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Are women being sent back to the home?

28 November 2012, by **Esther Vivas**

To the extent that they are cutting basic public services, such as health and education, and various social benefits, such as the Dependency Law [1], there are all kinds of care work, invisible but necessary, which eventually fall back, for the most part, on women. The frontal attack against a Welfare State that is in a poor state, as well as the transfer of the cost of the crisis to the popular sectors, lands on our backs.

It is not for nothing that the capitalist system is perpetuated to a considerable extent by the unpaid domestic work that we women, do, mainly in the home. A huge amount of unpaid work, which is absolutely necessary and which capitalism needs in order to survive.

Scarcely come to power, the PP government announced a reduction of â‚¬283 million in an already very anemic Dependency Law, putting it on the verge of disappearing. This is a measure which, in addition to leaving

some 250,000 people without help and making it almost impossible to provide care to new beneficiaries, has increased pressure on women. The care that is already no longer provided by the public administration falls back into the private domain, in the home, and particularly on the mothers and daughters of dependent people. The wellbeing of the family is maintained by an increase in domestic work.

If we analyse the figures concerning inactive persons for 2010 provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), 96.4 per cent of those who stated that they were not seeking employment for family reasons (parenting, caring for sick adults, people with disabilities, etc.) were women. And insofar as they have children, their rate of employment decreases. Without children, women's employment rate stood at 77 per cent, while with children it was 52 per cent. On the other hand, the male employment rate was not affected and it even increased in the case of men

with children. Conclusion: the articulation between waged working life and private life is achieved through exclusion from employment, precarious work and/or a frantic and untenable rhythm of life for many women.

Other measures taken by the government, such as the freezing of pensions and the lengthening of the period of calculation for pension contributions, also have very negative consequences for us. A greater presence in the informal economy and very often an intermittent working life, because of care of dependents, make it difficult to achieve the minimum number of annuities to qualify for a pension.

Women hold the bulk of poorly paid and socially devalued jobs. Out of all part-time contracts, 77.6 per cent are held by women. And the precariousness of employment is even further encouraged by the latest reform of the labour laws, making it

more difficult to ensure our autonomy and the articulation with personal and family life. Thus, it is important to note that both sexes are not on an equal footing on the labour market. Women earn on average nearly 22 per cent less per year than male colleagues, according to the latest Annual Survey on Salary Structure, published in 2009 by INE, and this discrimination increases with the level of education.

In addition to these cuts in our social and labour rights, we must confront a growing reactionary offensive against our sexual and reproductive rights. The proposed reform by the PP of the Abortion Law, which wants to limit even more the conditions, the time limit and the cases concerned in having an abortion, and pushes us several years back, is only the tip of the iceberg of policies which seek to impose a heterosexual model of

sexuality centred on reproduction and to control the reproductive capacity of women. They do not want us to have the right to decide about our own bodies and our lives, and this brings the threat of a criminal punishment in the case of abortion.

On this November 25, we claim this day against sexist violence in order to make visible a violence against women that is invisible but daily and persistent, and which is becoming sharper in the current context of the crisis. In the second quarter of 2012, complaints of macho violence increased by 5.9 per cent compared with the first three months of the year. And women who suffer from these situations are less and less helped and supported because of reductions of public resources.

CiU [2] called elections for the Catalan Parliament for today, 25 November, and the electoral junta banned the

demonstration which was due to take place and which, anyway, is maintained. But, as noted by the Women's Section of the Federation of Neighbours' Associations of Barcelona: "It is not the demonstration of feminist collectives which coincides with election day, on the contrary it is that the election has been called on the 25 November". A fact which proves, once again, that political interest in this issue is equivalent to zero.

The current crisis seeks to send us back to the home and to make us take on our family roles again, catalogued by gender in a retrograde fashion. This is a full-scale offensive against our economic and reproductive rights. But we are not going to take it lying down. It doesn't matter if it displeases some people, but it is we who decide. Women sent back to the home? Not even in your dreams!

The Gaza Massacre and its Enablers

28 November 2012, by **David Finkel**

Other specialized language needs translation too, including this sample from the Israeli military spokesperson: "We take special care to avoid hitting or killing civilians." The translation: "We are going to kill a lot of civilians."

This terminology of military spokespeople applies of course not only to the present Gaza "conflict," but almost universally to others from the U.S. war in Afghanistan to the closing days of the war in Sri Lanka. It has become especially applicable these days to U.S. drone warfare, from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Yemen, where it is self-verified by simply defining all male victims as presumed "militant combatants," whether they were planting IEDs or digging a hole to plant their crops.

Sometimes there's a further explanation for the media to repeat: "In fact, our soldiers even refrain from operations or risk their own safety to

avoid hurting innocent civilians." Translation: "We will kill civilians rather than risk the precious lives of our soldiers (especially when their deaths may bring about a political backlash)."

The most spectacular rhetorical inversion came from Israel's present enabler-in-chief president Barack Obama and his spokesperson Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as she shuttled about brokering the latest cease-fire: "What is required is a solution that brings security for the people of Israel, improves conditions for the people of Gaza and moves towards a comprehensive peace for all the peoples of the region."

Let's translate: "Palestinians will be allowed to just barely eat, sleep and breathe if they surrender their right to resist and accept whatever political crumbs the United States and Israel decide to offer years, or decades, from

now." Israel gets guaranteed "security" while its victims receive some "improved conditions." After twenty years of a "peace process" that produces no peace while Israeli settlements gobble up the West Bank and strangle Palestinian East Jerusalem, it's all too clear what that means.

There is a problem: Despite the horrific suffering in Gaza, whole families wiped out in their homes, schools and media centers and the soccer stadium bombed to rubble, the cynical and vicious operation by the Israeli regime was fundamentally as futile as the previous ones. In the short run it has practically ensured Netanyahu's reelection in Israel's January elections, but in the new Middle East political configuration it will not end the ability of Hamas to govern Gaza and engage in resistance.

The fact that Palestinian resistance is

meaningless in conventional military terms is beside the point. The disruption and trauma it's caused in the lives of the Israeli population — miniscule as that is in comparison with the human carnage in Gaza, as well as the misery in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a whole — is politically intolerable. The Netanyahu government is forced to promise that it will "eliminate the menace from Hamas rockets once and for all," a promise that it cannot keep and that its U.S. enablers cannot deliver.

Hillary Clinton put enormous pressure on the government of Egypt to force Hamas to stand down — using its longstanding ties with the Egyptian military and the implied threat to cut off U.S. aid — but today's Egypt led by the Muslim Brotherhood is not yesterday's compliant Mubarak regime. The Egyptian regime today is far from being "anti-imperialist" or socially progressive, and wracked with internal conflict, but it is forced to respond to the sentiments of its population in a way that the former one never was. For that matter, the Hamas strategy cannot liberate Gaza, let alone free Palestine, but it does express the reality that Palestine cannot and will not simply give up.

The United States and Israel are caught in a trap of their own making. It appears that the Obama administration last summer extracted a promise from Netanyahu to back off from attacking Iran without U.S. permission — especially in advance of

the U.S. election — in exchange for giving Israel blanket permission to run amok in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

As tensions along the Israel-Gaza grew, the Israeli government found itself confronting a very serious threat — the threat of a genuine, permanent truce. In fact, the leader of the Hamas military wing, Ahmed Jabari, had prepared the organization's negotiating position, which was known to the Israeli leadership. That is why he was murdered by an Israeli air strike while driving in the center of Gaza City. It is a very old pattern going back to the 1982, 1973 and even 1967 wars: Arab initiatives for peace are always the greatest "danger" to the Zionist reliance on permanent war and threats of war.

Prior to the cease-fire announcement, the Israeli army had massed for a land invasion of Gaza, but the international political costs to Israel and the United States of a massacre on that scale would be enormous — while at the same time, the economic costs to Israel of a longterm mobilization of reserves also mounted. The Obama administration surely wanted to avoid the nightmare of a ground invasion of Gaza, but is unwilling or unable to put pressure on the Israeli government for a genuine peace agreement, fearing a Congressional backlash at a time when it's desperate to come to a budget deal.

After the cease-fire, Israel continues its practice of shooting at civilians

"too close" to the Gaza border, with fatal results. Nonetheless, Hamas emerges from this latest carnage with enhanced political authority, including the credibility to negotiate — if the Israeli regime is interested in serious negotiation. As things now stand, the deal that is emerging is going to be what was on the table before the assassination of Ahmed Jabari, before the bombing, the deaths of 40 children and wounding of hundreds more, and the other mass destruction — all of it unnecessary, useless and criminal.

It's important to demand the lifting of the Israeli-U.S.-Egyptian siege of Gaza, and a cutoff of all U.S. aid to Israel. But while emergency demonstrations are important, they won't change the causes of this massacre, which lie in the expulsion of the Palestinian people and the denial of their basic rights. Given the complete moral and political collapse of the Obama administration (and Europe) in the face of Israel's criminality, it is overwhelmingly important for the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement to step up its grassroots activism. Global outrage in support of the rights of the Palestinian people is the best tool at hand for ending the most recent massacre and much bigger ones looming ahead.

November 26, 2012

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The will of the people cannot be manipulated

28 November 2012, by Josep María Antentas

The mobilization of 11-S went beyond CiU (Convergence and Union) in its approach but the latter was skillful enough to present itself as the only force that could lead the process and launched a regrettable operation of presidential exaltation of the figure of Mas, who suddenly became a high level "statesman" endowed with a

historic mission: take Catalonia "national fulfillment".

This operation ultimately did not serve to reinforce CiU, either because voters looking for a party that "guarantees" a pro-independence stance opted for ERC, the big winner of the day with their 496,292 (13.68%) votes and 21

deputies, or because, despite all the efforts, CiU could not persuade a significant part of the electorate to forget that the real historical mission of Mas is much more prosaic: being the political executor of a vast reorganization of society at the service of finance capital.

The PSC (Socialist Party of Catalonia) continues a downhill journey that seems to have no end. Gone are the 1,183,299 votes (38.2%) it scored in 1999. Although its leaders feared a still worse outcome, their meagre 523,333 votes (14.6%) converted the elongated shadow of Greece's PASOK into a nightmare which the P (a) S (o) C will not easily exorcise. Torn by tensions between its more Catalanist sector and that more linked to the PSOE, it lacks a credible proposal in the national field, which overlaps with its lack of credibility as a left alternative bearer of another model of society, and its voters have switched to the CiU and ERC and Ciutadans. Devoid of a transformational project and converted into a faithful servant of financial power, European social democracy appears today as a current which is historically exhausted and without its own political project. The PSC is a faithful reflection of this.

The remarkable mobilization of the *españolista* [Spanish centralist] vote, expressed above all in the rise of Ciudadanos who tripled their three previous seats and transformed their 106,154 votes (3.39%) in 2010 to 274,925 (7.58%), is another relevant point from 25-N. This explains how the PP managed to avoid paying the price for Rajoy's cuts and increased their vote from 387,066 votes (12.3%) and 18 seats to 471,197 (13%) and 19 deputies.

The basic logic behind the rise of the *españolista* vote is the development of an independence movement devoid of social content which opens the doors to the demagoguery of Ciudadanos and the PP, and the entire media network, in a context where the trade unions, bureaucratised and institutionalized, and the traditional parties of the left, after decades of

acceptance of social liberalism, have lost their organic link with a working class which is ever more de-structured. It is not clear, however, that beyond an increase in passive electoral support, *españolismo* generates a real social polarization in the popular neighborhoods. The latent threat is there, anyway, which clearly raises the classical old problem of linking the national and social questions.

For the alternative left, 358,857 votes (9.9%) allowed ICV-EUiA (Initiative for a green Catalonia - United Left) to gain 13 deputies, an increase that while significant does not imply a qualitative change, after a fairly lightweight campaign, with a discourse that did not go much beyond defending "social policies" and apparently oriented to finding the disenchanted ex-PSC vote. ICV-EUiA represented, until now, the only credible electoral option and the "useful vote" to the left of the PSC for many voters, but at the same time very clearly appears as "another party", inserted in the traditional party system, little connected with social activism and marked by its managerial past in the Tripartito.

The great novelty in this respect is the emergence of the CUP-Alternativa d'Esquerres (Popular Unity Candidates À Left-Wing Alternative), whose 126,219 votes (3.48%) earned it three deputies. Born as the political instrument of the pro-independence left, the CUP entered Parliament with the electoral and activist support of the organised anti-capitalist left, the alternative municipal movement and broad sectors of the social left alien to the independence movement, something that will force a complex post-election management. After a campaign where the anti-capitalist and democratic radical profile of rupture formed the dominant note, for

the first time a left-wing formation unrelated to the consensus of the transition and with a clear project of rupture has entered the Parliament. The avowed objective: to be the "Trojan horse" of the popular classes.

As a whole, despite the weakness of the forces opposed to austerity and the note that the construction of an alternative with the possibility of becoming a majority is still far, the election results show that the crisis is eroding the traditional party system. The sequestration of politics by financial power causes a growing vacuum and implosion of the democratic institutional mechanisms, causing stress to the political system and eroding the pillars of bipartisanship. The two major parties of Catalan politics, CiU and the PSC, together won 45% of the vote, as against 56.8% in 2010, 58.3% in 2006, 62.1% in 2003 and 75% in 1999. If we add the votes of another big nationwide party, the PP, we get 58%, compared to 69.1% in 2010, 69.3% in 2006, 74% in 2003 and 84.5% in 1999. A clear trend.

With Mas the Messiah weakened Messiah, a pro-independence dynamic whose reversal would be very complicated for CiU and the total bailout of the Spanish state in the horizon, all indications are that the new parliament will not last four years and that it will be anything but placid. For the Catalan left a double task now appears inescapable: to demand that the referendum is held as soon as possible, to make it an exercise in democratic rupture with the flawed regime born in 1978 and to reactivate the pulse of social outrage at the new adjustments which are coming. The challenge? To ensure that Mas the Messiah becomes nothing more than Mas the Brief.

25N: the trimmers trimmed... and with a Trojan horse in the Parliament!

28 November 2012

One of the most important political facts of these elections is the deepening of the crisis of the PSC (Socialist Party of Catalonia), which with 523,333 votes (14.6%) fell to a historic low. Without a credible project at the social or national level, the PSC is the living exponent of how social democracy is going through a historic crisis motivated by its extreme subordination to financial power and its dictates.

The rise of the *españolista* [Spanish centralist] vote, with the increase in votes for the PP (People's Party) despite Rajoy's cuts and the massive growth of Cs (Ciudadanos - Citizens) shows how the development of an independence movement without social content opens the door to demagoguery and a potential danger of social polarisation by the national question in a context where trade unions and the traditional left-wing parties have lost many of their links with a fragmented and de-structured working class. Once more the need to articulate a defence of Catalan national rights and the improvement of the living conditions of the majority of the population appears as a crucial strategic issue to head off the demagoguery of C's and the PP. The social and national questions must be directly linked.

ERC (Catalan Republican Left party), one of the big winners of the day picking up votes from CiU and the PSC, will have to decide how it manages its capital and whether it still opts to be a force with aspects of subordination to CiU, and if, with the excuse of influencing the national agenda of CiU, it opts to support it in its cuts policy, which would constitute a grave political and strategic error contrary to the interests of the majority of the people of Catalonia.

ICV-EUiA (Initiative for a green Catalonia - United Left) considerably increased its number of votes, but its growth does not represent a qualitative leap. Despite the support of Alexis Tsipras, the fruit of EUiA's international relations, the tone of the ICV-EUiA campaign was loose, limited to a criticism of the cuts, and it appeared as a conventional party inserted in the traditional party system, remembered for its managerial past. The proposals for a "Catalan Syriza" launched by EUiA some months ago, which merit further discussion and should be taken seriously, have lost visibility in the electoral process. Let us hope that in this new phase its links with the social struggles continue to increase at a time where we have to join forces against austerity policies.

The eruption of the CUP-Alternativa d'Esquerres (Popular Unity Candidates - Left-Wing Alternative), which anti-capitalists should celebrate, is the great novelty in the panorama of the left. Never until now has a left force located outside of the traditional parties and with a programme of rupture achieved comparable success. The CUP-AE has entered Parliament on the basis of a campaign with a strong profile of radical anti-capitalist and democratic rupture and a wide range of support that goes far beyond the pro-independence left, including the anti-capitalist left, organized alternative municipal groups and many sectors of the social left. The great challenge now is to collectively manage this success. For the first time many social activists are committed to a political alternative. This should not be an ephemeral commitment but the beginning of a broad process of social re-politicisation and organization. The declared desire to have a "Trojan

horse" of the popular classes in Parliament should govern the parliamentary work of the CUP-AE and should allow a visualization of the possibility of practicing a different kind of politics, de-professionalised and in tune with the social movements.

The great challenge of the Catalan left is to build a force that can become a majority in society and defeat the forces of austerity that drown us every day. This alternative will only result from the confluence of many organizations and wills, in a process that we are just beginning. The crisis leads to an increasing loss of legitimacy of the political system and the major political formations. We must deepen this dynamic and break from the current party system.

The two main forces of Catalan politics, CiU and the PSC, gained between them only 45% of the votes, less than half, and if we add the PP the percentage reaches only 58%. It is increasingly clear that there is a growing rejection of the major parties that are the mainstay of the current regime.

The next parliament will be marked by instability, with increasing attacks by the state and the Spanish political-media apparatus against the sovereignty referendum, with a deepening of the economic crisis and an almost certain full bailout for Spain. The opposition to the cuts that Mas and Rajoy are preparing for the future should begin now, as well as the requirement that the sovereignty referendum, as a democratic act, be held as soon as possible and that there are no maneuvers on the part of Mas to put it off. Our challenge is to relaunch the social mobilization and extend no truce to the new CiU government.

Artur Scissorhands, or the regression of political and social rights in Catalonia

26 November 2012, by **Esther Vivas**

Since his election victory in Catalonia, two years ago, there have been cuts in health, education, all sorts of social benefits... budget cuts that had already started with the previous tripartite government and which have increased today. We have regressed in terms of social, economic and democratic rights, and they have sold the country to the highest bidder. They have left us in the hands of thieving bankers and politicians who criticize the "culture of *â€œNo*" and protest, while they themselves are addicted to the "culture of *â€œYes*" to everything that capital says. The failure of the Eurovegas [3] circus and the banana-republic style bowing down before a character as shady as Sheldon Adelson (an American billionaire) have been the best examples. [4]

These policies have led us to a situation of collective bankruptcy, where today one in five people in Catalonia live below the poverty line, where a million and a half people, according to the Food Bank, suffer from nutritional deficiencies and where every day there are more than 100 evictions. Arthur Mas has proven to be the best student of Angela Merkel, the Troika and the "men in black". For the first time in Spain, people now have to pay a part of the costs of medical treatment, and it is in Spain that we have seen the largest increase in university fees, an increase of 67 per cent compared to last year.

In two years, more than 50 clinics and emergency services have been closed, the construction of five new hospitals has been stopped, and the number of people on the waiting list has increased by 43 per cent, taking us back to the figures of 2003. The privatization of public health, through the introduction of precarious employment and outsourcing of

services, is a reality. This is a fantastic deal for the bosses of the Catalan health system of which Boi Ruiz was the president before assuming his current post of Advisor on Health. What a coincidence... or not.

Sticking your nose into affairs, such as those in the health sector, where public and private interests are intermingled and in which the transparency of public accounts is not really clear, is not without risk, as demonstrated by the investigations conducted by the magazine *Cafeamblllet* whose revelations cost it no less than a *â,~10,000* fine.

They have also made cuts in education: a reduction of the budget of 14 per cent, 3,500 fewer teachers, six schools closed, new school building stopped, still more than thousand classrooms in temporary constructions, a 50 per cent drop in investment in child care and fewer subsidies, and delays in payment for the catering service.

Similarly, poverty has been criminalized and stigmatized. In August and September 2011, the Government did not pay any money to thousands of families who receive the minimum income (RMI) from the state. His argument: it was necessary to review every file in order to combat the "abuses" of certain beneficiaries. Benefits were suspended for 7,000 people who were not affected by the announced fraud, as demonstrated by the fact that many of them have been authorized to continue receiving the benefit.

None of the electoral promises of CiU (Convergence and Union, the party of Artur Mas) have been kept. Except one: to abolish inheritance tax on the highest incomes. This measure had already begun to be implemented by the tripartite government, which

lowered this tax so that only the wealthiest paid it, and CiU has totally abolished it. As a result, the government is losing *â,~150* million, while massive cuts are being made.

But the cuts are not confined to social rights. They are also reducing democratic rights. The "Puig doctrine" has imposed preventive detention, the persecution and criminalization of community activists, trade unionists, students, etc. and the creation of an Internet page where people can denounce demonstrators, something which has echoes of the McCarthyist attitudes of the 1950s. Since the last general strike on March 29, more than 100 people have been arrested for the mere fact of having taken part in picketing. According to the "Puig doctrine", to be young, unemployed, a victim of eviction, an immigrant, a trade unionist, a student, a feminist and to fight for your rights, is synonymous with delinquency, and therefore you are likely to be arrested, ordered to pay a fine and charged. Less of a Welfare State rhymes with more of a penal and punitive state.

Today the campaign begins in Catalonia, and there is every indication that Artur Mas will win again - the only president who will not pay for the consequences of the crisis and the spending cuts. His magic formula: to use the legitimate sovereign aspirations of the Catalan people to develop policies which have already led us to poverty, unemployment and precarious employment. Artur Mas presents himself to us as the "Saviour" of Catalonia, while in fact he has led us to the precipice. We want to decide our future, but we also want a future and a country without cuts.

The scissorhands are back, but this is no longer Tim Burton's innocent

Edward Scissorhands, who cut and modeled beautiful figures. It is his gorier version that we see today in Catalonia, without having to pay at the

box office. It is the version of Artur scissorhands, who wherever he goes, leaves a trail of misery and desolation, as he cuts everywhere, absolutely

everywhere, except where the rich and their privileges are concerned.

November 23, 2012

The financialization of the Spanish economy: debt, crisis and social cuts

26 November 2012, by **Nacho Alvarez**

Financialization and growth models

The process of financialization has significantly influenced the growth patterns in developed economies during recent decades, explaining the fragile rate of investment, high levels of unemployment, external imbalances or increase inequalities in the distribution of income. However, the particular form that has adopted in each country the process of financial deregulation, patterns of trade specialization, credit expansion or wage restraint has resulted in different "varieties of financialisation".

On one hand, some economies have presented strong capital inflows resulting in relatively high economic growth, huge credit and real estate bubbles and significant current account deficits (U.S., Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Iceland). Other developed countries (Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Japan) experienced an export-led growth model with modest investment, consumption and GDP growth rates, and with trade surplus that have been used to finance credit bubbles of the first group.

The financialization of the Spanish economy

The Spanish economy has also undergone a significant process of

financialization in recent decades: the increase in the value of financial assets has been significantly higher than the growth experienced by the fundamentals of productive activity, and the financial share has augmented rapidly. In particular, the keystone of the financialization of the Spanish economy has been the huge credit bubble accumulated since the late 1990s.

The Spanish economic model was highlighted during the 1996-2007 period by many economists as a "successful" case: economic growth was above the European average, the rate of job creation was very significant, inflation was controlled and all this was consistent with fiscal surpluses.

However, the main weakness of this growth model (shaped by financial capital) was in its own basis: the global surplus of capital in the financial sphere, along with the liberalization process and low interest rates led during this period to a vast access to credit for Spanish businesses and households. The resulting debt-led growth was therefore linked to an intense dynamic of indebtedness and to the housing bubble.

In addition, the Euro has proven to be fully functional to the logic of financialisation. Its introduction in 2002 shaped the driving forces of the growth model: low real interest rates in the European periphery (as a result of a higher structural inflation), deregulation of financial flows and the absence of exchange risk encouraged

intense capital inflows in the Spanish economy. Thus, membership in the single currency has meant an expansion of intra-European trade and financial imbalances.

The Spanish household debt rose from 61% of gross disposable income in 1997 to 139% in 2007, significantly higher than that of major European economies (French, Italian and German household debt was, on average, 85% in 2007). However, households are not the only agents that have oversized liabilities. Non-financial corporations have experienced even greater indebtedness. As we can see in Figure 1, these corporations accumulated in 2009 a significant part of the total debt of the Spanish economy (much of this debt was linked to construction and real estate sector). Furthermore, Spanish financial institutions have mediated between households and corporations on the one hand, and international capital markets, on the other, so they have also achieved high levels of indebtedness.

Figure 1



Moreover, as seen in Figure 2, foreign indebtedness of the Spanish economy is very elevated, reaching in 2012 153% of GDP (excluding direct investment). In this figure we can see how the increase of foreign debt the years before the crisis is mainly due to borrowing by financial and nonfinancial companies in international capital markets.

Figure 2



The process of financialization of the Spanish economy has contributed to alter the pattern of income distribution. Since this process has channeled capital inflows and savings to real estate and tourism, job growth has taken place in those sectors. However, these sectors create basically temporary, low-skilled and low wage employment. Simultaneously, real estate and financial incomes have experienced unprecedented growth during this period. Thus, the process of financialization has functioned as an income transfer device, against labor and in favor of capital (labor share has decreased in Spain from 60.2% to 52.3% between 1996 and 2012).

As we can see in Figure 3, the growth experienced by the value of financial and real estate assets between 1994 and 2009 were significantly higher than the growth of GDP. In addition, both GDP and financial and real estate assets have grown well above the various components of wage income (real wages, average pension and unemployment benefits). Real wages have remained basically stagnant during this period. We can therefore say that the process of financialization has operated as a lever of social recomposition between classes, making the Spanish model of income distribution even more regressive.

Figure 3



Crisis and adjustment policies

The financialization of the Spanish economy has led to a growing systemic fragility. The expansion cycle based on credit growth ended when high indebted investors began to sell assets to pay debts. At that point home prices stopped growing, real estate assets were not accepted any longer

as collateral to continue to borrow and house bubble collapsed. The balance sheet crisis appeared in Spain: corporations and financial institutions experienced intense asset depreciation while their huge debts remain frozen.

The process of financialization was functional to restoring profitability in recent decades, overcoming the economic crisis of the 1970s. However, this restoration of profitability was possible at the expense of moving forward the contradictions of the accumulation model: deregulation, financial expansion and income transfer have allowed a huge increase of "fictitious assets". These "fictitious assets" represent in fact a claim to property rights or income produced in the real economy, but are devaluated and unconvertible at this moment.

In the first stage of the crisis, during the years 2008 and 2009, measures taken by the Zapatero government focused on important fiscal expenses to sustain employment. However, the second stage of the crisis, which starts in 2010 with the sovereign debt crisis of the European periphery, consolidated fiscal adjustment.

From that moment we see the true orientation of the Zapatero and Rajoy governments: to protect the interests of financial capital (domestic and international) and to ensure the repayment of debts to the extent of socializing the losses of financial institutions.

To ensure payment of debts, governments of Zapatero and Rajoy, forced by the EU, have opted for a dramatic fiscal austerity. Between 2010 and 2012 we have seen several pay cuts to public employees (including the elimination of their Christmas extra pay), the labor reform of June 2010 (making possible easier and cheaper dismissals), the pension system reform (increasing the retirement age and reducing the average pension), the deepening of cuts in social expenses (education, health, unemployment benefits...).

The logic of financialization seems further strengthened, since adjustment measures are the priorities

of financial capital but not the ones of the social majority.

From private debt to public debt: the bailouts to banks and creditors

The discourse that seeks to justify the austerity measures is not coherent. There are no data to support the claim that the origin of the current fiscal crisis in Spain is due to a high public spending that must be cut. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, the Spanish public spending is five points below the average expenditure in the euro zone, and social spending is also five points below. Additionally, as can be seen in Figure 6, the Spanish state had balanced public accounts at the time the crisis started: in 2007 Spain had a budget surplus of 1.9% of GDP, in 2009 the surplus had become a deficit of -11.2%, and of -9.4% in 2011. The Spanish government expects a deficit of -7.4% for 2012.

Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



The causes of this increase in the public deficit are diverse. On one hand, the sharp drop in tax revenues (personal income tax, VAT and corporation tax) has been decisive. Furthermore, the performance of the automatic stabilizers (including unemployment costs) have led to increased spending (see Figure 9). However, bank bailouts also have conditioned much of government spending during the crisis.

The Bank of Spain acknowledges that problematic exposure of banks and savings banks to the real estate stood

at 184,000 million Euros at the end of 2011 (of a total real estate portfolio of 308,000 million). That is, 60% of loans related to real estate presents the status of "toxic assets" (bad loans, substandard loans and foreclosed assets), a figure equivalent to 17% of Spanish GDP.

To address these problems the government has provided since 2008 aid to Spanish banks worth 160,000 million Euros. This assistance has taken different forms. In 2008 began a plan to buy assets from banks, which provided 19,000 million that have already been returned. That same year the government launched a line of guarantees for banks of 90,000 million. But aids have also taken the form of direct injections: the FROB has injected into the sector over 14,000 million Euros, while the government has recapitalized Bankia with 19,000 million and Catalunya Caixa and Nova Caixa Galicia with another 9,000 million. Finally, bankruptcies of CCM, CAM and UNNIM have been funded with 10,000 million Euros of the Deposit Guarantee Fund. In total, aids to the banking sector, in one form or another, have reached a value equal to 15% of GDP.

The effort to ensure the solvency of Spanish banks (through recapitalizations and bailouts) has determined the fiscal crisis of the Spanish state. Both Zapatero and Rajoy said that aids to banks would not affect taxpayers or the government deficit. However, the Spanish government, given the doubt that the billions injected into troubled banks can be not recovered, increased by 16,600 million the 2011 and 2012 budget deficits. With that, the public debt will rise to 90% of GDP in 2013 (in 2008 was only 37%).

In addition, the State's need to keep going to the capital markets to finance itself has strengthened fiscal crisis: when we analyze the weight of interest paid by the public sector to financial markets (figure 7) we see how there has been a remarkable increase in these payments. To reconcile this increase in financial expenses of the State with the demands required by financial investors, Brussels insists in further

deepen public spending cuts (excluding the payment of interest, as reflected in Figure 8). Thus, the General State Budget for 2013 requires cuts worth 40.000 million Euros, while increasing the expenditure on interest payments up to 38,600 million (3.4% of GDP).

Therefore, despite the intense public spending cuts that we have seen since 2010, public debt continues to grow strongly (see Figure 8).

Figure 7



Figure 8



The government estimates that it will be necessary to inject another 50,000 million Euros of public money to troubled banks, in line with Oliver Wyman report. Although future injections are made by means of an EU bailout (by the European Financial Stability Facility), the State will guarantee the loan, so injections will be part of the budget deficit if they are considered unrecoverable (highly likely, given what happened with FROB injections in previous years). In this case, Brussels will impose new and additional cuts to offset the deficit increase.

The austerity strategy of the EU to tackle the debt problem of the Spanish economy is actually a bailout for private banks, especially German and French banks. The State guarantees to pay off debt to foreign creditors at the expense of its own resources, thereby increasing public debt and cutting spending.

As we see, the "institutional capture" driven by financial interests over the last decades has led to the Spanish and European public administrations to break into the social battle open at the present time around debt, in order to facilitate the socialization of banking losses.

Against the power of financial capital, what alternative from the left?

One key point for the left in order to build a political alternative to austerity measures is its orientation towards the EU. At this moment, the only favorable exit for the Spanish workers and for the social majority requires a break with the measures imposed by the EU and the Euro discipline.

From the beginning of the crisis, not to go further back, the orientation of Brussels institutions has been clear: the Euro Plus Pact (later the Pact for the Euro) institutionalized fiscal austerity and the priority of debt repayment, promoting for that purpose the liquidation of collective bargaining and wage, public spending and pensions cuts. We must also remember that the Union treaties prohibit European states to borrow from their own central banks, been forced to borrow from private banks at rates and market conditions. This intervention of the EU institutions to serve the interests of financial capital is implemented from decision-making bodies not elected directly by the EU citizens, such as the European Commission, even against the decisions of sovereign parliaments. The requirements imposed by the European Commission, together with the ECB and the IMF as part of the "troika", are therefore hardly compatible with democracy.

The context determining political action and the correlation of social forces is now deeply determined by the economic and institutional dynamics that take place at European level. This is precisely why a left alternative will be doomed to failure if it denies to transcend the national framework to coordinate with other countries' political forces in a common proposal.

Now, how do we begin this break with the EU? What do we offer in return? We must begin to challenge the

policies of cuts, i.e. calling to disobey treaties as the Stability and Growth Pact, the Pact for the Euro or the different Memorandum of Understanding. Begin to recuperate fiscal sovereignty involves a necessary break with these agreements.

The social legitimacy gained by those who, in various parts of Europe, oppose to welfare cuts, should be used as a “political fulcrum” to break the logic of austerity imposed by Brussels. Austerity measures (especially in a balance sheet crisis where all the actors try to deleverage simultaneously) sink us into a depressive spiral.

If the barbed wire that Brussels has placed around us forces us to choose between paying the debt or closing hospitals and schools, we will logically have to appeal to the priorities that a state has with its citizens and start to walk towards debt repudiation. Taking into account that goal (achieve substantial cancellations on public and private debt in the hands of senior creditors), the campaign for debt audit currently underway in various parts of the European periphery can be of great value.

The recovery of fiscal sovereignty to address major public needs requires a comprehensive reform of the tax system to ensure its progressiveness. Tax exemptions of capital income must be reversed, top marginal rates must

be raised and tax havens should be banned. A left alternative should try to coordinate such measures at European level with other political forces to strengthen their feasibility.

Nationalized banks should serve as the basis of a public banking system, managed with public interest criteria. Every euro that the state injects into banks should be accompanied by the corresponding access to the capital of the institution. A public good as important as credit should not be left to private banks initiative, with the risk that this entails. Similarly, a strong financial sector regulation it's needed, as well as capital controls that limit the coercion that financial capital exert on society.

Moreover, in this context of monetary sovereignty transferred to the ECB, this institution should be required to ensure an end to the speculation against sovereign debt of peripheral countries (by purchasing such debt securities and issuing Eurobonds). Obviously this measure will not restore monetary sovereignty to the countries of the Eurozone, will not solve the crisis in these economies, nor resolve the essential problem of the EU institutions (their limited democratic nature). But surely will help alleviate the pressure that financial capital puts on European peripheral states, and thus to stop the offensive against labor and social welfare.

Beyond measures to stop the current offensive of capital, a left alternative should try to coordinate at European level a fight for the employment. To push a reduction in working hours without wage cuts would not only help solve the terrible problem of unemployment, but would also lay the foundations for a new model of income distribution in Europe.

Finally, the break with Brussels policies and institutions here proposed should consider the need for a radical democratic remaking of Europe. Brussels institutions, which do not appear in any Constitution and whose leaders are not elected by any parliament, have completed an unprecedented political expropriation, confiscating the parliamentary sovereignty of European democracies. True, national parliaments have voluntarily allowed that expropriation, but that does not change much the final result. Any government seeking to promote now a truly progressive alternative within the EU will be condemned to violate existing treaties and to clash with the ECB and the European Commission. The democratization of these institutions seems now a true chimera. However, a left alternative cannot give up to the making of a proposal to coordinate policy on the continent. The ruins of the old European Union should serve as a support to build, this time, a truly democratic integration experience.

Resolution of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores

26 November 2012, by **PRT, Mexico**

1. The fight against the imposed election of Peñón Nieto has opened the possibility of a major political confrontation with the oligarchic regime and its parties. The outrageous fraudulent operation to impose Peñón Nieto, which has completely adulterated the electoral system, bypassing all democratic rights, has

resulted in a frontal clash with the democratic aspirations of millions of people who have illusions in the “real change” proposed by AMLO. This confrontation, whose central point was the fight to have the election voided, did not extend after July 1, 2012 through a call to mobilization by AMLO and MORENA. The appearance

of the new student movement “I am the 132” offered a political perspective beyond the election by calling for a struggle against the imposed election and neo-liberalism. Under its leadership the National Convention Against the Imposed Election held in Atenco has appeared (with a second meeting to be held in

Oaxaca), which brings together a wide spectrum of forces beyond the Progressive Coalition and MORENA. Despite attempts to impose the government of Peña Nieto, the latter has already been delegitimized and faces a political force opposed to him.

2. The position of AMLO, also adopted by MORENA on September 9, 2012, opens a more complicated and long term course to the fight against the oligarchic regime, and the imposed election specifically. This position has as its antecedent the signing between all the presidential candidates of "the agreement of civility" two weeks prior to the elections. If AMLO currently denounces as illegitimate the designation of EPN as president elect, he has opted for a strategy he calls "civil disobedience", but which actually has a symbolic character, without struggle or mobilization. A strategy of civil disobedience should create a situation of ungovernability for an illegitimate and imposed regime, which is impossible without actions and mobilizations. This limited position weakens the struggle of the Convention by excluding MORENA from it and preventing the support of millions of voters for the plan of action, protest, mobilization and struggle of the Convention and the "I am the 132" movement. As Cardenas did in 1988-89 with the creation of the PRD, AMLO offers an internal organizational perspective to MORENA with the objective of creating a new political party, thus reducing the fight against the imposed election to a symbolic dimension. The decision to organise its own political forces is legitimate, but by doing this separately from the fight against the imposed election it weakens the latter.

3. The Convention is currently the broadest unitary space, within the logic of the united front, of the majority of forces opposed to the oligarchic regime and neo-liberalism. The Convention, while being the unitary space bringing together the left, mainly the extra-institutional left although minority sectors of MORENA participate despite the demobilising posture of AMLO, also reflects the limited social insertion of the left. If the posture of AMLO and MORENA does not weaken the Convention per se, it weakens the process of

confrontation with the regime while marginalizing itself in the current economic climate. The idea that the broadest non-exclusive unity should be sought (which represented a call directed at the movement of López Obrador) is one of the achievements of the Convention of Atenco. The current position of MORENA and AMLO has the effect of introducing tensions and internal differentiations in the movement of the Convention, mainly because of the significance taken, since the withdrawal of MORENA, by intolerant and bigoted positions. Similar difficulties and confusions have caused the reflux of the "I am the 132" movement, which had a fundamental importance in the development of the Convention. In the development of the action plan up to December 1, 2012 (which has very important moments like the struggle against the labour law reform or the mobilization of October 2) it is necessary to preserve and strengthen the vitality and unity of the movement. During the third meeting of the Convention, which will be held in December, the program and strategy of the movement should be redefined towards a more long term struggle against the regime and neo-liberalism. As we see in the days of struggle against the reform of the Labour Act, it cannot be ruled out that the workers' movement can play a role alongside the student movement. The strengthening of this dynamic building represents a challenge and the opportunity to see a change in the balance of power and to broaden the scope of political opportunities. In this context, the proposal of the SME and OPT to create a new federation of workers can play a central role. The third meeting of the Convention must preserve and amplify its united front character, while offering prospects for the continuation of the fight after December 1. The geographical extension of the struggle and the Convention can be strengthened by the creation of Conventions in the states of the Republic.

4 The separation of AMLO from PRD (and the parties of the Progressive Coalition) represents a contradictory fact. Firstly, as we have already said, it undermines the fight against the imposed election of EPN by channelling the social energy of

MORENA to the organizational discussion, while on the other hand, the undeniably positive aspect of this break with the PRD is to accentuate the crisis of a bureaucratic organization that has legitimized EPN and to break its hegemony as a supposed single representative of the whole of "the left". Finally, AMLO's break with the PRD took place, even if in the civilized and "loving" manner that latterly characterizes López Obrador. This manner of break, although "civilized" and correctly leaving the door open to future short-term agreements, does not contribute to the clarification of its meaning. The farewell to the PRD is the product of the distancing and the breakdown made inevitable by the apparent differences and the betrayals of the PRD since 2006. To this should be added the disputes which emerged during the struggle for the defence of oil in 2008, the line of alliance with the PAN in 2009 and the election campaign in the federal state of Mexico. This break could only be formalized by the appearance of a new party, given the reforms of the COFIPE voted for jointly by the PRI, the PAN and the PRD, which prevented the legalization of new parties before the 2012 elections. This event confirms the analysis made by the PRT since the Congress of 2009 and 2010, which stated that we were entering a period of crisis that would lead to a process of reorganization of all political forces, and to the demise and the emergence of new parties. The idea that the PRD has attempted to impose, since its foundation in 1989, namely that it alone represented the whole of the left, is now delegitimized by its growing loss of prestige. It is now obvious that the PRD does not in itself represent the left. It is part of the institutional left (functional to the system) and represents, on this field, one of the options of the latter to which will probably soon be added MORENA, transformed into a party. MORENA and AMLO represent another political current. As such, it is totally legitimate that they fight for their recognition and their own identity. The legitimacy of this search for recognition also applies to currents which are not part of this institutional left, such as organizations of workers like the OPT,

the socialist left like the PRT as well as to other currents such as for example the Zapatistas and anarchists. The response of the PRD which proposes the creation of a "broad front" type party in order that there is not more than one "legalized" party (enjoying legal recognition) is unacceptable. This proposal would raise again the level of programmatic heterogeneity of the PRD, together with the reign of electoral pragmatism, opportunism and patronage.

5. MORENA is not our party. Since the Congress of the PRT, held in 2010, we had considered supporting the presidential candidacy of AMLO in 2012, as it offered the possibility of a political confrontation with the neoliberal political regime. We had therefore left open the possibility of participation in the campaign within MORENA with our criticisms and policy proposals. This is what we have done in various places with more or less success. But participation in an election campaign led by MORENA is not the same as being part of a party building project. MORENA, as a political force, shares the strategic vision of the PRD that questions some aspects of neoliberalism, and endorses a liberal social perspective in line with other experiences of the Latin America left and the left around the world. MORENA's multi-class composition prevents it from abandoning this political perspective. During the election campaign we evaluated the formation around AMLO as a broad multi-class pole, which represented the emergence of an alternative social bloc to that of the neoliberal oligarchy, whose anti-popular policies tended to isolate it socially and politically. This social isolation of a small and wealthy oligarchic group resulted in the migration of groups of entrepreneurs and sectors of the bourgeoisie towards the political opposition grouped around the candidacy of AMLO. Again, this dynamic of growth of the election campaign of AMLO on this terrain is explicable. However, the creation of a new party, another political force based on this multi-class block (which if it does not manage to incorporate all of the entrepreneurs who participated in the campaign, reserves for them however a "chair" at the

programmatic level, even if - as Trotsky put it - it is only the shadow of the bourgeoisie which participates) marks definitively the character of the new party as falling within the framework of capitalism, while being critical of the current political system. In the context of the reorganization of the political forces and the current crisis, our option cannot be that of a multi-class party. Our choices must instead focus on a class based alternative as represented in embryonic manner by the OPT, which paves the way for the possible creation of a workers' party. This radically different alternative may not be part of the options discussed in the so-called internal debate within MORENA, nor in the discussion on the alternative between party or movement, because these two positions share the same programmatic basis and because there is no real democratic discussion between the positions that would be different in the preparatory phase of the Congress of MORENA. As it is common to hear in the movement against the imposed election of EPN and in the media space, but also inside MORENA, the main criticism relating, incorrectly, to the PRD, is unrelated to its character and its program but focuses on the existence of "tribes" within it. It is foreseeable that during the organizational process of Morena the idea is imposed that the new party will be "different" from the PRD, because it will not allow the existence of "tribes", currents, or groups. The way of posing the problem is contradictory because AMLO himself announced that the MORENA Congress will have to choose between two positions: becoming a political party or continuing as a movement. During the Congress, these two options will be defended by three texts defending the party based option and three texts defending the "movementist" option. The confusion that equates the "tribes" of the PRD with political currents, when they are actually interest groups, often leads to the undemocratic conclusion that it is the right to organize political currents that should be suppressed. These elements make it so impossible to attend the preparatory Convention of MORENA for those who defend an alternative position and represent a

different party based option to that in construction. In addition, participation in the preparatory work for the Congress would of course commit those who took part.

6. It is necessary to strengthen the OPT [5] as a project for the constitution of a workers' party. In the current debate, it is easier and more understandable to defend the option of a class based party starting from the experience underway in the OPT, which arose at the initiative of the most conscious sector of the Mexican working class in struggle, namely, the SME As noted in the first balance sheets of the OPT, the youth of the organization and the fact that it had to participate in the presidential election campaign from its foundation have not left it the time necessary to consolidate or clarify its political profile. The next National Council of the OPT, which will be held in October, will then be decisive because, as is normal, there is an internal debate about perspectives and the option that the OPT represents in the context of the current crisis. Understandably, there are within the OPT "echoes" of the present positions within the PRD and MORENA, which could call into question the original meaning of the proposal by the SME to create the OPT. The idea of a "party movement" which is expressed in the OPT has similarities to the idea of a "broad front party" present within the PRD or a "party movement" which would not have "dogmatic" ideological definitions and which is related to the multi-class proposal of AMLO for MORENA. Within the PRT, we have emphasized the importance of ratifying and repositioning the OPT from the perspective of the creation of a party of workers. This view is also shared by comrades representative of other currents organised within the OPT. It is this focus that marks our difference with other left currents, mainly institutional, which defend a multi-class option. The need to build the OPT as a democratic and pluralistic organization must not lead to opening it to a multi-class perspective. There is a need to maintain and further develop if necessary the existence of political currents, as accepted and practiced since the founding of the organization

a year ago. These debates and those to come will confirm, on the condition that the OPT strengthens itself in other sectors of the working class, the validity of the posture that defends the existence of currents as well as the need for the presence of the PRT and its program within the OPT. In order for the OPT to represent a political option in the context of the current crisis, it is essential to ratify and confirm the perspective of the OPT as a broad party of workers and their organizations. It will be difficult, otherwise, to offer a perspective of broad political regroupment in the current period of reorganization of political forces. The political option represented by the PRT must also be deployed, but a broader alternative regrouping alternative is made necessary by the size of the forces involved.

7. The challenges and tasks of the PRT are numerous in the context of the crisis and the current recomposition. In the first place at the political level with the analyses that we distribute. The OPT must seize the opportunity to integrate militants politicized during the recent struggles and movements. The PRT also has the ability to strengthen and increase contact with many comrades in struggle who have politicized and gained political experience and are searching for a militant alternative activist which defends the socialist, revolutionary, internationalist feminist, eco-socialist and democratic programme. That is why we need to move quickly in party organization. The urgent tasks include recruitment, the functioning of cells and base organizations, payment of dues guaranteeing the financing of activities of the party, the publication

of *Bandera Socialista*, and documents of education and political analysis. It is not possible to address all these organizational issues in detail during the meeting of the Central Committee, or to develop a general plan. For this reason, a National Conference of organization is necessary, prior to the cadre school which will be held in December, but after the days of struggles that are underway with December 1 as their culminating point. The Central Committee support the Policy Committee of the preparation and the call for a National Organising Conference for December of this year, on the eve of the national cadre school, and the holding of the 13th National Congress of the PRT next year.

Central Committee of the PRT, Mexico, D.F. on September 29, 201

Bureaucratic capitalist?

26 November 2012, by **Au Loong-Yu, Terry Conway**

TC : Can you explain why you have developed the term bureaucratic capitalism to describe China today and what you mean by that term?

A LY: I did not invent the term. It was first used, ironically, by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the 1940s to depict the kind of capitalism that the Guomindang had created under its rule.

Maurice Meisner defines bureaucratic capitalism in his book *The Deng Xiaoping Era - An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism 1978-1994* as a term to refer to the use of political power for private pecuniary gain through capitalistic or quasi-capitalist methods of economic activity. He adds that although this is not new in history, the form of this in China today is more prominent than the others.

I would also add that today Chinese bureaucrats at all levels of government run companies, profit from them and rarely get prosecuted,

because the bureaucracy has completely monopolised state power and this enables it to rise above all classes. One could even say that the bureaucracy has privatised the state.

Marx once remarked that the bureaucracy see the state as its private property. Where Marx considered this as an entrenched tendency within the bureaucracy, it is only in present day China that this evolution has been fully completed. Entirely unchecked, this bureaucracy have now been fully bourgeoisified.

A recent example is the Chongqing Security Group, founded by the Chongqing police force - which was headed by Wang Lijun until his arrest after he defected to US embassy to escape from a plot by former head of Chongqing, Bo Xilai - and run by its leading officials. This company recently applied for listing in China, disregarding the legal ban on police departments running security companies.

What has discredited socialism in China is the fact that the CCP, which made a revolution against the bureaucratic capitalism of the Guomindang ended up embracing the same thing. It is quite common today to interpret the term revolution in its original meaning: things that move in an orbit and therefore always return to the same point of departure. In fact the original meaning of the Chinese term for the word revolution (*geming*) means a change of heaven's mandate of a dynasty, and therefore also suggests a change only in the rulers but never the dynastic social order - in fact, the mission of a *geming* is precisely to restore dynastic peace. Many intellectuals today do see the 1949 revolution in that perspective and therefore argue against the idea of revolution.

I do not agree that the 1949 revolution can be interpreted in that way. Even if bureaucratic capitalism is brought back by the CCP which once eradicated it, some fruits of that

revolution are still largely intact, for instance, the independence of the nation, and the collective ownership of land by the peasants. There are more and more serious attempts to erode the latter through land grabs by local government or their cronies are, but the peasants are also making use of their constitutional rights to defend these lands. And industrialisation and break neck speed promoted by the CCP also fundamentally modernises the economic and social structure of China which, ironically, also nurtures the social forces which will eventually challenge the thousands years old tradition of despotism. Bureaucratic capitalism enables the bureaucracy to plunder the country on a terrible scale but at the same time creates a new working class from rural migrants and potentially brings together other social forces such as the peasantry and students to make common cause with this against the bureaucracy.

TC: Could you tell our readers what role the CCP has played in the reintroduction of capitalism in China and how it has benefited from this?

AYL: The top leaders of the bureaucracy have made a conscious chose to restore capitalism. Deng Xiaoping was already feeling his way in 1984 when China signed an agreement with the Britain over Hong Kong which said that *laissez faire* capitalism would be maintained for fifty years after being handed over to China - in complete contradiction with socialist principles of course

Later he was reported as saying that capitalism in Hong Kong should allowed to continue even beyond that timeline.

In 1987 he told an African delegation "do not follow socialism. Do whatever you can to make the economy grow." His subsequent crackdown on the 1989 democracy movement signified his party had decisively and qualitatively transformed into a capitalist party.

However it is utterly unconvincing when some Maoists try to put all the blame on Deng Xiaoping alone, however. The fact that Deng encountered no significant opposition,

but on the contrary received enthusiastic response from the bureaucracy, implies that he was just doing what they wanted. This should not be startling for any socialist.

Even in Mao's era when the bureaucracy was fiercely anti-capitalist, it was also highly privileged as a ruling elite. They monopolised the right to distribute the social surplus through monopolizing the running of the state. They, like any other ruling elites, were never content with their salary - which was ten to 30 times that of ordinary workers - and always wished to appropriate still more social surplus.. Their fundamental interest lay in restoring private property rather than being a faithful public servant defending common ownership indefinitely.

In the late 1980's, price reform created the so called *guandao*, or officials who engaged in speculation. Meanwhile nearly all level of state departments set up different kinds of companies to make money. The bureaucracy was beginning to transform themselves into capitalists as well. This enraged the people who rose in protest against the government in 1989. The CCP's crack down crushed all opposition to capitalist reform, and this alone is sufficient prove that it had decisively transformed from an anti capitalist party to one which embraced it.

Deng Xiaoping's 1992 tour to the south signified that the CCP had taken another big leap forward again, towards full integration with global capitalism. To make the leap successful the terror of the aftermath of 1989 crackdown was not longer enough. It was imperative to inflict more defeat on the workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) by privatisating these enterprises and thus sacking more than 40 million workers.

TC: Can you explain how a new working class has been created of migrant workers from the countryside and in what ways the consciousness of that new class differs from that of the 'old' working class in the state sector?

ALY: A positive side of capitalist

restoration in China - as opposed to what occurred in former Soviet Bloc - is accelerated industrialisation. As a result the number of China's wage workers is constantly increasing; they now comprise half the working population and account for one-quarter of industrial workers in the world. Most of them are rural migrant workers.

Being at the centre of production and distribution makes them a potentially phenomenal social force. For the moment they are still a class "in itself" rather than "for itself", though.

There are deeper reasons for the difficult birth of a new labour movement beyond than state repression. Although rural migrant workers, now numbering 250 million, have not experienced the devastating defeat of SOE workers, neither do they possess a collective memory as a class. They are *nongmingong*, literally peasant workers, more peasants than workers, not because they really till the land - in fact, most of them do so rarely - but because the *hukou* system of household registration, acts as a form of social apartheid, barring them from raising families in the cities and sinking real roots there. No matter how long they stay in the cities they aware that it is bounds to be temporary. Hence a sense of true class identity is hard to forge.

But neither are they entirely passive. Rural migrant workers have staged numerous spontaneous strikes against their bosses and local authorities. These spontaneous strikes often win partial victories, and they are so common that the authority's *de facto* ban on strikes broke down long ago, to the effect that local government has to learn to live with that. Organizing is still very difficult, though. The next stage of struggle will likely be one to defy the ban on organisation, though this is going be a long term and uphill struggle. Yet even today it is possible to form activists' network, which can act as a transitional platform for future organising.

TC: Can you talk about some of the recent struggles of workers which have raised questions of democracy as well as opposed

privatisation and/or fought for improved conditions in the workplace

ALY: Two cases should be of particular interest. The first and most recent one was 700 workers at the Ohms Electronics Shenzhen Co., which is the business partner of the Japanese TNC Panasonic, struck for three days from 29-31 March 2012 over unsatisfactory wages and working hours. They also demanded re-election of their workplace union, so that their interests would be better represented. The workers complained in their open letter on 26 March that the chairperson of the union was appointed by the management and was a manager, which violated the laws on trade union and the charter of the official trade union. The strike was successfully launched when part of the lower ranking management and also the security guards joined in. The workers also used the Chinese version of Twitter, weibo to spread their demands over the internet. Although later the management was able to divide the lower ranking management from the striking workers the action was still able to force concessions to the economic demands of the workers and also an agreement that the local trade union would hold a re-election of the workplace union leadership. The election was held between end of April and early May, and although the old chairperson lost the election, the newly elected chairperson is a workshop manager, and there were reports which suggested that there were manipulation and frauds in the election. Despite this, allegedly half of the members of the new union committee were workers who had gone on strike. Due to censorship and harsh repression, it is difficult to verify the information.

This case stands out as rural migrant workers, even if they do take a lot of strike actions, do not often have awareness of the importance of reclaiming trade unions for themselves in a democratic manner as they do not have strong collective identity.

I am not sure if the workers at Ohms were inspired by the Honda Foshan strike in 2010. But anyway that strike

is considered to be a milestone in the development of consciousness of rural migrant workers. In May 2010 1,800 Honda Foshan workers took action, calling for higher wages and the reorganisation of their workplace trade union, triggering off a wave of strike action by workers in foreign-owned car plants that summer. In an open letter by worker representatives they condemned the branch trade union saying, "We are outraged by the trade union's appropriation of the fruits of the workers' struggles. We insist that the branch trade union of the factory shall be elected by the production line workers'.

The reasons that letter gives for their struggle are noteworthy: the workers were not just fighting for their own interest but were also concerned about the interests of working people throughout China. Such a broad vision is very rare among rural migrant workers. The strike lasted for more than two weeks and only ended after regular workers at the plant had been offered a 35% pay increase and those working as interns at the factory had received a raise of more than 70%. Later the management also agreed to the re-election of the workplace union. The local trade union soon announced the election of the workplace union at the company in late August 2010, it turned out that this was only a by-election, where only part of the workplace union leadership was open to election and the original chairperson, who was very much resented by the striking workers, kept his seat. A little more than a year later, the election of a new leadership of the workplace union was held in November 2011. This was not genuinely democratic either, as the outgoing leadership monopolised the nomination of candidates of the incoming leadership, such that members of the management were elected as members of the leadership, while the activists who led the strike in 2010 were pushed out altogether. Despite this, the strike shows that workers do have power to improve their situation.

These two cases of workers' action and their call for a rank and file controlled union, they provide an alternative image of workers fighting for their rights to one which merely

sees worker as a vulnerable social group who need outside help but who cannot resist injustice on their own, like the Foxconn workers who killed themselves.

TC: Could you say something about how the reintroduction of capitalism in China is deepening the environmental crisis in the country and what struggles there have been which have reacted to these effects?

ALY: China's crazy speed of industrialisation has caused the twin problems of water shortage and water pollution. Today 400 out of 660 cities in China do not have sufficient fresh water, and among these cities, 136 of them are experiencing severe water shortages. About one-third of China's population lacks access to clean drinking water. 70 per cent of the country's rivers and lakes are polluted. Over 25,000 large dams nationwide are causing ecological damage and the forced migration of millions of people.

The lax enforcement of environmental laws means that the pollution resulted from this industrialisation had not been checked at all. Increasingly, however, the people find the pollution in air and water so serious that they begin to take matters into their own hands.

An interesting example is the protests against the building of PX factories across the country. Paraxylene (PX) is an important chemical in the production of fibre and plastic bottles. Unverified report suggests that there are at least 13 PX plants across the country, which had caused serious health problem for local residents. The first widely reported protest took place in 2007, when local residents of Xiamen demonstrated against a PX plant and eventually succeeded in halting construction there. This obviously inspired the 2011 Dalian local residents when more than 10,000 protesters gathered to demand the closure of a PX facility, forcing the mayor to promise that he would shut it down. Later reports have since suggested that the Dalian factory may have been reopened, although much of the news reporting on the plant's resumption on mainland websites has since been removed.

Despite this, the struggle against PX was triggered off again just days ago, this time in Ningbo. On 24 October 24, 2012, the Ningbo government announced the new PX project, it was immediately followed by protest the next day, and it continued to Sunday 28 October 2012 which drew more than 10,000 protestors taking to the street. The action forced the government to suspend the decision. Whether this is a lasting victory is hard to tell now. What is significant of these struggles,

however, is that they may reflect a gradual change in people's mentality. There had been complete demoralisation after the 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement. That fear overwhelmed the SOE workers, stopping them from launching any effective struggle against privatisation. This fear also spread across the society as a whole.

Yet in recent years the fear seems to be beginning to recede. Workers'

economic strikes are rising and they are more likely to win partial concession. The same is true for peasants' defence of their land and local residents fighting against polluting projects. Although not yet political, these kinds of struggles and partial victories encourage the people to overcome their fear. Hopefully they may also help to change the conservativeness of the intellectual's fear of any kind of popular rebellion.

From Socialist Resistance

A Review of Progressive Third Parties in U.S. Elections

22 November 2012, by **Adam Hefty**

The Broad View

The chart below is the culmination of a procrastinatory project that originally started out with a couple of simple, contemporary questions. How did Jill Stein, Roseanne Barr, and Rocky Anderson do, in comparison to each other and in comparison to recent history? The contemporary period for left-of-center third-party presidential races starts with Ralph Nader in 2000. But then I wondered how the weaker numbers from 2004, 2008, and 2012 compared to previous years. After all, in recent years, Nader's 2000 campaign was kind of an outlier in its relative impact. What were its precedents? Eugene McCarthy's several campaigns? The foundation of the Peace and Freedom Party in 1968? Henry Wallace's 1948 campaign? Going back even further, Norman Thomas, Eugene Debs, or "Fighting Bob" La Follette? And what if anything was the historic pattern in between these high water marks?

This chart and this post may not directly engage the debate, heightened over the past few months as it is every four years, about how to vote or whether to build a third party. It is intended more as a node of

reflection for those of us who are already somewhat engaged in or committed to building an independent, left third party (or "independent political action," as it is sometimes called amongst socialists).

Left-of-center presidential candidates' combined vote: Figures taken from US Election Atlas

2012 Stein (Green), Barr (Peace and Freedom), Anderson (Justice), Lindsey (Socialism and Liberation) 0.43%

2008 Nader (independent), McKinney (Green), Calero (Socialist Workers), LaRiva (Socialism and Liberation), Moore (Socialist) 0.71%

2004 Nader (independent), Cobb (Green), Peltier (Peace and Freedom), Brown (Socialist), Calero (Socialist Workers) 0.52%

2000 Nader (Green), Harris (Socialist Workers), McReynolds (Socialist) 2.75%

1996 Nader (Green), Moorehead (Workers World), Feinland (Peace and Freedom), Harris (Socialist Workers), Peron (Grassroots) 0.79%

1992 Fulani (New Alliance), Daniels

(Peace and Freedom), Warren (Socialist Workers) 0.12%

1988 Fulani (New Alliance), McCarthy (Consumer), Winn (Workers League), Warren (Socialist Workers), Lewin (Peace and Freedom), Holmes (Workers World) 0.33%

1984 Johnson (Citizens), Serrette (Alliance), Hall (Communist), Mason (Socialist Workers), Holmes (Workers World), Winn (Workers League) 0.23%

1980 Commoner (Citizens), Hall (Communist), DeBarry (Socialist Workers), Smith (Peace and Freedom), Griswold (Workers World), McReynolds (Socialist), Pulley (Socialist Workers) 0.42%

1976 McCarthy (independent), Camejo (Socialist Workers), Hall (Communist), Wright (People's), Levin (Socialist Labor), Zeidler (Socialist) 1.17%

1972 Jenness (Socialist Workers), Spock (People's), Fisher (Socialist Labor), Hall (Communist), Reed (Socialist Workers) 0.33%

1968 Blomen (Socialist Labor), Gregory (Peace and Freedom), Halstead (Socialist Workers), Cleaver (Peace and Freedom), McCarthy (New Party/write-in) 0.28%

1964 Hass (Socialist Labor), DeBarry (Socialist Workers) 0.11%

1960 Hass (Socialist Labor), Dobbs (Socialist Workers) 0.13%

1956 Hass (Socialist Labor), Dobbs (Socialist Workers) 0.08%

1952 Hallinan (Progressive), Hass (Socialist Labor), Hoopes (Socialist), Dobbs (Socialist Workers), Krajewski (Poor Man's) 0.34%

1948 Wallace (Progressive), Thomas (Socialist), Teichert (Socialist Labor), Dobbs (Socialist Workers) 2.75%

1944 Thomas (Socialist), Teichert (Socialist Labor) 0.17%

1940 Thomas (Socialist), Browder (Communist), Aiken (Socialist Labor) 0.36%

1936 Lemke (Union), Thomas (Socialist), Browder (Communist), Aiken (Socialist Labor) 2.56%

1932 Thomas (Socialist), Foster (Communist), Harvey (Liberty), Reynolds (Socialist Labor), Coxey (Farmer-Labor) 2.73%

1928 Thomas (Socialist), Foster (Communist), Reynolds (Socialist Labor), Webb (Farmer-Labor) 0.94%

1924 LaFollette (Progressive), Foster (Communist), Johns (Socialist Labor), Wallace (Commonwealth Land) 16.85%

1920 Debs (Socialist), Christiansen (Farmer-Labor), Cox (Socialist Labor), Macauley (Single Tax) 4.54%

1916 Benson (Socialist), Reimer (Socialist Labor) 3.27%

1912 Debs (Socialist), Reimer (Socialist Labor) 6.18%

1908 Debs (Socialist), Gillhaus (Socialist Labor) 2.92%

1904 Debs (Socialist), Corregan (Socialist Labor) 3.23%

1900 Debs (Socialist), Barker (Populist), Maloney (Socialist Labor), Ellis (United Reform) 1.32%

1896 Matchett (Socialist Labor). Note: Populists nominate Democrat W. J.

Bryan this year. 0.26%

1892 Weaver (Populist), Wing (Socialist Labor) 8.69%

1888 Streeter (Union Labor), Cowdrey (United Labor), Socialist Labor Party electors unpledged to a candidate 1.34%

1884 Butler (Greenback) 1.33%

1880 Weaver (Greenback) 3.32%

1876 Cooper (Greenback) 0.99%

1856-1872 No left-of-center candidacies got ballot access and obtained more than 0.01% of the vote.

1852 Hale (Free Soil) 4.93%

1848 Van Buren (Free Soil), Smith (National Liberty) 10.22%

1844 Birney (Liberty) 2.30%

1840 Birney (Liberty) 0.31%

1789-1836 No left-of-center candidacies got ballot access and obtained more than 0.01% of the vote.

Methodology of this chart

Deciding who to include and exclude from this chart involved judgment calls. I tried to include all candidates who were generally left of center, that is, left of the bourgeois consensus or left of the two major parties in a given era. I included everyone from left-liberals and populists to candidates of small left organizations who may be considered sectarian (or even cultish in a couple of cases) by some of my readers. I only included those candidates / parties that received at least 0.01% of the vote.

For the purposes of this chart, I don't care how healthy these parties were, just that their candidates were espousing left-of-center views semi-consistently. I did not include Lyndon LaRouche, whose origins are on the left but whose ideology by the time of his presidential runs was not clearly left-of-center. (I'd consider LaRouche's ideology to be corporatist, capitalist, and tending towards a

paranoid form of Bonapartism or Caudillismo, perhaps with some qualities that hearken back to Huey Long or Father Coughlin within US political history. Others consider him to be semi-fascist, due to apparent anti-semitism and attacks on the left.)

Speaking of Long and Coughlin, I did include the 1936 Union Party, after some hesitation, since it at least posited itself as a populist wing of the New Deal. And I included a couple of candidates who received small numbers of votes based on a platform articulating some kind of slightly left-of-center-leaning reform, like the 1932 Liberty Party or the Single Tax / Commonwealth Party of 1920 and 1924.

I wasn't sure how far back to take this exercise. In different ways Eugene McCarthy, the Peace and Freedom Party, Henry Wallace, and finally Debs are the antecedents of the contemporary third party / left celebrity presidential campaign. Even LaFollette's run, the most successful in history for a left-of-center candidate in these terms, seem to belong to a fundamentally different era with a different language and social base. Nevertheless, the People's Party of the 1890s and the Greenback Party before that represented real antecedents to Debs, and to some extent provided a milieu from which the Socialist Party then departed.

I decided not to include Tom Watson's Populist Party runs in 1904 and 1908, at which point Watson had taken a stances that were racist (even having called for the reorganization of the KKK), anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and anti-socialist. This same Watson had previously fought for cross-racial agrarian unity in the South in the 1890s. Of course many of his 1904 and 1908 voters were probably still left-of-center, and I'm sure a fair number of Populist voters before 1900 would have taken some of these same, contradictory stances. The People's Party was hardly consistent even in its healthiest days by the later standards of the Socialists and even contemporary multi-tendency parties like Peace and Freedom and the Greens. However, I'd argue that their first incarnation was clearly left-of-center, while after 1900, following a

disbanding and reorganization, many of the leftists had left for the Socialist Party, and there was something of a collapse of the old agrarian producerism beyond the peculiarities of Watson.

Arguably the first real electoral “third party” in the modern sense was the Greenbacks, in the sense that they were a party with a broad conception of the political world, using electoral campaigns more to advance this vision than to elect a candidate to office in the near term. After some consideration, I decided to include abolitionist (Liberty) and Free Soil candidates from 1840-1852, as well. The term “left” is probably a bit anachronistic for this time period, but the abolitionists were radicals, attacking the question around which the nation would soon (nearly) dissolve. (The Free Soil Party was a pragmatic offshoot of this, opposing the extension of slavery to new land, a program which abolitionists could see as a first step and other Northerners could see as a practical extension of their mode of life into land which was about to be colonized and settled.) As an electoral party they were also single-issue reformers, in a sense, even if that single issue was the most fundamental of the day, and key figures were often social elites whose political style has as much in common with the later, 1910s Progressives (who I haven’t included here) as with the later left. Famously, as Du Bois observes in *Black Reconstruction*, the Northern labor movement and abolitionism were able to find little common ground, to the great detriment of the possibility of a labor movement which could perceive and act upon a common class interest.

Immediate Interpretations

The numbers seem to tell a story that is at variance with how leftists usually talk about history in some interesting ways, at least on the face of it, though number of votes are a poor and to some degree not terribly meaningful (some would argue, completely meaningless) proxy for the political significance of a campaign.

One interesting factor was the variance between years in which “single tendency” or sectarian campaigns did well vs. years in which multi-tendency or broad left campaigns did well. Since 1996 the biggest vote getters amongst the third-party candidates have been Green, independent, or Peace and Freedom candidates supported by a fairly heterogeneous array of forces. The New Alliance Party in 1992 and 1988 was more or less a sect presenting itself as a multi-tendency party. 1976-1984 also saw broad left efforts led the way, but from 1956-1972 the relatively well oiled campaign apparatuses of the Socialist Labor Party and Socialist Workers Party pulled in the most votes on the left. We think of 1968 and 1972 as exciting times to be on the left and formative years for third party campaigning, but Benjamin Spock in 1972 was outpolled by the SWP, and in 1968 the SLP candidate led the way, though the Peace and Freedom Party would have outpolled him had they run the same candidate everywhere. (They ran runner-up for the nomination Dick Gregory in some states, since Eldridge Cleaver was 34, too young constitutionally to be eligible for the office of president, and therefore declared ineligible for the ballot in some states.)

Henry Wallace’s 1948 run is widely remembered on the left, while William Lemke’s 1936 run and (to a lesser extent) Norman Thomas’s in 1932 are almost forgotten. Yet, the three are of a similar order of magnitude.

Looking cross-historically at Nader and Wallace, it’s tempting to conclude that 2.7% of the popular vote is just enough to get you reviled by the political establishment, possibly tarnishing your associates by proximity and requiring you (Wallace) or countless supporters (Nader) to vocalize mea culpas for years, to try to live down the audacity. If Schopenhauer’s maxim (“All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.”) applies to third-party left politics, then 2.7% might be just enough to register violent opposition in the modern era. Of course in the

Debs era, the Socialists got more than 2.7% five elections in a row.

The Broad View

Why do some of us on the left bother running or supporting left-of-center presidential candidates every four years? Why do leftists whose views are far removed from the mainstream axis around which presidential elections turn bother to engage with presidential races at all, when local races offer possibilities for more immediate inroads?

In heady years, like those of Nader’s 2000 run, a third-party presidential campaign seems like it could lay the groundwork for a permanent shakeup of the electoral system and provide a space for the expression, development, and broadening of radical politics. (Arguably, if Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition had left the Democratic Party in 1988, this would have provided an even better opportunity for such a development. But Jackson was nowhere near taking such a step, and independent forces within the Rainbow Coalition were not developed enough to challenge him.) In lean years, like 2004-2012, supporting a third-party presidential campaign is a good way to alienate your liberal and progressive friends (and bore your anarchist friends) seemingly without a lot in return.

Yet, presidential politics occupy a large space within the terrain of the national-popular. Every four years, most other political discussions come to a halt or get derailed as this large symbolic prize takes center-stage. One may find it frustrating to see social movements dissipate in the face of a presidential election, but that they often do so is a fact. The failure of Occupy to experience a spring 2012 revival may have been partially conditioned by an already growing focus on the presidential race. Arguably a downturn in the Immigrant Rights Movement coincided with the 2008 cycle, though activism by undocumented youth has provided a partial revival, albeit without hundreds of thousands in the streets at once. The clearest example in recent memory is the 2004 cycle, when many liberals and progressives,

led by groups like MoveOn, abandoned the antiwar movement and buried their energies in “Anybody But Bush” efforts which ultimately coincided with the Kerry campaign.

Local and state races never take up this amount of space, and even midterm Congressional, Senate, and gubernatorial elections only take up a fraction of it. Fundamentally, I think this is why we do it: propagandistically, if the left wants to speak to people during these paroxysms that arrive like clockwork every four years, there’s nothing quite like an electoral intervention at the presidential level. It’s a space of political debate that is tantalizingly desirable and maddening: desirable to the extent that it offers a specter of debate over the direction of the country; maddening to the extent that the parameters of that debate are very carefully circumscribed. It provokes a certain kind of detailed, frenetic, yet politically captivated energy on the part of a great many politically engaged people, to the extent that people whose politics are way to the left of the candidates who have a chance of being elected begin to think like tacticians for one of these candidates. Platitudes abound on all sides for how an election is the bare minimum, not the end-point, of political engagement, yet the organizing we promise each other and the holding-accountable we promise towards the candidates tend to fall short. Shibboleths of immanent fascism and reaction rattle about, along with the hyperbolic inflation of the preciousness of each vote, to the point where the whole thing becomes a depressing and sometimes disgusting exercise. Of course that reaction is often a real threat, and disenfranchisement of poor voters and voters of color is all too real.

The 2012 election seems to have dealt a blow to reaction on several fronts, though Obama’s promised “Grand

Bargain” suggests that the Democrats will continue their approximately 1970s-present tradition of triangulating away their political capital instead of using it to build a governing consensus. Nevertheless, suggestions that Republican reliance on a shrinking older, white male demographic might cause them to go the way of the Whigs are intriguing. Chances are better than not that they will figure out a way to rebrand themselves, and that as early as 2014 we’ll see a wave of Latino Republican standard-bearers, along with a few Black and Asian candidates and more and more women, articulating some modernized version of the GOP maybe along the lines of a more plebeian version of the pre-2001 George Bushes. Nevertheless both a Republican collapse and an increasing level of two-party “transformism” seem within the realm of possibility, at which point the left’s ability to articulate something could become more important.

Such a transformation would probably not happen in one or two election cycles, though it’s impossible to predict idiosyncratic political personalities and ever sharpening economic crises. In my view, what we should be aiming for would be a series of results that would look like the Socialist Party’s from 1900-1920, possibly presaging a leap into major party status. This sounds like a modest task but it is in fact immense, since socialism from 1900-1920 was an idea that captivated a great deal of excitement, reflected however diffusely in these results. In those years the US labor movement was combative and experimental, led by the IWW; revolution was on the agenda around the world; socialism had a cultural milieu, building on the legacy of populism; and the world got embroiled in a terribly unpopular, grisly, draining world war. The left today is still mostly mired in a post-1989 inability to project the new world we insist is possible, as opposed

to rejecting the neoliberal consensus and making pleas for a different kind of public space. Furthermore, even the better vehicles we have for the electoral aspect of such a project are in relative disarray.

Third parties are largely secondary to a revival of some kind of democratic, worker-driven labor movement and either sustained mass movements or an intensification of episodic struggles, and presidential races are probably even more secondary in some ways to local campaigns that could be winnable short-term, building the base for a new historic bloc. They may only be important as a kind of superstructural barometer of how we’re doing, or they may provide a space for making propagandistic inroads.

A useful accompaniment to this piece would be a history of insurgent political expressions within the major parties, such as the Rainbow Coalition, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, etc. I suspect that the establishment of a left historic bloc of this sort would not emerge solely from the organic growth of a left-of-center electoral bloc, but also from a split in which wings of one or both of the two major parties broke away. It seems most likely to imagine such a split from the Democrats, though it’s worth observing that before their consolidation into a reiteration of the conservative wing of the Republican Party, the Tea Party was a movement of disaffected, anti-bailout, largely white and non-urban / non-cosmopolitan social groups. Within the range of political possibilities currently articulated and the prevalence of reactionary racial politics in this milieu, it was perhaps inevitable that the Tea Party evolved in the direction it did, but if the legitimacy of capitalism continues to come into question, it’s possible to imagine similar formations evolving in a populist or even radical direction.

Some incomplete notes on the political situation in Europe

22 November 2012, by Josep María Antentas

1. The European economy is still immersed in crisis. The IMF predicts that 2012 will end with growth of -0.4% and 2013 with 0.2%. The recession is particularly significant in the periphery, especially in Greece and the Spanish state (in the latter a fall of 1.5% and 1.3% in 2012 and 2013) and there is weak growth in the centre, with forecast of 0.9% growth for Germany. The general economic stagnation and austerity policies affect the latter in a negative way, as its exports to the rest of Europe tend to fall (down 11.4% as a whole, with falls of 15.8% to Portugal, 9% to Greece, and 8.6% to Italy) and are not offset by the increase in exports to the United States and China.

The crisis is generating tensions in the entire edifice of the EU and the Euro zone and accentuating the neo-colonial and centre-periphery internal dynamics. In this context Mediterranean Europe has become the place where all the political and social tensions of the crisis are condensed. The future of the Euro remains uncertain, although the German policy for keeping the single currency, tightening the rope but without breaking it, is needed to promote their exports. Capital flight continues from the periphery to the centre (the Spanish state suffered outflows of capital from June 2011 to June 2012 of 296,000 million Euros, 27% of GDP in 2011, while Italy has registered outflows of 235 billion Euros, 15% of GDP in 2011), and the gap between the sovereign debt premiums for Germany and those of countries like Italy or the Spanish state show the situation of risk for the Euro.

The most immediate factor that marks the European agenda is the total bailout of the Spanish state that has been planned in European politics for

months. Apparently imminent weeks ago, it seems now that they can get by a little longer. Apart from the doubts of the Spanish government, and above all Germany itself, the issue will remain on the table, in a scenario also involving Italy, Cyprus and Slovenia. In Greece the political crisis can only worsen and the strategy of the troika is to prepare a firewall preventing a domino effect in case of having to disconnect the Hellenic country from the Euro.

In this situation the debate about the Euro is gaining force on the European left, although the only country where there is real debate beyond small circles is in Greece. The anti-capitalist left opposed the creation of the Euro, as a project in the service of the major economic powers of the EU and detrimental to workers. Once implemented and consolidated as an apparently inescapable reality the most appropriate policy was to put the emphasis on an internationalist break with the Europe of Capital (opposition to all Treaties, Constitution, Directives and so on), without raising the question in terms of "exit" from the EU or the Euro. Focusing on the rupture with the Europe of Capital in an internationalist sense and not falling back on the national-state mentality remains a strategic issue. However, the evolution of the situation puts on the table the specific issue of the currency, the Euro, which no longer appears as an irreversible fact. In this context exit from the Euro cannot be a taboo, nor can we take its existence for granted, as was the case before the crisis.

However, I do not think it necessary to raise exit from the Euro as a programmatic demand *a priori*, or focus on the discussion around the currency as fundamental, but it is best to place the question of exit from the

Euro as a possible consequence of the break with the policies of austerity: suspension of debt payment, non-application of the adjustment policies and reversal of the cuts made, expropriation of banking and so on. Thus a possible leftist government in any European country, rather than voluntarily leaving the Euro, would have to break with the policies imposed by the troika and assume the possibility of expulsion from the Euro, which on the other hand is also not 100% sure, especially if this happens in a country which is economically relevant (Spanish state, Italy and so on) with the consequences that could entail for the survival of the Euro itself. Faced with a scenario of "disobedience" from one country the troika would be forced to punish such insubordination, so that the example does not spread, but at the same time there may be difficulties in drastically expelling from the Euro zone a state of this weight, or two states if there is insubordination in two countries at once. A left-wing government should be prepared to leave the Euro and would have to prepare the population for this, but I see no utility in posing *a priori* a voluntary departure although it's very important to continue to denounce the model of European integration that has been built.

2. What is underway is a comprehensive project of social reorganization and change of the social model under the designs of financial capital. It is not a complete, coherent, or planned project in its entirety but, without a doubt, what is at stake is a deep and drastic change of the current social model. In the European periphery we are witnessing a "Latin Americanization"/"Third Worldization" of the Euro-Mediterranean societies in terms of model of society (inequality, social de-structuring, increased violence and so

on). And the destruction of the so-called "European social model" and the remains of "Rhineland capitalism" is deepening in the continental centre, through an "Americanization" of the continent, towards a model of wild unregulated capitalism. This has been Germany's path since the Schröder reforms and Hartz laws at the beginning of the century.

The transformation of the social model implies a change of political regime. The oligarchic involution of the parliamentary democracies is deepening and intensifying. We are seeing a draining of content, an implosion of the traditional democratic-institutional mechanisms of the European countries, by extreme subordination of politics to the interests of finance capital, the greatest expressions of which have been "financial coups" in Greece and Italy and the placing in key institutional positions in the EU and in many countries of the men from Goldman Sachs. In times of crisis, it is better to take the rudder of the ship directly.

In the countries of the periphery, the economic and social crisis has become a political crisis continually deepening the growing process of delegitimization of institutions and mainstream political parties, and the rejection of the financial elites. In Greece, the most advanced case, a continuing, deepening crisis of hegemony has led to an explosion of the traditional party system. In the Spanish state the rejection of "politicians and bankers", which was the founding motto of 15M, has increased and the country is entering a growing dynamic of "regime crisis" which mingles the wear and tear of the institutions of the state (including the King although in nuanced form) and the two great parties for their pro-banker management of the crisis with the crisis of the state model and the rise of the independence movements in Catalonia and Euskadi.

The deepening of the political consequences of the crisis in Greece, Portugal, and the Spanish state, of the traditional party system, social outbursts and problems of "governance" denote a deterioration of the political situation, in countries

where the "democratic" tradition among political and business elites is very superficial and historically not deeply rooted. There is increased police repression, with the hardening of the laws and reiterated violation by the regime of its own laws and rules of the game when necessary, within the framework of a growing authoritarian involution of political and social life, to which must be added the growth or emergence of the extreme right. Recourse to authoritarian solutions, whose realization can take many forms, evolves more and more as a real hypothesis for the ruling class, as the crisis of legitimacy deepens and the traditional mechanisms of domination decompose.

3. Social democracy does not present any kind of alternative to current policies at the European level, or any agenda of solution to the crisis that is differentiated from that of the right and finance capital itself. In the countries of the periphery, social democracy (PASOK in Greece, PSOE in the Spanish State, SP in Portugal and so on) has actively collaborated in the implementation of adjustment measures. In Germany the SPD has not questioned either, in any real way, the austerity of Merkel or the official story of the crisis that lays the blame on "workers from the South". It cannot be ruled out that in the future a social-democratic majority in the key countries of the EU could pose some slight variation or "breathing space" to the countries in the worst situation and opt for slightly opening the security valve to release steam, with the aim of alleviating the worsening of social tensions, but there would not be any serious change of course. Despite all the pumped up media expectations around Hollande, for those who had them, they have been quickly dashed and, despite all the election promises, his government's budget maintains a commitment to austerity policies (reducing the deficit from 4.5 to 3% next year and 0% by 2017) and supports the fiscal pact at the European level.

Social democracy appears today as a current at a historic low point without a specific political project. Where it has applied austerity policies, it has paid a huge political price. However, it still retains, with distinct forms

according to each country, broad political-electoral apparatuses, bases in some sectors of society and in the trade unions, control or affinity with the media and, despite everything, still has a significant share of electoral support in many countries (Great Britain, Germany and so on) as the only alternative to conservative governments today available. In Mediterranean Europe the crisis of social democracy acquires an ever-increasing dynamic although with different degrees of intensity. PASOK has been destroyed in Greece and its standing in the polls is below 10%. In the Spanish state the PSOE has not climbed back in the polls or capitalized on the erosion of the right-wing PP government and has indeed lost electoral support and social credibility. In Portugal the SP retains a significant electoral quota and is capitalizing on the unpopularity of the government of Passos Coelho, somehow combining a hypocritical verbal radicalism against the cuts and basic support for austerity policies. But everything suggests that when the battered Passos Coelho falls the SP will have to engage again in the management of austerity, either in a unity government or in another form, that will inevitably erode it.

Devoid of a transformational project, and converted into a faithful servant of the financial regime at a time when it is sacrificing most of society to save itself, social democracy in the south of Europe enters into contradiction and collision with its social base. Social democracy had a key role in the formation of the post-dictatorial regimes in the 1970s in Greece, Portugal, and the Spanish state and its deep crisis in these countries is one reflection of the more general crisis of the political order established then.

4. A new phase in the social struggles starting from 2011 is clear, although these are still very uneven on the continent, reaching a mass or popular "rebellion" level only in the Mediterranean periphery (with strong exceptions such as Italy) or in some Eastern European countries (Romania in early 2012 and so on). In others, such as Britain, struggles against the cuts are notable by the usual standards of the country, as shown in the demonstration on October 20,

2012. The wave of current struggles have as a clear limit, in geopolitical terms, the fact of having not yet reached France, the key country in the resistance to neo-liberalism from 1995 until the outbreak of the crisis, and Italy, where the social situation still has not been exploited in a "Spanish" manner. Without being deterministic, it is predictable, however, that as adjustment policies deepen along with the instability of the crisis, these countries will sooner or later develop their own "15M", and their own, unexpected, ways to unlock the situation and enter into a new political and social cycle.

The internationalization of the "indignant" and "occupy" movement and new resistance to austerity is very uneven. The 15O of 2011 was an important step forward and represented a day of remarkable global action, to be followed a few months later by the protests of Blockupy Frankfurt in March 2012 at the continent's financial heart. But the new movement has not yet been able to provide solid frameworks and international structures and promote a dynamic of international coordination which goes beyond global days of symbolic action, such as the recent day of 13O against the debt. The initiatives organized by what is left of the former antiglobalization wave like Firenze+10 are quite peripheral to the new movement. And also, the attempts to organize a European movement by the left union currents in Britain as the European Conference Against Austerity don't have enough continental impact to launch a European dynamics. In this scenario there is a triple dynamic at work: driving national-state level resistance to cuts, global protests like 15O and 13O, and specific actions of solidarity with peripheral countries affected by structural adjustment, with Greece and the Spanish state to the fore.

The logic of the current cycle is defensive before an unprecedented intensification of attacks, and develops in a very unfavourable global balance of forces, but it contains offensive elements, in the sense of being disruptive and its ability to destabilize the routine functioning of the institutions, and with an ability to counter-attack. Social struggles have

not reached a dynamic of victories allowing a building of forces upward and the great battles that have been fought across the EU over the past year have been lost. There could, however, be chances of specific partial victories in the future, such as the case of the payment in kind in the Spanish state for example. In Portugal, the protests of 15S obtained a relevant rectification of the measures envisaged by the government but they were replaced by a tax increase and nobody felt this as a victory. We lack victories that transmit the fundamental message that still needs to be generalized: "Yes we can".

The translation of the mobilizations into stable collective organization (associative, trade union, political and so on) is still very weak (weak and unstable neighbourhood assemblies in the Spanish state for example). The challenge is rebuilding a new social block, whose bases are still fragile, gelatinous, in a fragmented and de-structured society which articulates common interests from the comprehension of social plurality.

Despite the lack of victories, even with an everyday life which is ever more desperate, there is not a sense of defeat in the societies affected by structural adjustment. Even in Greece, where much of the population perceived the defeat of Syriza as the end of the last hope against austerity, there is not a definitive feeling of defeat, a final resignation. The towel has not been thrown in. On the contrary, as adjustment policies are hardened for the whole Euro-Mediterranean region willingness to struggle multiplies.

5. The capacity for citizens' and social mobilization in the street contrasts with the difficulties it meets in the workplace because of unemployment, casualization and transformations in productive organization (subcontracting, outsourcing and so on), elements which hinder the development of a new combative and mobilizing trades unionism. Majority trades unionism still clings to an institutionalized model oriented to "social dialogue" which is strategically exhausted. The magnitude of the attacks and social grassroots reaction through the "indignant" movements

pushes mainstream unions, particularly in the south of Europe, towards struggle, but without this implying a change of trade union model or a strategic reflection on the depletion of "social dialogue". They maintain a zigzag orientation (mobilization, failed social dialogue, mobilization in response to new attacks and so on), torn between their orientation towards a non-viable coalition and the need to mobilize to defend social rights and their own future as organizations, but remaining anchored in their institutional and bureaucratic mentality and unwilling to get involved with struggles and social movements they do not control.

At the European level the European of Trade Union Confederation does not offer any coherent alternative of resistance to the adjustment plans or any attempt to articulate the international solidarity of workers. The split between trade unions in the south and centre and northern Europe has widened and deepened with the crisis and the implementation of adjustment policies. The latter accept, more or less explicitly, the official line of the governments of central and northern Europe and of the troika that responsibility for the crisis lies with the workers in the south of Europe, who are unproductive, idle and do not pay taxes. This argument serves the governments and financial elites of central and northern Europe in their efforts to displace domestic social contradictions to the outside.

The day of November 14, 2012, was a step forward in the international trade union coordination of a response to austerity policies, which goes far beyond what has been done so far traditionally (symbolic days of trade union Euro-mobilization). For 14N there were announced general strikes in Portugal, the Spanish State, actions in Greece (where finally nothing happened because the country had had a general strike the 6-7th), Cyprus and Malta, a general strike in French-speaking Belgium and a stoppage of 4 hours by the CGIL in Italy. However the international momentum of 14N was a little less than expected in the end and it seems to have been very much centred around the axis Portugal-Spanish State. The international dimension of 14N served

to reinforce the success of national-state level appeals, giving them more credibility although without yet generating the perception of being part of an international solidarity movement in response to the adjustment policies in the collective imagination of Euro-Mediterranean workers. To achieve a “Euro-strike” or “Euro-Mediterranean strike” would be worth more than decades of bureaucratic work of trade union lobbying in Brussels. If 14N remains an exception it will have had little relevance. If it represents a turning point, although very limited and weak, in the internationalization of the strategy of the official trade union movement it will be significant, but insufficient, progress.

6. The left to the left of social democracy has had difficulties developing within the framework of the crisis and the electoral reflections of social resistance remain limited and contradictory. The left has capitalized less on the unrest than the far right or populist right. The background reasons are to be found in well-known phenomena: the weight of political defeats in recent decades, the absence of ideological references, depoliticization, the lack of credibility of the parties. The rise of the extreme right across the continent is based on xenophobia as a common denominator and the exploitation of social unrest resulting from the crisis and, before that, by the destruction of the welfare state by decades of neo-liberalism. The far right takes the form, albeit with many variants country by country, of a populist “national” right (which in some cases is a “camouflaged” neo-fascist right), with the exception of Golden Dawn in Greece whose model is directly the fascism and Nazism of the 1930s.

The disaffection felt by citizens with the major parties, however, is deepening alongside the electoral punishment of governments (whether rightwing or social liberal) in turn in each country. And in the countries of the periphery social democracy, as we pointed out earlier, suffers a historic crisis bringing it into direct contradiction with its social base. In several places phenomena are occurring whose urgency expresses disaffection and unrest, on the one

hand, and the absence of consistent, alternative views on the other. Such is the case with the successes of the Pirate Party first in Sweden and now Germany, with a young middle-class vote identifying neither with social democracy nor the Greens (and although it is a very different phenomenon we should also mention the populist-demagogic candidacy of Beppe Grillo in Italy). Nevertheless, the double context of capitalist crisis and heightening social struggles and re-politicization (even starting from a very low level), is a favourable backdrop for the forces of the left in Europe.

To the left of social democracy the balance of forces between the anti-capitalist and revolutionary currents and the reformist forces has shifted in favour of the latter, even more, in the last period. Many reformist formations benefit electorally from the discredit of social democracy and the absence of a strong anti-capitalist alternative, although this is not true for all of them and some relevant forces in this field, such as Die Linke in Germany, have known a significant weakening. The Greens, on the other hand, at different levels depending on each country, but with a few specific exceptions (as in Great Britain) have become very institutionalized forces and moved much to the right. The European anti-capitalist left appears as credible, in many countries, in the social and activist front, but not in the electoral field. The presidential campaign of the NPA with Poutou is a good proof of this (and on a more modest scale the successive IA campaigns also). Poutou took a modest 1.1% (very small compared with the 11.1% for Mélenchon and the previous 4% for Besancenot) but the political and social echo and sympathy awakened by his candidacy and its proposals were significant, regardless of the result and found sympathy among people who chose the “useful” vote for Mélenchon.

With the retreat of the NPA the anti-capitalist left has “disappeared” as a visible current in the European media-electoral ground in relation to the left reformist groupings, although it remains a relevant current in the area of militancy and social activism. Broad anti-capitalist formations like the

Bloco in Portugal or the RGA in Denmark have little European visibility and, in the absence of a European anti-capitalist pole, their international policy swings around to that of the Party of the European Left driven by IU, the FG, Die Linke, and others. There is no need to think that this situation of lack of strong anti-capitalist left visibility has stabilized and again there could be changes. In the last decade we have already seen quick “rises” and “falls” of various forces (PRC in Italy, Die Linke in Germany, the NPA in France and so on) and should not take the current French scenario, for example, as a fixed and irreversible stage, but it is an inescapable reality right now.

The prospects for the bulk of the European anti-capitalist and revolutionary organizations, with a few national exceptions, are those of being able to construct activist forces, with weight in the struggles, but with an inability, at least in the short term, to become strong electoral references, at a time where this is more necessary than ever before the advance of the adjustment policies and the social reorganization involved. So it is necessary to locate the construction of anti-capitalist and revolutionary organizations within the framework of a broader perspective of construction of new unitary political tools that take different forms according to country and that can gain a mass audience and influence.

The rise of Syriza marks the dynamic of the European left which has been interpellated by its emergence. It has become the concrete reference in Europe showing that is possible to articulate a political-electoral project able to contest the electoral hegemony of social democracy and aim at a majority. If it does not make big mistakes, its influence on the European left predictably will increase in a context of absence of other major reference points. It is not an anti-capitalist formation and its leadership is located in “left reformist” positions, with a programme and a strategy that will not go “until the end” in a consistent approach of rupture, but it is a project that is located to the left of IU, the Front de Gauche, or Die Linke. Its reformist left-wing component cohabits with radical currents within it

that, although in the minority, have a certain weight. And, above all, the political project of Syriza is developing in a context of popular uprising. The evolution of Syriza is uncertain and will be subject to two conflicting pressures: the logic of governability and institutional respectability, on one hand, and the growing social radicalization as a result of the intensification of social attacks, on the other. The anti-capitalist left should not romanticize Syriza uncritically, or show a sectarian attitude. We have to show our sympathy for its social and electoral rise and what it means, and seek a dialogue with its leadership and deepen the relationship with its left-wing currents. But apart from the "real Syriza", the "Syriza symbol" has become the example that "it is possible" to build an alternative. This is the main meaning that it has for the European left.

7. In the countries where the social revolt against adjustment has broken out there is a strong social politicization, although it is a contradictory politicization and starts from a very low level, without clear references (political, cultural, intellectual, historical, organizational and so on), or with overly confusing references and actual results which are not very definitive (although paradoxically the Icelandic "revolution" or the Latin American processes are often idealized). This politicization has not yet led to the organization of policy instruments, or even stable social structures, but it has left behind the period of what Daniel Bensaïd called the "social illusion", of self-sufficiency of the social struggle, of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, or the ideas of "changing the world without taking power" in the manner of Holloway (not in vain the Arab revolutions were, with popular attempts to topple regimes and the fall of dictators, the founding event which remains in the imagination of the youth radicalized against austerity in Europe). Increasingly the "political question" appears as inevitable in relation to the virulence of the attacks on the conditions of life by governments and the de-legitimization that such attacks cause, precisely because of their depth, to parties and institutions. In historical terms the

most important variable is the incorporation of the bulk of social activists, the social left today not politically organized, into the construction of new political instruments.

In the Euro-Mediterranean periphery, the implementation of structural adjustment plans shake society as a whole, tending to destroy the party system and destroy the traditional mechanisms of representation. Before the depth of the attacks, the discrediting of social democracy, and the desperate need for solutions, sometimes the debate on the "alternative", on the "political instrument" is directly transformed into debates, strategically hasty and based on a real need at risk of "leapfrogging", on how to form an "alternative government" in the "Latin American" mould.

The rising level of politicization and social struggles has boosted, at the same time and in a contradictory manner, both the instrumental support for the traditional left, and the formation of new alternatives outside the institutional parties. Maybe in the end the instrumental support for what exists will prevail, or the reverse, the impulse toward what's new will prove stronger. Possibly both will end up recombining. The key will be how and with what weights. Also determinant will be the question of what form the "new" takes and if a logic of radical transformation of the system prevails or if on the contrary what expresses a more superficial critique of today's world impose themselves.

The general dynamic favours social radicalization fed by the realization of the impossibility of achieving real changes and the widespread perception that the system and the "markets" are undisturbed. But this radicalization also has significant limits, the weakness of the left, the lack of references, the accumulated weight of losses, the lack of expectations of social change; there is limited strategic clarity in the case of many movements and, in many cases, the radicalism is expressed more in forms of struggles and dynamics than in strictly programmatic terms. The fundamental challenge in the period is to make this diffuse anti-systemic

awareness acquire more strategic and programmatic consistency (clarifying what it means to be "anti-capitalist", or have a "revolution", how to change the world and so on).

In some countries there will be new instruments that might gravitate around reformist forces but offer a profile of breaking with austerity and connecting with the rising social radicalism (perhaps *Alternativa Galega de Esquerdas* in Galicia winning 9% of the vote and 14 Deputies in the elections of October 21, 2012 is the most recent example of this). Others will see alliances between radical and anti-capitalist currents and/or sectors of the social left form the axis of new groupings and instruments. Even with different scenarios, different routes and different final results, the task of the anti-capitalist currents will be to work for the formation of new political instruments of effective struggle and ensure they have a programme, a strategy and a daily practice that is the most advanced possible.

In the European periphery the situation on the left is very different according to the country. There are instruments to practice politics with a mass audience in Greece and Portugal. In the first case the task is to build Syriza, strengthen its left wing and look to build bridges between it and Antarsia, while working to keep the bulk of the project in a position of rupture with austerity and no compromise with the troika. In Portugal it is to further develop the *Bloco Esquerda*, whose election prospects are on the rise again. It appears as the party most tied to the new resistance movements, in a scenario on the other hand of mistrust of parties and electoral representation, which submits it to a permanent structural tension and the pressure of the "new" and "emergent".

In the Spanish state and Italy the question which arises is different: the need to rebuild the left and a political instrument of struggle and defence that has a mass audience, and social and electoral credibility. Anti-capitalist formations like *Izquierda Anticapitalista* or *Sinistra Critica*, although they have social impact and

credibility as activist currents, do not themselves constitute a political reference. Reformist organizations such as IU in the Spanish case have electoral credibility, and if it deals successfully with its internal tension between its general discourse in opposition to the crisis and its participation in the austerity policies in the Andalusian Government, it can establish itself as an increasingly significant electoral benchmark. But at the same time it cannot by itself constitute the “alternative”, nor can it can transform electoral support into organic militancy, lacking political credibility (which is not the same as electoral credibility), real social roots and because it appears as part of the “old” and traditional politics. The question of the political instrument

appears, therefore, raised.

The issue on the agenda is rebuilding the left in a society shaken by a huge social transformation process that is destabilizing all areas of social life. As adjustment plans reconfigure society and shake up all the political and social structures, the need to construct new political instruments becomes more evident. On the basis of the rejection of the austerity policies, as we have said before, we have to work to ensure that the new political tools that will be built will have a strategic and programmatic orientation and a daily practice reflecting the need for rupture to the greatest possible extent, a project of social change that is as advanced and developed as possible. The forms that

the new political projects to be built will take will be unpredictable and will probably become confusing, with contradictions and programmatic and strategic limits. A variety of national dynamics will combine, according to political traditions, the respective weight of the different currents of the left and the configuration of the social and trade union left. Adjusting tactics to the diversity of contexts and the respective role of each country, anti-capitalist currents must participate actively in attempts and experiences of construction of new, comprehensive and useful political instruments in those countries where this task is yet to be done (the majority!) and have, at the same time, their own ambitious project of party-building and development.

The women's movement fights back

20 November 2012, by **Ecehan Balta**

They fought to increase women's access to education and paid work, to abolish polygamy, and the *peçe*, an Islamic veil. The first women's association in Turkey, The Ottoman Welfare Organisation of Women was founded in 1908 and became partially involved in the Young Turks Movement which was a driving force in the founding of the Turkish Republic. The women's revolution accomplished by the young Turkish Republic was in fact the result of these 50 years of activism by Ottoman women.

The right to vote, which Ottoman and feminists in Turkey had demanded for decades, was finally granted in 1934 by the Republican People's Party CHP under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. But, at the same time “the feminist movement” gradually became integrated into the state, which thus inhibited its practice outside state approved structures. So called “state feminism” established itself as a part of the Kemalist modernisation efforts to copy western societies. From this time onward

women in Turkey were portrayed as emancipated and liberated. The discourse of emancipation was used to close down the Turkish Women's Union in 1955, which was the only women's organisation of the period.

As a result, between 1923 and 1980, there was no independent feminist movement. Women had to wait until the 1980 coup d'état to bring feminism back onto the political agenda. The military government crushed the socialist movement. Being left unorganised and having experienced the male dominant political culture of the dissent movements, socialist women organised the contemporary feminist movement in Turkey after 1980 coup. Partly as a result of this legacy, socialist feminism has always been a strong trend within feminist movement.

Since 1983 there have been hundreds of publications and public meetings organised by feminists and these have made a real political impact. Starting from 1989, the feminist movement has

been publishing independent journals (such as Feminist, Kaktüs, Pazartesi, Feminist Politika, Amargi etc). Non-hierarchical and independent forms of organisation, consciousness-raising groups, issue-oriented ad hoc committees characterised the movement. The insistence on the “political nature of the personal” is another point of similarity between Western and Turkish feminism. Now there are over 250 Turkish women's groups that organise themselves in the form associations, clubs, lobby groups, and networks.

In the last 30 years the feminist movement in Turkey has gained experience in organising country-wide campaigns. Even though there are many ideological differences between women's groups in Turkey today, feminists come together to work on common issues affecting women's lives, such as state-led virginity controls, violence against women and privatisation of welfare services. The women's movement, in Turkey, has always positioned itself in the ranks of the non-parliamentary opposition. The

formation of LGBT movement in the middle of the 1990's further helped the development of feminist politics and identity.

Conservatism rising

One should add the emergence of the Kurdish women's movement to this picture. In the beginning, the movement was mainly centred around the politicisation of motherhood. Through the mothers' movement, the women's movement (Demokratik Â-zgür Kad?n Hareketi - Democratic Liberated Women's Movement) gained legitimacy within the Kurdish movement. The feminist movement and Kurdish women's movement has an impressive history of collaboration, albeit with tensions. These tensions are usually a reflection of the tension between socialist movement and

Kurdish opposition.

The rising neoliberal conservatism of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government is now threatening the basic rights of Turkish women. In the summer of 2012 the AKP government initiated a debate on the abolition of abortion rights. Although there were several collaborations between Islamic feminists and other feminist groups in the 1990s, the veil issue made that kind of collaboration uneasy for both sides. In addition, the Islamist government's attacks to the rights of women hadn't made that relationship easier.

The attack on abortion rights is aimed at both forcing down wages and pushing women out of the labour market. Women's groups organised rallies and demonstrations in cities from the beginning of this discussion and raised their voices against the attempt to ban in defence of their

social rights and control over their own bodies. The demands of the movement were for free, secure, easy and accessible abortion and free, wide, secure contraception both for men and women.

The rallies held in June in the three biggest cities were disappointing. This was mainly the result of the contradictory standpoint of feminist movement: There was an intention to incorporate Kemalist and other women into the movement in the one hand, and to urge the Ministry of Family to take action on the other. The first of these aims couldn't be accomplished because of a lack of real effort and the second one was not realistic from the beginning. Despite everything, the government took a step back for now because of the public reaction against the ban. But they successfully put it into the agenda and we can predict that it won't be long before the next attack.

One of the biggest strikes ever

20 November 2012, by Luis Branco

The general strike of the 14th was initially called by the CGTP and soon found that the Secretary-General of the UGT was "unavailable", having signed a social pact with the government and the employers. However, some UGT unions later decided to back the strike, putting the secretary-general in the ridiculous position of having to explain to the press on the eve of the 14th, that he would be striking after all, despite being against it, since his union was one of those that had decided to take part.

The numbers confirm the success of the General Strike. Even though wage cuts made even more difficult the choice of losing another day's pay, more people took part than in the previous one. Transport and public administration were as always the main sectors that gave strength to the shutdown, but the highlight of the day

was the level of support in the private sector. For example, in the Lisnave shipyards 96% stopped work, at the Bosch factory it was 90%, and the EDP hydroelectric plant at Sines was shut down. Many factories in the auto industry, the pulp and engineering sectors had well over 60% of their workers joining the strike.

In addition to the strike, 39 demonstrations were held around the country. In Lisbon many thousands of people took part, including trade unionists, students and activists from other social movements. This demonstration ended in front of parliament, where hours later, after the CGTP had already taken down its stage, a group of a dozen young people with their faces covered spent more than an hour throwing stones at the police shields, just a few meters away, without the police trying to stop them. Although they were completely

isolated from the rest of the demonstration, just a few minutes before the CGTP leader was due to give a press conference with a balance sheet of the strike, the minister ordered the police to move violently and indiscriminately on thousands of protestors, causing panic and dozens of injured. More than 100 random arrests were made on the streets of Lisbon, with those detained being held for many hours with no access to lawyers or even a phone call. Most were released around midnight, in exchange for signing an identification form with the sections for the time, place and reason for detention left blank.

As expected, the images of violence came to dominate the end of the strike day, but they can not erase the extraordinary mobilization of workers at a time of very severe crisis. As evidence of the significant support in

the private sector, both the reasons and the timing for this strike enjoyed the sympathy of a large part of the population, which was not the case in the past. It was called just as the Government was preparing to approve a budget that nobody believes in, including its own supporters. It is a budget that includes a brutal tax increase for those in work and for those who have retired, amounting to a cut equivalent to two minimum wages. It is also a budget that will

limit the payment of benefits, by reducing further the amount and duration of severance pay, unemployment benefits and aid to the poor and elderly.

This mobilization will continue with protests by students on the 22nd and by workers on the 27th, when the budget is put to the vote. With a government tied to the troika and Merkel, and an SP with one foot in the

memorandum and another in the opposition, it is the trade unions and left political forces that have put forward alternative proposals; proposals to break with the troika's memorandum and to renegotiate the debt, to concentrate resources on supporting employment and the economy and not on paying abusive interest on the debt, which in this budget represent a larger share of total expenditure than spending on education.

A congress against the Troika

20 November 2012, by Christine Poupin

The congress itself was preceded on Friday evening by a "Europe against austerity" international meeting with speakers from Germany's Die Linke, Izquierda Unida from the Spanish state, a video of Alexis Tsipras from Syriza and the reading of a statement from Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Under the slogan "Vencer a troika" nearly 600 delegates were present, representing more than 6,000 members. The congress was very well covered by the media and was the subject of lengthy reports on news channels and newspapers.

Breaking with the memorandum

The model the Bloco identifies with is that of Syriza. But with electoral results which are clearly less significant and above all a very different social relationship of forces, the Bloco relies on a rapid transformation of the political and social situation initiated by the demonstration of September 15 which succeeded in forcing the government

to back down. It defends the proposition of a left government breaking with the memorandum of the troika based on several points: the cancellation of the illegitimate debt, the defence of public services and the right to education, health, social security, the nationalisation of the banks which have been rescued by the state and the sectors which have been privatised (energy, telecommunications and so on), a new tax system cracking down on fraud and shifting the tax burden from labour to capital.

Today the perspective of a left government opposed to the troika indicates the will to bring down the Passos government and the urgency of a policy of rupture, but it remains at this stage very algebraic, with a PCP which is still strong and extremely sectarian and which reject any alliance with the Bloco, and a PS with which no left policy is possible.

Government and movement

Motion?A received 80% of the votes

and motion?B 15%, with the remaining 5% being shared between the anti-capitalist platform and local platforms. The differences of orientation are hard to detect in the texts. However numerous interventions supporting motion?A stressed that a left government breaking with the troika cannot be created with the PS, thus indicating the underlying debate. Motion B defended a more "movementist" option and pointed to what it considers as democratic problems.

The Bloco enjoys a local implantation and an influence in the trade unions and in the social movements like that which initiated the September 15, 2012 but this dimension was relatively little present in the interventions, which centred on numerous denunciations of the troika, austerity, poverty, the destruction of public services and so on.

This congress also saw the end of the term as coordinator of the political bureau of Francisco Louça, a central figure and founder of the Bloco, whose public spokespersons will now be Catarina Martins and João Semedo.

Stop a New Israeli Massacre in Gaza: Boycott Israel Now!

19 November 2012, by [Palestinian National BDS Committee](#)

Despite biased Western media reports to the contrary, it is clear that Israel has initiated and escalated this new assault [6] on the eve of its upcoming parliamentary elections, underlining the time-honoured Israeli formula of Palestinian bodies for ballots. [7]

It is worth noting that a great majority of the Gaza population are refugees ethnically cleansed by Zionist militias and later the state of Israel during the 1948 Nakba and denied by Israel their UN-sanctioned right to return to their homes of origin.

This belligerent aggression is the most murderous and inhuman Israeli attack on the Palestinian people since the Gaza massacre of 2008-09, which killed more than 1,400 and injured more than 5,000 Palestinians, mainly civilians. The US and Europe have so far been successful in preventing Palestinian recourse to international justice mechanisms for Israeli crimes against humanity that took place during the massacre and that were documented by a UN Fact Finding Mission as well as a team of international law experts commissioned by the Arab League. Urgent action must be taken to prevent Israel from acting with such impunity again.

The 1.6 million Palestinians in Gaza have endured the worst of Israeli impunity and violence including being

placed under a medieval siege, being subjected to deliberately created food insecurity and frequent acts of Israeli state terrorism. It is the duty of all supporters of international law and universal human rights to hold Israel accountable through effective measures, such as those called for in the global, Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), the broadest coalition in Palestinian civil society, including all major political parties, trade unions, social movements and NGO networks, calls on:

- People of conscience around the world to intensify BDS campaigns to hold Israel accountable, and to pressure their governments to immediately suspend arms trade with Israel, implement trade sanctions, and bring to justice all Israeli officials and military personnel who took part, at all levels, in Israel's crimes against Palestinians in Gaza.

- Civil society organisations, including trade unions, universities, trade unions, student groups and NGOs, to boycott Israeli goods, divest from all Israeli and international companies that are complicit with Israel's occupation and apartheid, and call for governments to implement military embargoes and trade sanctions on

Israel.

- Governments, especially Arab and friendly governments, to respect their legal obligation to protect the Palestinian right to life and self-determination and to impose sanctions on Israel to immediately end its assault on, and cease its illegal siege of the occupied Gaza Strip and its policies of colonialism and apartheid that oppress the Palestinian people.

As this new attack on the people of Gaza shows, Israel will continue its belligerence, aggression and state terrorism unless it is made to pay a heavy price for its crimes against the Palestinian, Lebanese and other Arab peoples. As the last seven years of the global BDS movement and the long history of past international solidarity with the struggle against apartheid in South Africa have shown, the most effective, sustainable and morally consistent form of solidarity with the oppressed is for international civil society and conscientious people around the world to apply boycotts, divestment and sanctions against the oppressor and all institutions that collude in maintaining and justifying its oppression. It is high time for BDS against Israel. This is the clearest path to freedom, justice and equality for Palestinians and the entire region.

[From Palestinian National BDS committee](#)

Australian imperialism in the "Asian

14 November 2012, by **Liam Ward, Tom Bramble**

Speaking in front of a veritable who's who of the Australian political Establishment, Gillard told the audience that the neoliberal revolution unleashed on the Australian working class by the Hawke Labor Government nearly 30 years ago is only going to continue.

Trade with Asia has been growing rapidly in the past decade. Australian mining companies have made a killing. University vice chancellors have also awarded themselves fat salaries from the extortionate fees charged international students. Pharmaceutical companies and banks have also been doing good business.

The White Paper is all about creating opportunities for the corporate elite to get their snouts deeper into the trough. Further deregulation, "better integration of financial markets", greater involvement of the private sector in infrastructure provision, "tax reform" and free trade treaties are all designed to lift the fortunes of Australian bosses.

And they want us to work harder to make all this happen - productivity, although high, has to increase further. Enhancing "regional production chains" means more outsourcing. That's what they mean when they talk about "engagement with Asia" - how to boost the corporate dollar, and to hell with everyone else. Little wonder that Gillard has put Craig Emerson, Minister for Trade and Competitiveness and her most fanatically pro-free market Cabinet colleague, in charge of implementing "Asian Century Policy".

Much is made in the White Paper of the need for greater "Asian literacy" and increased educational engagement with Asia. Gillard says that "A strong Australia needs a world class education system". But this is from the same government that has put back any serious funding

commitments to educational reform until 2020 [8] and only last week cut \$500 million from research funding in Australian universities. Meanwhile, state governments are attacking teachers [9] and slashing funding to technical and further education.

The White Paper's reference to Australia's "fair, multicultural and cohesive society" is light years from the reality. Australia is a nation that shamefully offloads responsibility for the tiny numbers of asylum seekers that try to get to our shores to some of the poorest countries in the Asia-Pacific, continues genocide against its Indigenous people and has pursued a racist agenda towards Muslims for more than a decade.

Australia's bloody history in the region

Australian business has a bloody history in the Asian region, something completely whitewashed by this White Paper. Australian mining companies have been amongst the worst offenders, leaving a trail of devastation in their wake in Bougainville, Borneo, West Papua, Indonesia and the Philippines. [10] [11] [12] [13] British NGOs say of BHP's plans to open up coal mining and build a railway line in central Borneo that "BHP Billiton's promises to leave a legacy of environmental and biodiversity benefits is just a smokescreen for digging the heart out of Borneo forests". [14] Similarly two Melbourne academics have written recently of the impact of drilling by an Australian company in East Java:

"Waterways have been contaminated and the exploration drilling has drained water from the agricultural system, leaving corn and other crops

desiccated and unproductive. Full-scale mining would radically disrupt the agricultural and fishing industries of the region, transforming the natural vista and destroying waterways." [15]

Even remote herding communities in the Mongolian desert, the new El Dorado of the international mining industry, have not been immune from the depredations of Rio Tinto. [16]

But it's not just mining companies. Government agency AusAID (with commercial partners including Australian universities like ANU) has been accused of ignoring its own promises to consult with local communities and indigenous people in the Kalimantan Forest and Climate Partnership in Indonesia, denying them access to their own land. [17]

Toll Holdings (and AusAID, again) got entangled in a human rights controversy when the Cambodian Government forcibly removed 1,200 poor families from the site of Toll's new railway. [18] Macquarie Bank has loaned money to giant logging company Samling that is destroying the remaining rainforests of Sarawak in Malaysia. [19] And just last month, sporting goods manufacturer Sherrin was caught red-handed using an Indian subcontractor that used child sweatshop labour to sew their official league footballs. [20] Most famously, perhaps, Woodside Energy has made a killing from its stake in East Timor's energy resources over the past decade, something that it hopes to repeat in Burma. [21] [22]

Protests objecting to devastation of this kind in South East Asia, including displacement of thousands of villagers, have been smashed up by police. [23] [24] In many cases these police and local security forces have been trained and armed by the Australian government. In West Papua for example, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has recently

reported on the activities of Detachment 88, an Indonesian government death squad, responsible for waging a bloody campaign of terror against activists, which is trained and supplied by the Australian Federal Police. [25]

The White Paper is also a manifesto for war and imperialism. It states squarely that "Australia's alliance with the United States and a strong US presence in the region will support regional stability". Regional "stability" is code for continued US domination of Asia, with China invited to play a role so long as it is willing to accept its subordination to the US in both economic and military matters.

This regional "stability" is the kind of phrase that successive Australian governments used in past decades to support a string of pro-Western dictators, from the South Korean military junta to President Marcos of the Philippines and President Suharto in Indonesia. Today it means rolling out the red carpet for authoritarian rulers in the Philippines and Sri Lanka and selling uranium to India. [26] [27]

"Stability" means the suppression of national liberation movements, whether of the Vietnamese and the East Timorese in the 1970s or the West Papuans and Sri Lankan Tamils today. "Stability" also means the imposition of "structural adjustment programs" on countries of the South Pacific, at the behest of business in Australia and other wealthy countries. Little wonder that in the White Paper's 312 pages, human rights only merits one paragraph, on page 249.

An Asian Century for the 99%

The Gillard Government has set out the ruling class agenda for the next

decade in the Asian Century White Paper. Conservative Opposition leader Tony Abbott has "broadly welcomed" it, noting its "common sense" and "laudable goals". The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Business Council of Australia and the National Farmers Federation have all lent it their support. [28] Why wouldn't they, it's gift-wrapped for them!

Our side, the working class and the downtrodden peasants and landless of the Asia-Pacific region, need our own vision of an alternative "Asian Century", one not dominated by the interests of the region's parasitical 1%.

Thankfully, when we look at our region, we can see the beginnings of such an alternative. Just this year we have witnessed a general strike of 100 million in India on 28 February, hundreds of thousands of garment workers walking off the job in Bangladesh in June, a massive strike of more than 2 million in Indonesia on 3 October and the ongoing fight by workers at Philippines Airlines against outsourcing. [29] [30] [31] China too, despite massive state repression, has seen big demonstrations against corporate environmental vandalism in the Pearl River Delta and a rising curve of workers' struggles in the factories. [32] [33]

These are not something remote from the experience of Australian workers. We are all facing a world of government cut-backs, privatisation and mass sackings. And sometimes the target of popular anger is an Australian company: thousands of Malaysians have taken to the streets in recent months to protest against plans by Australian company Lynas Corporation to open a radioactive waste treatment plant. [34] [35]

Our Asian Century has to be built on solidarity of the 99% across the Asia-Pacific. We have seen evidence of just this kind of solidarity with the support lent by Philippines Airlines workers to Qantas workers late last year. In their statement of support they wrote "PALEA is not alone. And Qantas workers are not alone. Our supporters in the Philippines say 'We are all PALEANS.' To you, we say 'We are all Qantas workers.'" Representatives from PALEA have spoken to unionists in Melbourne and Sydney this year and are asking for much needed financial support to continue their struggle. [36]

There's a proud tradition of this kind of solidarity in the Australian working class movement - from the support by maritime workers for the Indonesian independence struggle after World War II to the involvement of trade unionists in the campaign against Australian involvement in the Vietnam War. This is the kind of "engagement" that works for our side, not the "engagement" that would have us trying to cut each other's throats in the competitive struggle waged by the fat cat 1% who are interested only in their own enrichment.

14 November 2012

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Socialist Alternative's Marxism 2013 conference next year will host speakers from around the Asia Pacific, including: the Awami Workers Party of Pakistan, Nava Sama Samaja Party of Sri Lanka, the Philippines Labor Party, and the People's Liberation Party of Indonesia. More information can be found at [Marxism 2013](#).

A call to join in the international days of

solidarity against political repression in Russia

12 November 2012

The massive protest movement that began in December 2011 radically changed the atmosphere of political and social passivity established during the Putin years. Tens of thousands of young and middle-aged people, office workers and state employees, began to appear on the streets and to demand change. On December 10th and 24th 2011, and then on February 4th 2012, Moscow, Petersburg and other large cities became the sites of massive rallies, demonstrating a new level of politicization of a significant part of society. The "managed democracy" model crafted by the ruling elite over many years went bankrupt in a matter of days. Political manipulations ceased working in the face of real politics, born from below. The movement, whose demands were initially limited to "honest elections," quickly grew into a protest against the whole political system.

After the elections of March 4th 2012, at which Vladimir Putin, using a combination of massive administrative pressure on voters, massive falsifications and mendacious populist rhetoric, assured himself of another term, many thought that the potential for protest mobilization had been exhausted. The naïve hopes of the thousands of opposition volunteers, taking on the role of election observers in the hope of putting an end to voter fraud, were crushed.

The next demonstration, in the success of which few believed, was scheduled for the center of Moscow on May 6th, the day before Putin's inauguration. And on this day, despite the skeptical predictions, more than 60,000 people showed up. When the march approached the square where the rally was to take place, the police organized a massive provocation, blocking the marchers' path to the square. All those who attempted to

circumvent the police cordon were subjected to beatings and arrests. The unprecedented police violence produced resistance on the part of some of the protestors who resisted arrests and refused to leave the square until everyone had been freed. The confrontation on May 6th lasted a few hours. In the end, over 650 people were arrested, some of whom spent the night in jail.

The next day, Putin's motorized procession headed for his inauguration through an empty Moscow. Along with the protesters, the police had cleared the city of all pedestrians. The new protest movement had demonstrated its power and a new degree of radicalization. The events of May 6th gave rise to the Occupy movement, which brought thousands of young people to the center of Moscow and held strong until the end of May. Leftist groups, until then peripheral to the established liberal spokesman of the protest movement, were progressively playing a larger role.

Those events were a signal to the authorities: the movement had gone beyond what was permitted, elections were over, and it was time to show teeth. Almost immediately, a criminal investigation was launched into the "mass disturbances," and on May 27th, the first arrest took place. 18-year-old anarchist Alexandra Dukhanina was accused of participating in the disturbances and for the use of violence against the police. The arrests continued over the next few days. The accused were drawn both from the ranks of seasoned political activists (mainly leftists) as well as from ordinary people, for whom the May 6th demonstrations were their first experience of street politics.

So far, nineteen people have been accused of participating in those "disturbances"; twelve of them are in jail in pre-trial confinement. Here are some of their stories:

? Vladimir Akimenkov, 25, communist and activist of the Left Front. Arrested on June 10th, 2012, he will be in detention until March 6th 2013. Vladimir was born with poor eyesight. In jail, it is getting even worse. In the last examination, he had 10% vision in one eye, and 20% in the other. This, however, was not a sufficient cause for the court to replace detention with house arrest. At the last court session of the court, the judge cynically commented that only total blindness would make him reconsider his decision.

? Michael Kosenko, 36, no political affiliation, arrested on June 8th. Kosenko, who suffers from psychological disorders, also asked for his stay in jail be replaced with house arrest. However, the court declared him "dangerous to society" and plans to send him for forced treatment.

? Stepan Zimin, 20, anarchist and antifascist, arrested on June 8th and placed under detention until March 6th 2013, after which date his arrest can be extended. Stepan supports his single mother, yet once again the court did not consider this sufficient cause to set him free under the obligation to remain within city limits.

? Nikolai Kavkazskii, 26, socialist, human rights activist and LGBT-activist. Detained on the 25th of July.

Investigators have no clear evidence proving the guilt of any one of these detainees. Nevertheless, they remain in jail and new suspects steadily join their ranks. Thus the last of the players in the "events of May 6th," the 51-year-old liberal activist and scholar

Sergei Krivov, was arrested quite recently, on October 18th. There is every indication that he will not be the last.

If the arrests of already nearly twenty ordinary demonstration participants were intended to inspire fear in the protest movement, then the hunt for the “organizers of massive disturbances” is meant to strike at its acknowledged leaders. According to the investigation, said “disturbances” were the result of a conspiracy, and all the arrested were receiving special assignments. This shows that we are dealing not only with a series of arrests, but with preparations for a large scale political process against the opposition.

On October 5th, NTV, one of the leading Russian television channels, aired a film in the genre of an “investigative documentary,” which leveled fantastical charges against the opposition and in particular, against the most famous representative of the left, Sergei Udaltsov. This mash-up, made in the tradition of Goebbels’ propaganda, informs of Udaltsov’s ties with foreign intelligence, and the activities of the “Left Front” that he heads are declared plots by foreign enemies of the state. By way of decisive proof, the film includes a recorded meeting between Sergei Udaltsov, Left Front activist Leonid Razvozhaev, Russian Socialist Movement member Konstantin Lebedev, and one of the closer advisors of the president of Georgia, Givi Targamadze. In particular, the conversation includes talk of money delivered by the Georgians for the “destabilization” of Russia.

Despite the fact that the faces on the recording are practically indiscernible and that the sound is clearly edited and added separately to the video, within just two days the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor General’s Office (the agency today playing the leading role in organizing repression) used it to launch a criminal case. On October 17th, Konstantin Lebedev was arrested and Sergei Udaltsov released after interrogation, after having signed an

oath to remain within the limits of Moscow. On October 19th, a third participant in the new “affair,” Left Front activist Leonid Razvozhaev, tried to petition for refugee status with the Ukrainian delegation of the UN. As soon as he stepped outside of the delegation building, unknown parties violently forced him into a vehicle and illegally transported him across the Ukrainian border onto Russian territory. Once in an undisclosed location in Russia, he was subjected to torture and threats (including regarding the safety of his family) and compelled to sign a “voluntary submission of confession” and “statements of confession.”

In these “statements,” Razvozhaev confessed to ties with foreign intelligence and to preparations for an armed insurgency, in which Konstantin Lebedev and Sergei Udaltsov were also involved. Afterwards, Razvozhaev was delivered to Moscow and placed in jail as a criminal defendant. At present, Razvozhaev has asserted in meetings with human rights activists that he disavows these confessions obtained under duress. However, he could not disavow their consequences. “Razvozhaev’s list,” beaten out of him by torture, has become notorious: it contains the names of people who will before long also become objects of persecution.

The scope of repression is spreading steadily. Quite recently the Investigative Committee announced the start of an inquiry into Sergei Udaltsov’s organization, the Left Front, the result of which may well be its prohibition as “extremist.” Pressure against the anti-fascist movement is likewise building. The well-known activists Aleksei Sutug, Aleksei Olesinov, Igor Harchenko, Irina Lipskaya, Alen Volikov have been detained on invented charges and are being held under guard in Moscow. Socialist and anti-fascist Filipp Dolbunov has been forced to undergo interrogation and threats on multiple occasions.

It is hardly accidental that the majority of the victims of this

unprecedented wave of repression are involved in the leftist movement. At a threshold moment of preparations for austerity measures in Russia, for curtailment of labor rights and pension reforms, the Putin-Medvedev administration is more afraid than anything of an alliance between the existing general democratic movement and possible social protest. Today’s wave of repressions is the most important test for Russia’s new protest movement: either we hold strong or a new period of mass apathy and fear awaits us. It is precisely for this reason, in the face of unprecedented political pressure, that solidarity of our comrades in struggle in Europe, and in the entire world, is so crucial.

We turn to you with a plea to organize Days of Solidarity Against Political Repression on the 29 of November - 2 of December in front of the Russian Federation embassy or any other representative of the Russian government in your countries, demanding the immediate release of the illegally arrested and the termination of the shameful criminal actions and preparations for new “Moscow trials” based on torture and forgeries. We also ask that you use the most concrete information in your protests and demands, with the specific names and details that we provide in this appeal. This is crucial for every person behind bars today.

Please, send your reports on solidarity action and any other information or questions on this email: solidarityaction2012@gmail.com

**Solidarity is our
only weapon!**

United, we will never be defeated!

***Russian Socialist
Movement,
Autonomous
Action, Left Front***

After Venezuela's elections: defeat for the right, challenges for the left

10 November 2012, by **Iain Bruce**

In the event, of course, Chavez won with 55.08 per cent to 44.30 per cent, on a turnout of 80.5 per cent. It's worth repeating those numbers. After nearly 14 years in office, in the face of enormous media hostility outside and inside the country, a sitting president won by a margin of 11 percent; in a country where voting is voluntary (unlike many other Latin American), an unprecedented four fifths of eligible voters cast their ballot, including a huge contingent of first-time voters, meaning both young people and some of the most marginalised sectors who traditionally never registered. And no one even hinted that this was anything but the cleanest of ballots. Compare these figures with the U.S. election just past and the difference is striking. One footnote figure is also striking: the only 'far left' candidate, Orlando Chirino of the PSL, a coalition of small, trotskyist currents, got 4 thousand votes nationwide, or 0.02%.

So how did it happen and what does it mean?

First the Venezuelan opposition did put up a more united and credible alternative than it has in the past. It toned down its more rabid, sometimes overtly racist rhetoric, and adopted a smoother, centrist, social liberal posture: 'back to the free market, but let's keep some of the social policies'. This helped it win over a number of disenchanted Chavez supporters, although the increase in the size of the electorate makes it difficult to tell just how big such a "defection" was. It has of course always been true, to paraphrase Fidel Castro, that there cannot be 6 million oligarchs in Venezuela. Nonetheless, the opposition base remains firmly anchored in the rather white, middle and upper middle class neighbourhoods of eastern Caracas

and their equivalents in cities like Maracaibo, Merida and Valencia. Around them orbit larger, more marginalised petty-bourgeois sectors and the least organised or politicised parts of the working class and urban poor. This hasn't fundamentally changed in ten years and in this sense the opposition's new face has so far failed.

This means that tensions within the opposition could well resurface around the state elections in December and the municipal ones next April. On one side are the more aggressive coup-mongering sections of the opposition, who want to get rid of Chavez by any means, and who probably would have cried fraud this time if the margin of his victory had been smaller. Alongside them are the larger electoral blocks, now led by Primero Justicia, but including remnants of the traditional parties like Accion Democratica and Copei, who have a vested interest in increasing their share of local, regional and parliamentary posts, and who therefore, for the time being, have adopted a more 'democratic' stance.

The failure and division on the Venezuelan right, and the spectacular self-delusion of the global establishment over the likely outcome of this presidential election, are symptomatic of a larger disarray on the right in Latin America, and in imperialism's policies towards the region.

From the 1990s through to the beginning of this millennium, Washington had a coherent project for Latin America: free trade plus controlled, formal democracy, and a 'war on drugs' to deal with any exceptional insurgency. At the beginning of his first term, George W. Bush made his maiden trip abroad to

Mexico, to emphasise that his attention would be focussed southwards. After September 11, that went out the window. The grand project of a Free Trade Area of the Americas was finally defeated at Mar del Plata in 2005. Since then successive U.S. administrations have seemed bereft of any alternative.

At the beginning of his tenure, Barack Obama briefly flirted with the soft left of Lula in Brazil and Michelle Bachelet in Chile, but his attention soon strayed. In this last election, Latin America all but disappeared off the horizon. Mitt Romney occasionally boasted he would sign lots of new free trade agreements with Latin America – as if he hadn't been watching anything over the last decade. Obama made occasional references to the supposed 'war on drugs' in Mexico. But both candidates avoided the issue if they could.

The 2009 coup in Honduras looked like it might herald a new offensive from the United States and the right across the region. It was followed by the revelation of Washington's plans for new military bases in Colombia and the election of right-wing presidents in Chile, Panama, Costa Rica. But the offensive faltered. There were divisions among the competing, middle-level cliques that now ran Washington's Latin American policy. Most of the region's increasingly autonomous bourgeois governments reacted with hostility. The Obama administration was left looking more diplomatically isolated than ever.

At the same time, Washington's right-wing allies in the region have faced mounting social resistance. The huge movement led by students in Chile is the most important, but the recent revolt in Colon, Panama, forcing President Ricardo Martinelli to

withdraw plans to privatise land in the continent's largest free-trade zone, is emblematic of a wider mood. Even in Mexico and Colombia, right-wing hegemony has been dented, with the thrashing of the PAN in the former and President Santos' shift to the centre in the latter. The peace talks now underway in Cuba with Colombia's FARC guerrillas may signal a defeat for one kind of Latin American left. But they could open the lid on some of the region's most potent social struggles.

In this context, last June's parliamentary coup in Paraguay looks more like a wounded beast lashing out than the continuation of a concerted strategy.

The reason for this relative failure of the right is clear. Latin America is still the part of the world where the challenge to neoliberal hegemony – that is imperialism – has gone furthest. This remains true even after the extraordinary mobilizations in the Arab world and Europe since 2011. Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution has been the key component here: first, because it showed, in practice, that a break with neoliberal priorities was possible; second, because for the first time since the collapse of the soviet block it opened up a discussion about socialism as the framework for any alternative, under the heading "socialism of the 21st century". In this context, there is no doubt that Chavez' victory is a victory for all of us on the left, and an important one.

None of this should be cause for complacency. If the right has failed to mount a coherent counter-attack, the Bolivarian left has also run into serious problems.

Latin America's challenge to neoliberalism has broadly three pillars. First came the waves of social struggles, by students, indigenous

communities, peasant organisations, environmental campaigns and movements of the urban poor – but relatively few industrial or trade union struggles. These express a wider loss of credibility among tens of millions of people of the free-market prescriptions of what used to be called the Washington consensus. Within this, and under the influence particularly of the indigenous movements and the organisations of Via Campesina, the last few years have seen a growing ecologist and even eco-socialist awareness.

The second pillar comprises the governments of the Bolivarian Alliance, ALBA, that emerged directly or indirectly out of these struggles, principally Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, plus Cuba.

The third pillar also reflects, in a distorted way, the popular rejection of neoliberal hegemony. But it subordinates this to the interests of a newly assertive local bourgeoisie that simply wants greater benefits and autonomy within the existing globalized economy. Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Peru all fit in here.

The relations between these three components are shifting. The outcomes are hard to predict. But it is far from certain they will be positive.

At the continental level, we have seen repeated confrontations between social movements and the Bolivian government of Evo Morales, and a swerve to the right by the Correa administration in Ecuador. This means there is now a deepening rift between Latin America's most important social movement, the indigenous one (which has plenty of internal differences of its own) and the ALBA axis of progressive governments.

Inside Venezuela, in addition to

uncertainties over Chavez' health, many left observers have noted growing disenchantment among the revolution's supporters as conservative, bureaucratic or just plain opportunist and corrupt elements strengthen their grip within the Bolivarian government. Still the outcome is uncertain. Revolutionaries in the Marea Socialista current describe how the election was won. First there was a far larger and more combative popular mobilization than expected at the final Chavez rally, changing the tone of a lacklustre campaign. Then on the day, as Bolivarian officials began to panic at worrying early signs from voting stations, the final hours saw a massive surge in turnout from the poor barrios of Caracas and other cities. Marea likened it to the masses descending from the shanty towns to defeat the coup against Chavez in 2002.

Another potentially positive sign came at Chavez' first cabinet meeting after the election, on 20 October. Chavez made a withering critique of the revolution's problems that echoed arguments made by revolutionaries inside and outside Venezuela. Quoting Marxist texts, he argued that the basis of economic production has to change, if the revolution's gains are not to be swallowed up in a sea of capitalism. That, he said, means radically democratising economic activity, because socialism is democracy. By the same token, the urgent task of building popular power through communes could not be entrusted to a ministry. It had to be done by communities themselves. And Venezuela's public media had to be overhauled to support these priorities of radicalising democracy.

The trouble is, Chavez has said similar things before in the last six years. But it hasn't happened yet.

November 5, 2012

Alexis Tsipras calls for a European

conference on the debt

8 November 2012, by **Alexis Tsipras**

In 2010, Greece was the first European country on programme of recession was imposed to try to find a solution to the debt crisis. This crisis has spread today and is now penetrating more deeply the hard core of the euro zone.

Quite logically, the citizens and governments of Europe are watching attentively the Greek situation. Firstly, because European taxpayers are funding a programme which could be a failure. Then, because, as Mr. Schäuble himself has admitted publicly, such a failure would have an enormous impact on the entire European economy. Finally, because the social experiment now being conducted in Greece, involving in particular the repeal of laws that protect workers, the dissolution of social security and the total privatization of public services, could be generalized to the rest of Europe via the budgetary stability pact.

The vicious circle of austerity

The recipe that was supposed to ensure the "rescue" of Greece is not working and that is why its extension would be bad for Europe. The fiscal measures imposed have led to recession. It is not achieving the budgetary objectives fixed. And this inability to achieve them justifies new and even harsher fiscal measures. It is a vicious circle, and the social deprivation resulting from it is intolerable. The austerity program imposed on Greece has already been amended twice and it is now recognized that it is impossible to deal with the Greek debt through a new policy of austerity.

But do they really have a clear view of reality?

Unfortunately, the last European Summit has shown that the answer is no: the European political leadership has shown once again that it has neither the will nor the ability to provide solutions adapted to the major problems that are tragically affecting European citizens. Under the influence of Germany, the European Union envisages no other solution than to ask citizens to pay, by their sacrifices, for the efforts necessary to save the banks. The Spanish people has a lot to say about that. As do all European taxpayers.

And that is not all, as far as Angela Merkel is concerned: she refuses the creation of Eurobonds, which are one of the financial tools that would make it possible to deal effectively with the European debt crisis.

Indeed, at the same time, she is pushing the idea of a European Commissioner who would have a right of veto over national budgets. In this way she is trying to institutionalize the austerity regime and through that, the decline of European democracy.

An international conference

Even though the experiment in austerity has failed in Greece, the idea is spreading in Europe. The end of the social contract that was established in the post-war period is underway. What does that mean concretely? Greece has already shown what it means: the closure of schools and hospitals; unemployment at around 30 per cent and in particular youth unemployment at 55 per cent; wages limited to

around 400 euros and pensions even lower than that. It means the dissolution of the Welfare State.

Furthermore, the implementation of this policy encourages the drift towards authoritarianism, undemocratic practices, the resurgence of the hatred and the violence of the far Right. It encourages a situation such as that which prevailed in the Weimar Republic. And I would like to remind those who, in Europe, defend dogmatically a generalization of austerity policies, that they are playing with fire. And that they have a responsibility towards democracy in Greece.

Europe can only deal with the crisis if it eradicates the neoliberal logic. European workers are not slaves, and they do not have to pay for the losses of private banks. It is necessary to provide a comprehensive response to the problem of debt and to that end to organize an international conference, similar to the one in London in 1953, which freed Germany from the iron grip of debt and paved the way, in the aftermath of the war, for that country's economic success.

Renew the historical thread of political democracy

The objective of this conference would be many-sided: to protect Europe from speculative attacks, by making possible, for example, collective management of the debt and the guaranteeing of bank deposits. The removal of a substantial part of the nominal value of the debt of the countries of the South of the euro zone and the repayment of the rest with a development clause. It should

be a "New Deal" for growth in Europe.

The keys to a new road for Europe are in the hands of citizens, workers, young people. The old Europe is

faltering and sinking under the weight of the greed of the markets, which it has itself nurtured. It is time to renew the historical thread of political democracy and the Age of the Enlightenment. It is time to open the

way to a Europe of democracy, social justice, equality and solidarity.

*Published in the French financial daily **Les Echos**, October 27, 2012.*

Occupy Obama

8 November 2012, by **Cinzia Arruzza**

Between the end of August and the first week of September the national conventions of the Republican and Democratic parties were held. It is not sure that these two events have actually contributed to a shift of undecided voters. Faced with a candidate like Romney and a candidate for the Vice-Presidency like Paul Ryan, there is no choice: we must support Obama. This is the reasoning of all those who, four years ago, sincerely believed in the message of hope launched by the Obama campaign. And although four years later, many think that the "Yes we can" challenge has turned into a bitter "No, we couldn't", supporting Obama in the next elections in November would seem to be the only option.

The same Obama, in his discourse, has decided to readjust the tone compared to his first candidacy. He no longer speaks of change but of "new" and "going forward". He no longer promises any historical turning point, but rather a slow path out of crisis and unemployment, provided that people roll up their sleeves. Besides, it is difficult to promise wonders when the economy is going backwards and four years of government have not at all changed the direction that American society is taking or attenuated the growth of social injustices. In any case, if the candidacy of Obama does not evoke the same enthusiasm and the same hopes as four years ago, the fear of a victory of the Republican Party, increasingly anchored further to the right and ever more aggressive on social issues, gender, and race, could play a decisive role in the re-

election of Obama.

A poor balance sheet

A newspaper identified fifteen programmatic points on which Romney and Obama are pretty much in agreement. And they are not trifles.

Concerning jobs, Republicans and Democrats are basically in agreement on not funding public programmes aimed at increasing the level of employment. Both think that the solution must come from the private sector. Under the Obama administration, there has been no increase in the minimum wage, trade union rights and the right to strike have continued to be eroded and there has been no attempt to enforce existing laws protecting labour.

Similarly, after promising access to health for all, the Obama administration has simply implemented on the national level the health care reform programme designed by Romney in Massachusetts, which encouraged people to resort to private insurance. Not so long ago, Obama and Nancy Pelosi were continuing to stress the need to conclude an agreement with the Republicans about budget cuts in three fundamental areas of the American Welfare State: Medicare, Medicaid and social security.

Certainly, the Republicans are distinguished by an aggressive racism, but we should not forget that during the Obama administration a million

immigrants have been deported, often without any trial, and after months spent in detention centres.

On foreign policy, and also on environmental policy, there is nothing to celebrate, and the differences are limited to questions of style. The Obama administration has continued to pursue the NAFTA programme, the embargo on Cuba, the militarization of Africa (not to mention the intervention in Libya), and has not changed in substantial terms US policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Last but not least, like the Republicans, the Democrats have fallen over themselves to offer billions of dollars to Wall Street.

The truth is that between the Republicans and the Democrats, there is little to choose and that the only novelty in American politics in recent decades has been the Occupy movement. The election sequence, however, is trying to influence this movement, which seems to be in big trouble. Occupy Chicago organized three days of events and debates during the Democratic convention under the slogan "Occupy Obama. Stop the war of the president of the one per cent against the 99 per cent of the rest of the world".

And Occupy Wall Street launched three days of protests in New York on the anniversary of the occupation of Zuccotti Park. For the media, now focused on the upcoming elections, the movement is no longer news. Especially if it calls Obama into question...

21st Century Socialism in Pakistan?

6 November 2012, by **Aasim Sajjad Akhtar**

It is rare for Pakistan to be in the news for something other than suicide bombs, Hindu and Jew-hating mullahs and a very peculiar (and vulnerable) type of postcolonial democracy. A plethora of institutions, classes, ethnic groups and prominent individuals animates narratives of Pakistani modernity, most notably the omnipresent military and those who would challenge the men in khaki, including ethno-nationalists like those presently leading an insurgency in Balochistan.

Conspicuous by its absence in almost all such accounts is the Pakistani left. Even informed observers of Pakistan might have little or no knowledge of leftist forces in the country, at least in the contemporary period. Students of history will know that the Pakistani ruling class visited a great deal of repression upon leftists during the cold war when the country was the frontline against the Soviet bloc. Despite having to operate in extremely dire circumstances, the Pakistani left exercised not insignificant influence on the polity, and society more generally, until the 1980s.

Since the end of the cold war, however, the little space that the left previously garnered has, more or less, frittered away. Of course this has been the fate of the left in many countries. With the exception of the experiments in "21st century socialism" being effected in Latin America, the left continues to suffer from a crisis of identity in the face of changes in the global political economy associated with neo-liberalism.

The retreat of the Pakistani left has arguably been more damning and sustained than most, even if one limits the comparative frame to south Asia. It is, for instance, an uncomfortable truth that a majority of the more than 100 million Pakistanis below the age of 25 do not even know that there is a political left in its country, or indeed

even that there is a competing ideology to the left of the dominant intellectual mainstream. The common sense notions that do exist are carry-overs from the cold war inasmuch as the term "communist" in Pakistan still connotes an irreligious world view.

Lighting the Lamp

There are, however, glimmers of hope amidst the relative gloom. On 11 November, three existing parties of the left - Labour Party Pakistan, Awami Party Pakistan and Workers Party Pakistan - will come together to form a new party with the goal of building a viable alternative to mainstream parties. This merger reflects recognition within leftist circles, both of the growing contradictions within the prevailing structure of power and the need for unity and maturity so as to take advantage of these contradictions.

Unity is of course a favourite slogan of the left. The Leninist tradition has, alongside unity, also emphasised ideological purity which, in far too many cases, has translated into sectarianism of the worst kind and continuous organisational divisions. The present merger is, in this regard at least, a first in Pakistan insofar as the three parties represent different Marxist traditions which have historically been distinctly opposed to one another.

Indeed, the merger process was impelled by younger activists within these three parties, and some outside of them, that do not carry the baggage of cold war sectarian conflicts (read: Stalinists, Trotskyites, Maoists, etc). It is also amongst the more recent entrants to the left fray that there is a greater critical reflection about the failings of 20th century socialist experiments, and a willingness to think in dynamic terms about the socialist project in the present century.

While there has been resistance from a segment of the older cadre, the imperative of unity, especially in the face of the inadequacies of the existing parties, appears to have won through. The most obvious manifestation of the left's retreat over the past two decades is in the composition of existing formations: a majority of the left's existing leadership and rank-and-file is the same as it was at the end of the cold war. In short, the left has, since the late 1980s, struggled to induct young people into its fold, or at the very least retain those who have joined the ranks. The latter failing is an indicator of the lack of dynamism in the left's analysis and political work, as young people, otherwise attracted to leftist ideas, are quickly alienated by its actual practices on the ground.

Needless to say, without a solid core of young activists, there is little chance that the left can make a dent in the cynical and patronage-based political order that exists in Pakistan. The left has not even been able to retain meaningful influence within its historic strongholds of industrial workers, small and landless farmers, and, of course, students.

One of the more promising initiatives on the left in recent times has been the revival of the National Students Federation (NSF), which between the 1960s and early 1980s was the flag-bearer of left politics amongst successive generations of young people. When Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency in the country in November 2007, a small but vocal protest movement took shape on university campuses (mostly in Punjab), and the impetus of this movement led, some months later, to the NSF's reconstitution.

It is not by chance that the attempt to take back campuses from the right-wing organisations, and encourage left student activism more generally, has

been followed by an initiative to merge existing parties of the left. If the present merger process is successful, the NSF will benefit greatly from institutional support that it currently lacks, while the new party will be able to focus on regenerating its creaking rank-and-file, and accordingly initiate the long process of establishing and deepening organic links between the party and the working people.

Once the Euphoria Subsides

There should be no doubt that the process of rehabilitating the left will be long, and often painful. In other words the actual merger is only a baby step in the right direction. There is no doubt that the profile of the left will improve, and those sitting on the outside looking in will no longer have an excuse to remain aloof from party politics on account of the left's internal bickering. Only time will tell, however, if the new formation can bring together Pakistan's long-suffering working people and oppressed nations.

Notwithstanding the obsession of the world's news media with the supposedly existential threat posed to Pakistan by the religious right, the left's arguably biggest immediate challenge will be to bridge the growing ethnic divide in the country. The Pakistani ruling classes' visceral mistrust of the democratic process and their undying commitment to a unitary nationalist ideology emphasising Islam and Urdu directly resulted in the secession of the eastern wing in 1971, and the deepening of conflicts within and across existing provincial boundaries since then.

The left has had to contend with the regionalisation of politics across south Asia and much of the world, so the challenge facing Pakistani leftists is not necessarily unique. Nevertheless, given the distinct rise of parochial trends in recent times, projecting a sensitive and nuanced politics of class that foregrounds Pakistan's multinational character is, in the contemporary climate, a truly

revolutionary task.

There are, at present, highly contrasting imperatives of doing politics in different regions of the country. The new party will likely try, as the left has done throughout Pakistan's history, to build alliances with ethno-nationalists who stand opposed to the Pakistani centre. But it will do so in a trying context - many ethno-nationalists, particularly in Sindh and Balochistan, now view the western powers, and the United States in particular, as the guarantor of their right to self-determination, a perspective that flies in the face of the anti-imperialist foundations of a left programme.

Imperialism remains a major impediment to the long-term democratisation of state and society, and here it is important to consider not just the role of the US, but also the states of the Arabian Gulf and China, multinational capital, and the international financial institutions (IFIs). The new party must move beyond sloganeering and develop a substantial understanding of the complex and contradictory ways in which imperialist influence is exercised. Further, and of particular importance is to develop an understanding of the extent to which an emergent middle class addicted to the neo-liberal economy and globalised cultural forms is a friend or foe of the subordinate classes.

This is a particularly pertinent question in light of the increasing polarisation between segments of the left and liberals who are inclined to view western governments and intervention in Pakistan and the wider region as necessary, desirable even, in the struggle to clip the wings of the religious right. In short, the struggle for secularism is all too often seen as an end in itself, rather than linked to the left's historic tasks of securing national liberation and class equality.

As in many postcolonial countries of Asia and Africa, in Pakistan too the fragmentation of progressive discourse and politics is explained in part by the rise of the non-governmental organisation (NGO). While there is merit to the argument that NGOs - donor funding more

generally - have undermined radical political praxis, it is just as true that they have exposed some of the left's major failings. NGOs in Pakistan have, for instance, proven to be a vehicle for women's mobility, whereas the left, especially in its current incarnation, cannot claim to have made any meaningful contribution to the struggle against patriarchy. If nothing else, the new party must dedicate substantial time and effort to increasing the number of women activists among its ranks.

It is not just traditional failings that have to be redressed. Relatively taken-for-granted political positions and strategies must also be re-evaluated. The process of what around the world is today termed "informalisation" calls for critical reflection on traditional subjects of Marxist praxis such as the industrial working class and the peasantry. Actions of the "vanguard" and how to remake the left in a competitive democratic context - rather than viewing democracy as a "stage" that will pass into the "dustbin of history" - have been taken on by the left in many countries.

These questions will also have to be confronted by the Pakistani left and the new party which will come into existence on 11 November. According to the original timeframe that has been discussed to date, and will in all likelihood be confirmed at the founding conference, the first six months will be dedicated to creating a single party organisation where there are currently three, addressing outstanding ideological and political questions, and inducting new members. A party congress will then be called - probably by the summer of 2012 - to take stock of progress made and chart the party's priorities and strategies for a subsequent period of two years.

And Then There Was One

The reality is that this initiative will not mark a major turn in the fortunes either of the Pakistani left, or its long-suffering working people. The collective resources of the three

parties involved in the merger do not amount to the critical mass required to definitively reverse decades of retrogression and the myriad effects of neo-liberal globalisation. As was mentioned at the outset, however, the new party will be operating in a context that is nevertheless inviting, insofar as dominant forces are as divided today as at any other point in Pakistan's history.

The Pakistani state's hegemonic project is today badly weakened. Even if renewed attempts to keep it afloat on the educational, religious, media and household terrains of civil society are made on an almost daily basis by a well-oiled critical mass of state functionaries and their lackeys in the media, educational institutions and so on, counter-hegemonic impulses are increasingly widespread. Balochistan is the obvious example, but just as important is the substantial conflict within the corridors of power itself.

The imbalance in the civil-military equation in favour of the latter is no longer so glaring, in part because it is

not possible in the current climate to justify military intervention in politics like in the past. The superior judiciary has emerged as a new power centre, not necessarily to the unambiguous benefit of the democratic process, but nevertheless a shift away from its traditional role of being a junior partner to the military; the alliance of superior judiciary and military has indeed been the bane of democracy for most of the country's 65 years.

The state's hegemonic project has been structured around Punjab's economic and political dominance (alongside the cultural pillars of Islam and Urdu). The left has long struggled for the establishment of a genuine federal system of government - a socialist one to boot - but now mainstream parties too have jumped on the federalism bandwagon. It goes without saying that none of these parties can be trusted to decisively undermine the unitary structure of power, but the very fact that the creation of a Siraiki province has become a mainstream issue speaks volumes about the rumblings within Pakistan's extant power structure.

Of course the very fact that divisions within are becoming ever more apparent does not by any means guarantee a rupture. Just as likely, if not more so, is for identities such as religion (or sect) and ethnicity to harden and for oppressed social forces to become more bound to these identities than ever before. The left must also contend with the mundane everyday politics of patronage. In short, the left is tasked with both understanding what exists in the here and now and then fomenting meaningful and viable alternatives - in the realm of ideas and in actual political practice. There is no blueprint guaranteed to produce the desired result. But there is hope and expectation that this latest experiment with socialism in Pakistan will take us closer to where we want to go: a society in which the potentialities of all of humanity are allowed to develop freely. The choice today is as stark as it ever has been, that between socialism and barbarism.

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The latest Colombian peace process

3 November 2012, by **Justin Podur**

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has reinitiated a dialogue with the FARC. Talks began in Oslo and will continue in Havana. The Colombian government suspended orders to capture the 29 members of FARC's negotiating team as long as the negotiations take place, but have warned that they will be arrested if they try to leave Cuba. [37]

The talks will deal with five issues: the end of armed conflict; land reform; guarantees for the exercise of political opposition and citizen participation; drug trafficking; and the rights of the victims of the conflict.

The government's opening statement prioritized the first issue, an end to the armed conflict. FARC's statement

suggested that peace implied a transformation of the state.

In some ways, both parties are negotiating from weakness - and in this, there is cause for optimism about the outcome.

The FARC has taken tremendous military blows in the past five years. Their commanders - Raul Reyes, Jorge Briceño, Alfonso Cano - have been killed, while other leaders like Simon Trinidad have been captured. They still have capacity to mount attacks - indeed they demonstrated it by attacking and killing five soldiers [38] after the dialogues started - but its capacity has been greatly reduced.

The FARC is also politically close to an

all-time low, with its name synonymous with kidnappings, collateral damage against civilians, extortion, and attempts to control the agendas of social movements. When the previous round of dialogues occurred in 1999, the government agreed to a demilitarized zone in San Vicente del Caguan, but the talks failed and the FARC persisted in its unpopular practices. They suffered militarily and saw their popularity continue to decline. The Right in Colombia benefited politically, and Alvaro Uribe Velez became president as the talks broke down.

Uribe's strategy for dealing with FARC was one based entirely on force. In fact, it is a misnomer to talk about a

strategy for dealing with FARC, since Uribe's approach was much more general – it was an approach to Colombia's neighbours (Venezuela and Ecuador), to unarmed social movements, indigenous people, unions, and the political opposition. All were accused, effectively, of being terrorists or supporters of terrorism, and large numbers were then placed on assassination lists by government-sponsored paramilitaries.

This takes us to the political weakness of the government. Under Uribe, the government was wracked by one scandal after another. While promising nothing but the iron fist to the FARC (and unarmed social movements), Uribe immediately initiated negotiations with the paramilitaries in 2002. This was strange to those who know Colombia, because the paramilitaries are universally known to be linked to the government: these 'self-defense' groups operate at the interface of the military and police, landowners, and drug trafficking, assassinating movement leaders, committing massacres to clear territories for landowners, doing social cleansing, and other crime. The negotiations with the paramilitaries led first to several very showy handovers of weapons and demobilizations by the paramilitaries for the cameras, followed by an uninterrupted continuation of their murderous activities. The next scandal occurred when journalists discovered evidence of 'montajes' – the Colombian army was planting car bombs in order to accuse FARC of a terror campaign in the city. The 'montajes' were followed by 'false positives', in which the army went a step further: actually killing innocent people, planting weapons on them, claiming they died in combat, and showing this as evidence of battlefield success against the FARC. Investigators also found numerous mass graves filled with disappeared victims of massacres – again, by the army and paramilitary. The last few years of Uribe's rule were filled with 'para-politica', in which military

officials provided reams of evidence that politicians linked to Uribe had signed contracts with paramilitaries to control territories and eliminate enemies. Many of the paramilitary and military leaders, once convicted, were extradited to prisons in the US, where they won't be pointing fingers at those who gave them orders.

In the region, Uribe's paramilitary incursions and threats on the Venezuelan border were met with anger throughout Latin America and sanctions by Venezuela. His assassination of Raul Reyes in Ecuador without any warning or cooperation with that government alienated that country as well. The US Congress held up a prospective Free Trade agreement with Colombia over the country's human rights record, specifically the assassinations of unionists.

So, while Colombia's powerful Right still thinks of Uribe as a strong figure for standing up to the FARC, and Uribe's approach paid military dividends, the contradictions and scandals of the paramilitary-linked regime have taken their political toll, and perhaps, for the time being, run their course. The new President, Juan Manuel Santos, represents a different section of Colombia's elite, one more interested in security for mining operations, perhaps, than in cleansing the rural countryside of peasants and indigenous opposition. Hence the peace talks.

Perhaps neither side is entering these negotiations with the loftiest of motives, but the outcome could still be positive for Colombians. The war has certainly not benefited the majority. Instead, it has effectively concentrated wealth and land in a few hands, set Colombia's rural development back decades, and created a murderously difficult context for unarmed social movements.

Analysis by Colombian economist Hector Mondragon [39] shows how the war is interrelated with the

agricultural sector: growing imports, technological dependence on transnationals, institutional weakness, priority for mining over agriculture, priority for biofuels within agriculture, displacement of peasants, and high prices and concentration of land. Mondragon shows how the Gini index for land concentration, always high in Colombia, reached a peak in 2009 at 0.875 (out of 1), reversing weak land reform efforts that started in the 1960s and brought the index as low as 0.840 in 1984. Colombia's agricultural sector has stagnated when it was not contracting in recent years, and has had the weakest growth in Latin America. Paradoxically, despite this weak growth and the tremendous rural insecurity, Colombia has some of the most expensive rural land in Latin America.

These specific problems can best be addressed by the proposals of peasant and indigenous movements in the countryside. Although the FARC's claim is correct, that true peace goes beyond a mere end to shooting war, it is also the case that an end to the shooting war between FARC and the government, even absent an end to the other kinds of violence, would be a huge step in the right direction, a step that would make it much easier for civilian resistance and social movements to seek true peace.

If the FARC signs, and demobilizes, it will be because they understand that every day the war goes on, the situation gets worse for the people. If that happens, it will be the starting point for renewed struggles for land reform, for worker's rights, for human rights, for justice for the victims, and quite possibly, against mining, all of which will be taken up by their rightful owners, the many diverse movements of Colombia. If justice is a prerequisite for an end to the shooting war, then neither will be achieved. If an end to shooting can be achieved, the struggle for justice will have advanced.

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