Not only is the massive Techint Group demanding wage reductions and the elimination of export taxes, but the Taliban of the bourgeoisie (economists such as Miguel Angel Broda, José Luis Espert, Carlos Melconian and Nicolás Dujovne) are talking about eliminating labor-management boards, reinstating the Domingo Cavallo team (the Minister of Economy under de la Rúa, who pegged the peso to the dollar), and cutting the fiscal deficit in half.

The electoral amnesia predominant today serves to make everyone forget these powerful players. But the same opinions can be heard from the economists advising the trio of presidential candidates (Miguel Bein, Roberto Lavagna and Rojelio Frigerio). They are careful to use moderate language and a strong dose of diplomacy, but they are all talking about the structural adjustment, which is in the making.

, - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Repression as Temptation

Workers’ ability to resist constitutes a major obstacle to the blows that Macri, Scioli and Mass are all preparing. The last general strike was an example of this potential force. It attained a level of cohesion greater than the three previous strikes. Unions pushed for a complete shutdown in the face of a government which didn’t even try to persuade them not to.

The strike not only served as a warning to whoever becomes the next president, it also demonstrated the weakness of all the official arguments against the protests. The workers were not thrown off by the media’s heavy artillery against “political strikes” that were only "hurting the poor," "helping the bureaucrats" and using "inappropriate methods."

Far from being a battle of the “labor aristocracy” to the detriment of the poorest workers, the strike’s demand to raise the threshold on income taxes as part of wage negotiations will stimulate action by all of the oppressed. Because inflation is so high, workers who never before made nearly enough money to cross the threshold are now being forced to pay income taxes, even though their pay is simply being adjusted for inflation.

These strikes may help revive the old traditions of workers with higher salaries taking the lead, and they make the point that relief for the poorest should be financed from business taxes, and not based on taxing incomes of the better-paid employees.

The strikes against the tax, moreover, have clarified the real social situation in the country. If only 10 percent of employed workers are impacted by this tax, the immense majority of workers earn salaries less than what is required for subsistence. The 15,000 pesos threshold for this tax is barely more than the 12,000 pesos needed to meet a family’s basic needs. That half of the population survives on incomes lower than 5,500 pesos is hardly compatible with the image of a winning decade.

Macri, Scioli and Mass have all necessarily decided to continue hiding this somber reality behind statistical smokescreens. After proclaiming that Argentina had arrived in the First World—eradicating indigence and reducing poverty to 4.7 percent—the National Institute of Statistics and the Census went silent about all other indices. In fact, poverty has remained at the same rates since the 1990s (around 25 percent), with two important differences: unemployment is not as high, and there is a high level of social spending on assistance to the poor.

At the same time, structural misery has consolidated social degradation and led to an increase in crime. No one even pretends to know the exact figures, but the rough crime numbers tell the story of an obvious multiplication in violent robberies, owing to the terrible marginalization that accompanies the drug trade.

The only response to this social drama on offer from the presidential trio is for the strong hand of the police. The workers were not thrown off by the media’s heavy artillery against “political strikes” that were only “hurting the poor,” “helping the bureaucrats” and using “inappropriate methods."

This turn towards authoritarianism has also been paved by the government. After presiding over cases of genocide, retrieving grandchildren and codifying significant democratic gains after the fall of the military dictatorship, CFK kept the accused torturer César Milani at the head of the army and delegated the management of security to the ultra right-wing Sergio Berni.

, - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Hopes on the Left
The entrance of the Left and Workers Front (Frente de la Izquierda y de los Trabajadores, or FIT) onto the scene as a national force constitutes the most promising element in an otherwise grim electoral scene. Its advance can be explained by the significant presence of left-wing organizers in recent social struggles, successfully directing part of this resistance into the political arena.

Many analysts are surprised by the influence that the three Trotskyist forces who initiated the FIT have gained, pointing out that there is no equivalent situation anywhere in the world. Yet these foreign observers often misunderstand critical factors. For instance, it is important to keep in mind the specific history of Peronismo and the traditional left’s (both socialist and communist) failure to understand this movement.

In the current circumstances, the FIT is resisting a polarization that has already ground down significant actors on the political spectrum. The results from the last elections confirm the Front’s gravitational pull, even though it did not surpass those of 2013. But if upcoming elections produce merely similar results, then the great hopes for a large break to the left, away from Kirchnerismo, will remain unrealized.

Most evidence points to a right turn in the upcoming elections, based on a conservative reaction to the perceived onset of an economic slowdown and a rise in unemployment. There is fear that what has been gained over the last decade will be lost, and this sentiment leads to paralysis and reinforces loyalty to the status quo.

These reactions are stoked by the incumbent party’s reviving memories of 2001, while their right-wing opponents offer an alternative imaginary tale. The latter attribute all the nation’s ills to Kirchner’s so-called progressive policies, divorced from what has happened in the rest of the world. Brazil’s right wing is placing its hopes in a similar narrative.

Faced with these restricted electoral horizons, the left has captured a section of progressive, anti-Kirchner voters. Yet CFK has demonstrated a capacity to react to crises (the fight with the vultures, the mysterious death of special prosecutor Alberto Nisman, etc.). and Kirchnerismo has won the allegiance of an important part of the new militancy in the streets. These tendencies must be kept in mind in order to avoid the exaggerated expectation of the imminent “collapse of bourgeois nationalism.”

Clearly, Peronismo has lost the loyalty and mythical status it enjoyed in the past, but this loss is more commonly felt in the hallways of the ministries than it is expressed in militant protests in the streets. And however one measures it, this weakness should not be equated with the extinction of Peronismo as the nation’s main political structure of the past seventy years.

The sharp crises that periodically confront Peronismo at the close of each political cycle reopen the possibilities for building a large left-wing force. Various forces have sought to direct these energies in the past, and it is falling to the FIT to attempt this task today.

To do so, the sectarian legacy of orthodox Trotskyism in Argentina must be overcome. The first step past this obstacle was the conclusion of an agreement between the different parties within the FIT. The second step is being confirmed in practice as the old dogmatic rhetoric has vanished from the FIT’s speeches, posters and messages directed to the general public.

However, the most controversial problem involves opening up the FIT beyond the closed agreement of the three initiating parties to other organizations and currents originating in different political traditions on the left.

This process has not really begun, and it remains to be seen if FIT will be capable of making this transition. Yet we must not write off this potential beforehand and must emphasize the positive role it has played in rebuilding the Argentine left, even as we point out some of the FIT’s negative features—such as its hostility to the Bolivarian revolutionary process in Venezuela or to the Cuban Revolution.

The FIT occupies the vacuum left by political currents that decided to dissolve themselves into Justicialista or into the anti-Kirchnerismo center-left. If the path to returning to this space together is uncertain, then the alternative path of voting for Scioli or for Margerita Stolbizer (the centrist social democrat, currently with little traction in the polls) means political suicide. The Front doesn’t provide easy answers for building revolutionary socialism in Latin America, but it does constitute the best chances for doing so up until now.

In the immediate future, a vote for the left is a mandate for resistance to abuses coming down the pike, and this is the chief argument for voting for the FIT. The more deputies and legislators the left wins, the stronger our armor will be when it comes to fighting the new government’s plans for structural adjustment.

June 3, 2015

Translated by Todd Chretien for socialistworker.org.

USA- Hillary Clinton’s Family Values

Hillary Clinton is well-versed in child welfare issues, having devoted much of her career to them, and her views, at first glance, seem progressive. Her popular 1996 book, It Takes a Village, starts from the premise that “children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough to provide for
them.” She emphasizes the need to give parents “the physical, financial, and emotional support they need to raise children well,” and argued that government “cannot retreat from its historic obligations to the poor and vulnerable.”

But these words are difficult to reconcile with Clinton’s actions in her long political career. Most troublesome is her support for the 1996 “welfare reform” act, which replaced the longstanding Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

In a chapter she wrote for a 1979 book on children’s rights, she urges the development of “a family policy in this country that provides stigma-free assistance to families in trouble.” Yet TANF is one of the most stigmatizing programs we have.

Under TANF, many states maintain a “family cap” rule, which denies benefits to any additional children born to a mother receiving assistance from the program. For “approved” children, arbitrary time limits are placed on the receipt of benefits, regardless of whether their needs outlast the time limits. And if mothers fail to comply with job-training, job search, and work requirements, it is their children who see their benefits reduced or get kicked off the program.

These reforms are all aimed at controlling mothers’ behaviors. In her 2003 memoir, Living History, Clinton explains her support for TANF: “I didn’t think it was fair that one single mother improvised to find child care and got up early every day to get to work while another stayed home and relied on welfare.”

Never mind that the welfare such a mother relied on was a pittance. She was not deserving of it. The TANF program would fix the recalcitrant mother by placing conditions on her — and her child’s — receipt of even the most minimal assistance.

In addition to backing TANF, Clinton proudly claims to have been the driving force behind the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. She writes in Living History that she “convened adoption experts in a series of White House meetings” and “outlined a blueprint” that led to the legislation’s passage.

ASFA has provided states with financial incentives to adopt more children out of foster care each year than they did previously, and sets an arbitrary time limit (fifteen months) on the termination of parental rights for children in foster care.

The national foster care population has always consisted predominantly of children from indigent families. Many believe that only children who have been severely abused or neglected by their parents, poor or not, are removed by the government and placed in foster care. This is far from the case. It is not unusual for children to be put in foster care due to a family’s inadequate housing or outright homelessness, lack of resources, or inability to obtain day care.

As a result of ASFA, adoptions of children out of foster care leaped to 50,000 children per year in 2000, and have not dipped below that number since. Based on 2011 federal data, on any given day almost one million children — and an estimated six out of every one hundred children from poor families — are residing in adoptive homes or foster care, placed there by the public child welfare system. These figures represent the greatest government-sponsored mass transfer of poor children from their own homes in our country’s history.

ASFA rests on the fantasy that by removing impoverished children from their houses, we can avoid “rewarding” their “undeserving” parents without harming the children themselves, and that we can promote “permanence” of children’s living arrangements (through adoption) while undermining it in their own homes.

Government has always supported poor children more generously in other people’s homes than in their own. Clinton’s version of children’s rights does not appear to include the right to be sustained within their own families.

In contrast to this view of government as judge of deservedness and distributor of rewards, penalties, and incentives is the recognition of the existence of a communal wealth that belongs to all of us. Indeed, both physical and social infrastructures, some built long before any of us were even born, have produced a common wealth beyond what any of us can be said to have earned on our own.

Children have not done anything to deserve a share of this bounty, nor has anyone else. But they are entitled to it as members of the community, as are unemployed adults and adults who have never been employed. Rather than continuing to remove poor children from their own homes, we should provide both parents and children their fair piece of the community pie, and cast aside the delusion that we can or should assist children without assisting their parents.

Clinton doesn’t seem to understand this. While her campaign fundraising letters claim she has spent her entire life “fighting for children and families,” her record suggests otherwise.

Leroy H. Pelton is professor emeritus of social work at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His most recent book is Frames of Justice: Implications for Social Policy.
Obituary- François Vercammen, member of the Belgian section of the Fourth International

We have heard of the death of our Belgian comrade François Vercammen on Tuesday, June 16, 2015 after a long illness. Aged 69, François was a pillar of the LCR (Belgian section of the Fourth International) but also one of the main leaders of the Fourth International. For years, thanks to his knowledge of several languages, he had regularly monitored the activities of its different sections and in particular of the French LCR.

A faithful companion of our comrade, Ernest Mandel, a Belgian economist recognized worldwide, François was himself the author of many books and publications and was for a long time involved with training at the Amsterdam School.

He attentively followed the debates in the LCR up to the creation of the NPA and many will remember his ability to listen, his kindness and his simplicity. Very open to all developments and debates, he nonetheless maintained the rigor necessary to revolutionary combat.

He was known for his laughter, his love of life and of activism until a stroke a few years ago which quickly cut him off from the world.

Alain Krivine

The death of our comrade François Vercammen

Our friend and comrade François Vercammen died on Tuesday, June 16, 2015. François had been ill for years and had been cared for in an institution for the last few months. He passed away peacefully, in the presence of his companion, Leen, surrounded by the affection of his loved ones.

François’s conscious political life was entirely devoted to the struggle for the emancipation of the exploited and oppressed. Born into a family of Antwerp dockworkers, François was won at a very young age to revolutionary Marxism and to the Fourth International. Through his profound knowledge of the working class, his great historic culture and his strategic vision, he rapidly established himself as a leader of the first level, first in Belgium and then in Europe.

Within the Belgian section, François was noted particularly for his fine analysis of the strength and the weaknesses of the labour movement, particularly from what he called the “oppositional reformism” of the FGTB. Many trade unionists have benefited from his insights, simple without superficiality and pedagogic without paternalism.

Within the Fourth International, François participated, with Pierre Rousset, in the foundation of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam, within which he perfected his knowledge of the Russian revolution and of the thought of Lenin, of whom he was a great admirer.

During his last active years, François threw all his strength and intelligence into the analysis of the “European despotic proto-state” and the construction of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL). Constantly travelling from one end of the continent to the other, he was involved in actively building links between the Italian PRC, the Scottish SSP, the Red-Green Alliance of Denmark, the Portuguese Left Bloc, and the French LCR, in particular.

In 2005, François took an important role in the organization of a symposium in tribute to his spiritual father, Ernest Mandel, ten years after the death of the latter. Those who knew him retain the memory of a man who was friendly, helpful, fully dedicated to the cause of the emancipation, contemptuous of honours and those who sought them.

François was a formidable and intransigent polemicist, but someone who, in debates, never left the terrain of the ideas and principles to which he devoted his life. A special tribute will be made on July 3, 2015 in Brussels, in the afternoon (the time is not yet fixed), in the salle La Tentation, rue de Laeken 28. We will return soon on the life of François, on this site.

In the name of the LCR, we express our very sincere condolences to Leen and to François’s family. The struggle continues, and “Swa” remains in our hearts.

Daniel Tanuro and Thomas Weyts

François Vercammen, a militant generation

François Vercammen was one of our leading cadre coming out of the 1960s youth radicalization. Playing an important role in the renewal of the organization in Belgium, he was actively involved in the Fourth International in the constitution a leadership team composed of activists from the same generation (from various countries and continents) - alongside "old" comrades such as Ernest Mandel, Livio Maitan and Pierre Frank. His main field of activity was Europe.
He drew heavily on the European experience when we together launched the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam in 1982 (he remained a co-director until 1985). At the time, two three-month educational sessions were held each year in the institute. The purpose not just "transmitting" "knowledge," but more thinking collectively - with participants, as well as visiting speakers - about the lessons of the history of social and revolutionary struggles. In particular, it was an opportunity for our generation of activists in the FI to take stock after some two decades of non-stop activity. Thus, from one session to another, the lectures were enriched by the discussions with Europeans, North and Latin Americans, Asians or Africans, belonging to a range of quite different organizations, not necessarily members of our International. The "educators" were educating themselves through these plural exchanges [1].

Beyond the West European issues, François took up at the IIRE, his substantive work on the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Party and Lenin’s thought. We came together in working on this crucial, founding experience; he had specifically in mind its teachings as seen from Europe - and I as seen in Asia.

François took history very seriously and did not think we could afford to make a clean sweep of the past – without memory organizations are disarmed. But the past must help us to think about the present, not to turn us away from it. François was as humanly as he was politically open.

**Pierre Rousset and Sally Rousset**

Alain Krivine was for many years one of the main spokespersons of the French Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire. Today he is a member of the national leadership of the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party).

Pierre Rousset is a member of the leadership of the Fourth International particularly involved in solidarity with Asia. He is a member of the NPA in France.