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Italian Elections - some initial comments

28 February 2013, by **Andrea Martini**

The results have contradicted all the forecasts and expectations: Bersani's well-oiled electoral machine failed in its objectives and once again the PD project of winning the elections by exploiting the so-called split between the main components of the ruling class and the Berlusconi's right wing political leadership has come to nothing. The big beasts of politics have also been disappointed: the EU's and ECB's "markets" and technocrats who are terrorized by the perspective of the significant ungovernability of a big, crucial country like Italy. Clearly their point man in Italy was Monti and they were all banking on "Supermario" playing an important support and constraining role in a future Bersani government. Instead the new parliament will be marked above all not only by the success of Grillo but above all by their defeat and the shrinking of the centrist project.

The breakthrough of the Five Star Movement (M5S), although to some degree predictable, was nevertheless

stunning and devastating for the political equilibrium of the traditional Italian institutional parties. It was certainly the single most important fact of these elections: The success of Grillo's slate shows very powerfully the growing popular rejection of the politics of corruption and austerity. This rejection is particularly strong among the youth as can be seen in the different percentage of the vote won by the M5S in the parliamentary poll compared with the vote for the senate [where you have to be 25 to vote]. The M5S is the biggest political party and regions [indeed it just beat the PD on the national vote "Trans.]. This vote is a challenge that voters have made to all the old politics of the centre left; of the right, of the centre and even of the far left "they were all hit by the massive support for Grillo as well as by the increased abstention rate.

The level of abstention is significant, it is now 25%, an increase of 5% from the last election. 10.8 million voters did not vote (1,800,000 more than in

2008), they obviously were not inspired by politicians to bother to vote.

(...) What we are seeing is perhaps a mortal blow to the political system established by the so-called "second republic" "the alternating of centre right and centre left governments over the last twenty years.

The absolutely disappointing results of Monti and his centrist coalition puts an end at least for the time being to the attempt of the Italian bourgeoisie supported by the EU potentates to build an alternative to their dependance on the PD/PDL two party system which was too conflictual and unreliable. In any case the results for the former premier's Civic Choice slate express a drastic condemnation of his government's policies "of the counter-reforms, cuts, abolition of laws protecting workers, tax increases, unemployment and useless, grandiose public works.

The revived support for Berlusconi and his populist demagoguery was also due to his skilful withdrawal from the 'big coalition' that he had supported up to two months ago and to his promise to pay back the tax on people's houses (IMU). Along with his victory in the senate seats of Lombardy, Veneto and Sicily, this all makes the formation of the government that up to last week all commentators were certain would be led by Bersani with varying forms of support by Monti and Casini, extremely difficult. So Berlusconi's resurrection combined with the big success of M5S, presents us with an deadlocked parliament.

Having said this the two party system has been significantly weakened. The PDL has seen its votes halved between the 2008 elections and 2013 – from 12.5 million to less than 7 (Senate votes). The Lega Nord has not recovered its former glory – declining from 2.6 to 1.3.

The biggest loser of this election seems to be the one that was the favourite – the PD, its coalition and the hypothesis of a Bersani government. These forces are paying for the decisive political support they gave to the unpopular and anti-working class government policies of the last 13 months and clearly lost votes to the M5S and as a result of increased abstention. In the Senate vote the PD lost more than 2.5 million votes with respect to 2008 without any compensatory score from its ally, Vendola's SEL. The latter, despite its optimistic forecasts, only won 900,000 votes and therefore did not even match the disastrous votes for the Rainbow Coalition of 2008, although thanks to its alliance with the PD it will manage to have a proportionate number of parliamentary representatives.

There was also defeat for the Civic Revolution slate that had hoped to bring into parliament a small group of MPs from the parties who did not make it in 2008 and who had not been accepted into the PD coalition (PRC; PdCI; IDV and Greens). Ingroia's slate did not get a single representative elected in either house. This disaster leaves only political debris and fragmentation and is the direct result of the way the leadership of the operation refused to take up a less conservative but more ambitious longterm political project.

Will the defeat of the austerity parties and the general political disorientation (at least temporarily including the most powerful capitalist interests) facilitate or not the resurgence of the social movements? The fragility of the institutional framework and the fear of "Hannibal at the gates" symbolised by the M5S will probably push the CGIL apparatus and its accomplices towards an even greater moderation of its policies and support for actual struggles even if the economic situation and the line of the ruling class imposes further aggressive attacks on the rights and conditions of working people.

Consequently the building of the movements and struggles is as important as ever. After the failure of any illusory electoral short cuts this approach must become the central political axis of any fight back for all those opposed to austerity and its terrible social devastation:

Parliament in percentages

Partito Democratico (PD - Democratic Party): 25.4

Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL - Left Ecology Freedom): 3.2

Total Centre left coalition: 29.5

Popolo della Libertà (PDL - People of Freedom): 21.6

Lega Nord (Northern League): 4.1

Fratelli di Italia (Brothers of Italy): 2

Total Centre Right coalition: 29.1

Monti coalition: 10.5

M5S (Grillo): 25.5

Ingroia: 2.2

Senate results in percentages

PD: 27.5

SEL: 3

Total Centre left coalition: 31.6

PDL: 22.3

Lega Nord: 4.3

Fratelli di Italia: 1.9

Total Centre Right coalition 30.7

Monti coalition: 9.1

M5S (Grillo): 23.8

Ingroia: 1.8

Note: the way the senate seats are calculated is on a regional basis so the biggest coalition in a region gets a bonus; this is why the % results in the Senate do not show the strength in seats of the PDL coalition.

A fresh breach in a worn-down regime

27 February 2013, by **Jesus Rodriguez**

The media revelations are multiplying after the discovery of millions of euros in Swiss accounts belonging to the former treasurer of the Partido Popular (PP, the main party of the Right, in power in Madrid), Luis Bárcenas, who is accused of tax offences and bribery. Barcenas had already been at the centre of several corruption scandals linked to top leaders of the PP. There have also been revelations of additional salaries undeclared to the tax authorities by leaders of the party, including the current Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. There is widespread public indignation over this.

But, even more, reduction of public services is being accompanied by privileges granted to private companies related to PP members, who are taking advantage of privatization. It is the same story in regions run by the PSOE (social-democrats), where companies related to personalities in the party manage the outsourcing of services by the public administration. In addition, the huge sums paid to the banks in order to save them are combined with tax exemptions for those on high incomes. Corruption is an element of this maze of privileges, where sections of the financial and industrial bourgeoisie merge with the political caste.

A parasitic system

Accumulation through dispossession, fueled by the constant expropriation of the working classes referred to by David Harvey, demonstrates some peculiarities in the Spanish state. Among other things, the existence of a model of urbanism that is based on speculation and plays a predatory role on the environment. This model has glorified individual enrichment and the selling-off of the natural heritage and has been a source of enrichment for city councils and networks of property developers, estate agents, banks and political parties. This policy of "enrich yourselves" has led to legalized political corruption.

It is therefore not enough to denounce the immorality of some political leaders or to demand that they resign and call for new elections. We must denounce the whole parasitic logic of neoliberal policies and their cultural matrix, the looting of public goods for private profit. It is also true that, as regards institutional corruption and the management of the debt, sackings and the question of public services, the question is "who decides?" We need a Left that puts at the centre of things the question of breaking with this system.

Overturn the institutional consensus

In the face of the neo-liberal offensive, the defensive reaction of the working class is very strong and the development of political consciousness is very limited. This benefits populist currents, such as UPyD, and the reformist Left (Izquierda Unida, a coalition around the Spanish Communist Party) who are now involved in many municipal and regional governments (in Catalonia a few years ago and now in Andalusia), in alliance with the PSOE, where they apply austerity policies.

But the bipartisanship of the PSOE-PP, joint architects of the economic architecture of the speculative bubble, is wearing thin. The institutional consensus is cracking, as well as the legitimacy of all the institutions that came from the Francoist system and from the Constitution of 1978, from the judiciary to the Crown. This crisis is accelerating with the national question in the Basque country and Catalonia, where the attacks against public services are accelerating the tensions in the territorial model.

We have to start from struggles in order to forge alliances with sectors capable of developing a political alternative, putting the accent on the overturn of all the institutional architecture in the service of the economic and political oligarchy.

This article was published in *Tout est Ã nous!*, weekly of the NPA in France.

The Empire in Decline

25 February 2013, by David Finkel , Gilbert Achcar

Against the Current: From your vantage point both in Europe and the Middle East, can you describe how the U.S. election was viewed from abroad?

Gilbert Achcar: As you may imagine, reactions were different in Europe and the Middle East. In Europe, there was a kind of sigh of relief at the reelection of Obama. Because Romney was seen in a very negative light by most

people, the most common comment was satisfaction that he wasn't elected.

In the Middle East there was much indifference this time "unlike in 2008, when there was so much enthusiasm for Obama for the obvious reasons of his color and background compared to the tradition of U.S. presidents. This had given way as Obama came to be seen as, at best,

very weak in relation to the political establishment in the United States and especially Israel "in the way his administration bowed down in the face of Israeli arrogance and provocations. This created huge disappointment because people had illusions that things would be different.

Also in general, this administration has actually had to run the empire at the time when it's at its lowest point of

prestige in the region. It came in the wake of the disastrous George W. Bush administration – disastrous from the point of view of the U.S. empire.

The neoconservative writer Charles Krauthammer had announced a “unipolar moment” in 1990 [unchallenged U.S. power as the Soviet bloc collapsed –ed.]. But not long after 9/11/2001, from 2003 onward with the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration managed to dissipate all the political capital the United States had accumulated since 1990.

The United States has been facing in the very recent period a real decline in its influence, especially in the Middle East, from the peak of its hegemony in 1990-’91 when it waged the first war on Iraq.

The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, without achieving a single one of the basic goals that the Bush administration had in mind when it invaded, is a tremendous defeat and disaster for U.S. power.

I think it was Henry Kissinger who said that if the United States were defeated in Iraq it would be “worse than Vietnam.” I think this has exactly happened, because what’s at stake in the Middle East and Gulf is so much more than in Vietnam.

U.S. Isolated on Palestine

ATC: This brings up my next question, about the significance of the United Nations General Assembly vote on “non-member state” status for Palestine. This seems much more of a defeat for the United States than anything it might mean for actually achieving a Palestinian state.

GA: Exactly – this is one of the most striking illustrations of what I was just saying. It is a real slap in the face and showed a degree of impotence of the empire that is quite amazing, and which we hadn’t really seen since the previous era of decline in the 1970s. It now feels like the United States and

Israel being isolated along with only Canada, the Czech Republic and some fictitious Pacific island states.

The way Europe in particular has broken with Washington is just an indicator of this decline in imperial power, especially when confronted with what is happening in the Middle East. The degree to which it lacks a real response to the events in the region and is just trying to adapt to the situation, with no real alternative to betting on the Muslim Brotherhood as it’s attempting to do – all this indicates how much regional U.S. hegemony has been lost.

As for how much this has to do with “two states” (in Israel-Palestine), for those countries that voted in favor or abstained on the UN resolution, of course this was related to the two-state solution. They feel that a negative vote would be interpreted as a rejection of this formula that they’ve been advocating for ages. That’s also how the Palestinian Authority presented the issue, as “the last chance for the two-state solution.”

Among the Palestinians this was mostly seen as a moral victory, after such a long chain of defeats of all kinds and faced with an overwhelming military force like Israel which keeps up its onslaught on Gaza. The vote also came in the wake of another moral victory, the fiasco of Netanyahu’s latest attack on Gaza.

ATC: Will Europe follow up on its anger over Israel’s “E1” settlement expansion? [This project around East Jerusalem, announced by Israel following the UN vote, would cut the West Bank in half.]

GA: This remains to be seen, but the expression of anger this time is clearly higher than on previous occasions. This specific signal for settlement expansion is qualitatively more harmful than previous decisions, because of the issue of East Jerusalem and its implications for the territorial integrity of any hypothetical Palestinian state.

Netanyahu took the U.S. vote as a green light, so it’s really the United States that bears the direct responsibility for this, even if

Washington tried to distance itself. He wouldn’t have dared to challenge the world and Washington – but Israel could challenge everyone else as long as the United States remains onside.

As we all know, Europe’s leverage on Israel is relatively limited. There are means by which they could exert pressure – like stopping their privileged trading arrangements and effectively entering into BDS (Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions) territory. But any such thing is so far beyond Europe’s policies that it’s difficult to imagine.

The crux of the issue is that Israel is dependent above all on the United States, and the fact that even this president Obama, who in many ways was expected to be favorable to the Palestinians, relinquished any possible fight, is striking.

If you take the decades since Eisenhower, it’s the Bush Senior administration that appears as the one that went furthest in pressuring Israel – in 1991, exactly at the peak of U.S. hegemony, when it pushed the Yitzhak Shamir government to join the Madrid negotiations. They threatened to withhold guarantees for a \$10 billion loan that Israel was seeking at the time. We haven’t seen anything similar since then.

Of course Bush Junior was in total harmony with the most rightwing governments in Israel – where we have seen since 2001 an uninterrupted move to the far right – but this has continued with Obama’s administration, which is a reflection of U.S. influence being in such deep decline. Washington is not in a position to put pressure on its most reliable ally.

ATC: My feeling was that there was a deal where Israel wouldn’t attack Iran against U.S. wishes, which would be crazy anyhow, while the United States would allow Israel to run wild in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Gaza. Does this make sense?

GA: I think such “deals,” if you like, aren’t explicit but can be implicit. The Obama administration has been faced with threats by Israel of unilateral

action, and one should say that Obama's reelection is a defeat for Netanyahu who was betting on Romney, in the belief that Romney would give a green light or even participate in a military action against Iran.

The truth is that not only the Obama administration but the top Pentagon brass is very worried about such a prospect (of an Israeli action). They aren't willing to take such a big risk just for the sake of Netanyahu. The same is true of the Israeli military; there are even leaks and revelations from Israeli security and intelligence circles that this would be a crazy adventure. Iran has missiles and rockets and so does Hezbollah in Lebanon. It's not risk-free as the onslaught in Gaza was for Israel.

The end result is that Netanyahu, having called an election for January, once he saw Romney was defeated reduced his ambitions and attacked Gaza in very much an electoral maneuver substituting for his desire to hit Iran. But it appears as a failure.

What will happen after that "I think it's hard to imagine Israel launching an attack on a target like Iran without a clear green light from the United States. That would be so crazy that I don't think the Israeli military would accept it.

ATC: You had accurately predicted that the victories of the nonviolent Arab Spring uprisings wouldn't be repeated in the case of regimes like Syria. How do you see the crisis that has exploded there, and what are outside powers attempting to do?

GA: The United States and Europe, especially Britain, have had policies in the region to avoid what they regard as "chaotic" change. The motto in Washington very early on, from January 2011, was "orderly transition," the phrase repeated countless times by U.S. officials including Obama and Hillary Clinton.

That was the kind of "orderly transition" they pushed on Yemen, with the aid of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) oil monarchies. It was a kind of accommodation that robbed

the Yemeni popular movement of its victory, a completely frustrating compromise that isn't working because it left the country completely unstable. They got a negotiated agreement where the president handed over power to his deputy while he continues behind the scenes and his family runs the military "a real attempt at aborting the revolutionary process.

That's exactly what the United States seeks when there's a huge mass uprising and change becomes inevitable "as in Libya, where the goal of the intervention was to try to control the process. Although they couldn't do it on the ground because the Libyan rebels wouldn't accept foreign troops, they kept negotiating with Qaddafi's son (Seif al-Islam). But the insurgency wouldn't abide such limitations, and the regime was ultimately brought down by the uprising in the capital.

In Syria they've again tried to achieve "transition" without giving any real support to the uprising. Of course there isn't direct U.S. or NATO military intervention, and the refusal to arm the uprising explains the big imbalance militarily between the rebellion and the regime. Obama himself had spoken of the "Yemen solution" for Syria. Not very long ago, British Prime Minister David Cameron had said Assad's safety could be guaranteed if he left the country.

That's imperial arrogance without limit. It indicates what these people are about, and how mistaken it is to believe that Washington is trying hard to overthrow the regime. Their main preoccupation is what Washington and London call "the lessons of Iraq," where they dismantled the army and the Iraqi state, which was seen later as the major blunder. It's a wrong assessment of the reasons for their defeat in Iraq, which run deeper than that "but from their own point of view they did make a huge blunder in dismantling the Baathist state, and they don't want to repeat that.

They repeat the same formulas in regard to Syria "try to strike a deal with a major sector of the regime. They aren't achieving success in this direction, any more than in Libya,

because the conflict is such that it's unimaginable, after so much destruction by a regime and ruling family that's willing to destroy its own country, including whole cities like Homs and Aleppo "it reminds me of the Israeli onslaught in Lebanon and destruction of Beirut suburbs in 2006 "that people would be willing to coexist with any major section of such a state machine organized on such a sectarian basis. To believe that's possible is completely illusory.

ATC: So where do you see the situation going from here?

GA: I don't think there's any other outcome than the end of the regime "the situation is completely irreversible. So the big question isn't whether the regime will fall, but how soon. The longer it will take, the higher the human cost, and the political cost too because this is creating conditions for a deterioration of the political scene even within the uprising.

In the absence of western support, backing for the uprising has come from the Saudi monarchy funneled through fundamentalist forces. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of the regime, which said from the beginning that it was a big "conspiracy of the Salafists and al-Qaeda," and did its best to produce this result. This of course is very worrying, and that's why the longer the conflict carries on, the worse it is for the future of Syria.

It's in the best interests of the future of Syria that the regime falls very soon. This seems rather difficult, unfortunately, although if you compare with last year when the situation was just beginning to militarize, the regime has lost a lot of ground and you see how quickly things can develop. It also depends on supplies for the uprising, and there have been reports of support from Qatar and insurgents acquiring surface-to-air missiles. But short of something like that or an internal collapse of regime forces, it may very well linger for several months, even a year or more.

ATC: Finally, there's the new political crisis in Egypt. Can you

briefly assess that?

GA: The issue in Egypt, on the one hand, is no surprise in that the Muslim Brotherhood is by far the most powerful organized force after the collapse of the Mubarak regime's institutions. So their electoral victory was to be expected. The key point isn't that they gained power, but the actual fragility of their victory. Morsi's victory wasn't overwhelming, and he doesn't command any authority in the eyes of the mass movement.

As soon as he decreed the concentration of power, you have a big

and continuing outpouring in opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood has a very powerful force that can organize masses, but what's new is huge numbers of people willing to say "No." In the long run this regime is actually quite weak, a "paper tiger," in that they have no solutions to all the major economic and social problems that led to the anti-Mubarak uprising.

The deep roots of all this are to be found in the economic problems and huge unemployment. Morsi's program amounts to nothing but a continuation of the previous regime; they've just signed an agreement with the

International Monetary Fund with all the usual conditions, which will create even greater dissatisfaction.

So the upheaval that began in January 2011 is far from over. We are only at the beginning of a very long revolutionary process, and when you see the rapidity of the discrediting of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia, this gives reason for optimism about the future — not the pessimistic mood that we now find especially among so many people in the West, who had wrong expectations to begin with and now portray negatively the whole uprising.

The deal that wasn't - Ireland enters its second bail-out

24 February 2013, by John McNulty

The chaotic vote was followed the next day by scenes of jubilation and triumph on the government benches. "We have a deal!" announced Taoiseach Enda Kenny to thunderous applause. In fact the "deal" - actually an internal debt restructuring - simply underlined the historical bankruptcy of Irish capital and its utter dependence on the imperialist powers.

The central issue of discussion was the promissory note through which the government supported its unconditional guarantee to the bankers and speculators behind the collapse of the Anglo-Irish bank.

An unfortunate side effect of the arrangement was a 3.1 Billion interest rate that fell due each March. This was the subject of endless lies and bombast: claims that they did not pay last year's tranche (the claim was based on a creative accounting technique that simply disguised payment). Claims that the coalition would refuse to pay this year. Claims that the European Central bank was the friend of Ireland and would write down the debt as a reward for our unstinting application of austerity. The

lies kept flowing. The emergency act was supposed to be a hurried response to press leaks. It turned out to be a central element of the new arrangement. It was supposed to be about liquidating the holding bank. It also abolished employment rights for IBRC workers, gave the finance minister the right to suspend property rights and moved financial decisions even further away from any form of democratic accountability.

The outcome of all this bombast? Another creative accounting measure between the Irish government and the Irish Central Bank that effectively doubles the level of banking debt. A deal? The support of the ECB? The most that could be squeezed from bank chair Mario Draghi was that he "noted" the deal. Pressed further, he said that the ECB board unanimously "noted" the deal.

The noting is however important in terms of the scheme. It means that the ECB will subsidise an Irish government bond held by the Irish central bank. An official rate of 3% will be effectively under 1%. The overall debt to GDP ratio will fall and

the Irish government hope that this will mean the withdrawal of the Troika and a return to the bond market.

The arrangement marks the failure of months of diplomacy when Ireland tried to follow up vague promises that the Irish banking debt would be included in a European Stability Mechanism. The mechanism has suffered delay - reflecting the continuing euro crisis - and concessions to Ireland would have weakened attempts to prevent debt contagion of the core economies.

The question of a further 30 billion used to recapitalise the other Irish banks remains unresolved and is the subject of further lobbying by the Irish government and their partners in the Irish Trade union movement..

Irish workers pay a high price for the new arrangement. All Irish debt is now sovereign debt. Every red cent is to be repaid. The rescheduled bonds now stretch the repayment period until 2054 - the next generation will pay well into middle age. The longer interest rate effectively doubles the promissory note debt to over 60

billion. In addition there will be a firesale of "good" debt from Anglo that will be likely to reduce its value. The "bad" debt will be transferred to NAMA. One economist commented that NAMA will become a repository for all Irish debt, with long-term recovery resting on the belief that the bet will someday pay off.

The workers will wait in vain for a protest from the leadership of the Irish trade union movement. "Longer to pay" was actually the central demand of their "better fairer way" programme for paying the debt. A trade union march following the deal was designed to support the government in its diplomacy. Meanwhile the partnership between government and unions continues with talks for a "Croke Park II" deal meant to shave a further billion of the public sector pay bill.

The gain for Irish capital is that interest rates are reduced as is the debt to GDP ratio, allowing them to plan for a future return to the market and an end to the bail-out and supervision by the Troika.

There is a great deal of confusion over the amount of freedom allowed to the Irish government. The Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, claimed a reduction in payments of €1 billion each year for 3 years. Finance minister Noonan claimed a total of €1 billion over the same period.

The new "freedom" will mean nothing to the workers. Ireland's debt is structural and austerity is meant to reduce the cost of labour and the level of public service permanently. One suggestion is that other debts be paid off more quickly. A second is that the government retain a cushion - an indication that the whole edifice is based on the dubious idea of an imminent capitalist recovery. A third proposal is that the stew of austerity be spiced with a thin sprinkling of investment that will supposedly generate jobs.

Although it was claimed to have been triggered by a press leak, the chaos and desperation in the Dail on the early hours of February 7th - a chaotic

breakdown of capitalist order - presents a true picture. Irish capital has made a desperate throw of the dice - the "double or quits" throw of the gambler in over their head.

Ireland has entered its second bailout. The banking debt has proved unsustainable. Ireland was caught in a European scissors - it could not pay the debt but it could not be offered mercy for fear of the collapse of the euro. Yet again a solution is found that spares the banks and bondholders and heaps more debt on the Irish working class. Yet again the hope is that capitalism will recover and that a new spurt of growth will shrink the debt. Yet again the outcome of a continued recession is not to be contemplated.

In the new bailout a puppeteer's string from the European central bank will replace the troika noose.

The financial occupation, the grinding austerity, both will continue until the working class organises in its own behalf to resist the austerity.

12/02/13

Political Initiative of the Popular Front

20 February 2013

Our country is living today under the impact of the assassination of the general secretary of the Party of United Democratic Patriots and founder of the Popular Front, the militant Chokri Belaïd.

This murder confirms the severity of the crisis facing our country at all levels: political (crisis of the institutions of governance, whose legitimacy and credibility are falling into disrepute), economic, social, cultural and security. This crisis results from the failure of the ruling coalition, led by the "Ennahda movement," and its inability to resolve the fundamental problems facing the Tunisian people, who are experiencing serious consequences: a rising unemployment rate, the exacerbation

of poverty and of the number of people in need, increased marginalization and repression. The government of the troika has shown that it is even unable to carry out a cabinet reshuffle, after consultations that have lasted more than seven months, due to the predominance of the mentality of quotas and of plunder, far removed from the interests of the people and the country.

In this situation, the head of the provisional government has recently announced his decision to carry out a cabinet reshuffle in order to form what he calls a "government of national competence" while stressing his determination to move in that direction regardless of the position of the political parties within and outside

the government, paying no attention to the popular rejection of the government and to the protests which have affected all regions of the country and which reached their peak after the martyrdom of Comrade Chokri Belaïd, whose funeral was a referendum against the government and for its resignation.

Faced with these developments, we salute the masses of the Tunisian people for their dynamism and their sympathy with the martyred comrade and for their rejection of political crimes, as well as policies, attitudes and practices that have led to or created a climate conducive to the commission of such crimes.

Accepting our historical

responsibilities, we:

1) Consider that the initiative of the head of the provisional government has not broken with the logic of having the sole right to have an opinion, whereas it has no political and socio-economic programme, direct and clearly able to carry out what remains of the transition period. We also believe that the head of the government himself, along with his governmental team, is responsible for the complete fiasco of the government;

2)

3) We stress that the current situation requires a new government, a government of crisis, to save the country, a government limited in size, at the service of the people and the homeland, with the support of the population and of national and progressive and democratic forces, composed of people with the national competence to manage what remains of the transition period, whose members will not stand in the next elections, a government which acts in the framework of the following emergency programme:

4)

a) Set a clear agenda for the remainder of the transitional period:

b)

â€¢ complete the drafting of the Constitution, enshrining the aspirations of our people to freedom, dignity, social justice and equality between Tunisians;

â€¢ resolve the dossier of the martyrs and the wounded of the revolution;

â€¢ draft the electoral law;

â€¢ draft a transitional justice law;

â€¢ launch regulatory authorities: the electoral commission, the commission of the judicial magistracy and the media commission;

â€¢ fix a precise date for the holding of the next elections;

â€¢ implement mechanisms to fight corruption and political money;

â€¢ organize a national seminar on immigration.

â€¢ Take economic and social emergency measures which include:

â€¢ preventing the liquidation of domestic enterprises and of the main wealth of the country;

â€¢ suspending the repayment of the debt and setting up an audit committee on the question;

â€¢ recovering the rights of the state concerning tax evasion;

â€¢ establishing an exceptional tax on large fortunes;

â€¢ supporting and encouraging small and medium farmers and exempting them from the payment of the debt which is crushing them;

â€¢ freezing prices to protect the purchasing power of the people and encourage consumption;

â€¢ implementation of the decree on the prohibition of subcontracting (temporary work) and regularization of workers on construction sites;

â€¢ reducing unemployment and considering the introduction of an unemployed allowance;

â€¢ modifying and restructuring the industrial and agricultural minimum wage;

â€¢ reducing imports of luxury goods and expenditure on public administration.

c) And immediately:

â€¢ opening an urgent investigation into the murder of comrade Chokri Belaïd;

â€¢ investigating all attacks which have targeted political activists, intellectuals, artists, journalists, and the sanctuaries, tombs and *zawiyas* [1] and prosecuting those responsible;

â€¢ dissolving the so-called "leagues for the protection of the revolution" and all parallel bodies;

â€¢ criminalizing the exploitation of mosques for incitement to violence and political and partisan propaganda;

â€¢ criminalizing "excommunication" (*takfir*) [2]

â€¢ cancelling all administrative and political denominations that have been

assigned on a partisan basis.

We propose this initiative to all political and social forces and to the Tunisian people and we consider that its implementation will require a national salvation conference, including all parties and individuals who want to avoid the country sliding towards chaos, to restore security, stimulate the economy and develop production, to preserve the reputation of the revolution and the country, in the country and abroad and to ensure the best conditions for the upcoming elections.

We call the upon the masses of our people to maintain the mobilization in order to foil all plots and all internal and external political manoeuvres aimed at undermining the security and stability of our country, plundering its wealth and denigrating its revolution.

We express our unwavering commitment in the fight for the achievement of the objectives of the revolution and the defence of national sovereignty and the unity of our people.

Tunis, February 12, 2013

The Popular Front, which held its first national conference in September, 2012 and adopted a draft political charter, groups together many independent activists and organization coming from different traditions:

Marxist-Leninist: Parti des travailleurs (Workers' Party, the former PCOT, led by Hamma Hammami), Parti des patriotes démocrates unifiés (Party of United Democratic Patriots, resulting from the recent merger of the MOUPAD led by Chokri Belaïd and the Jmour current of the PTPD), the Parti patriotique socialiste révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Socialist Patriotic Party, led by Jamel Lazhar), and the Parti de la lutte progressiste (Party of the progressive struggle, PLP - led by Mohamed Leban);

Trotskyist: Ligue de la gauche ouvrière (Workers' Left League - LGO);

Socialist: Parti populaire pour la liberté et le progrès (People's Party for Freedom and progress, PPLP, led

by Jalloul Ben Azzouna);

- Marxist Pan-Arab: Front populaire unioniste (Popular Unionist Front, led by Amor Mejri);

Nasserite Arab nationalist: Mouvement du peuple (Movement of

the people - Hrakat Echaab, led by Mohamed Brahmi);

Baathist Arab nationalist: Mouvement Bath, led by Othmane Belhaj Amor, Parti de l'avant-garde arabe et démocratique (Party of the Arab and Democratic Vanguard, PAGAD, led by

Khereddine Souabni);

Others: Tunisie verte (Green Tunisia, led by Abdelkader Zitouni), Mouvement des démocrates socialistes (Movement of Socialist Democrats), RAID (ATTAC and CADTM).

The revolt spreads

20 February 2013, by **Lucien Perpette**

The revolt of the Slovene population has antecedents and the trade union organisations have already played a major role in opposing the different attempts to erode the social conquests of the post war period. A 30,000 strong demonstration organised by the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) helped defeat the flat tax proposal of the first government led by conservative Janez JanÅia. This tax would have inevitably favoured the wealthy.

Another trade union demonstration, this time 70,000 strong, succeeded in having the minimum wage fixed at 763 Euros, an exception in eastern Europe, where this minimum, when applied in other countries, is in the area of 300-400 Euros.

But as in many other European countries, this opposition and these social movements have no political reflection organised in parties. The voters only have the choice between multiple political factions which in past elections agreed on distributing the various ministerial posts among themselves and aligning on the same neoliberal policies as other European governments.

In 2012, wishing to strictly apply the austerity measures inspired by the European Commission "reduction of public spending and attacks on social security, a higher pension age, cuts in the civil service" the JanÅia government provoked popular anger.

On November 17, 2012 a demonstration of several tens of

thousands took place in the country's capital, Ljubljana, to oppose these measures. On January 23, 2013, at the initiative of the union presidents Branimir Åtrukelj (SVIZ) and DuÅian Semoli? (ZSSS), 100,000 people stopped work in the civil service. Other workers also went on strike, notably the metalworkers in the SKEI union.

On the same day, nearly 25,000 people demonstrated in various Slovenian cities. It should also be noted that the spontaneous demonstrations began in several cities, first in Maribor, an industrial town in the north east of the country. The resignation of the town's mayor on grounds of corruption was obtained. The demonstrations spread to the capital, Ljubljana, where youth confronted the police. A veritable revolt against the "tycoons", nouveaux riches with dubiously acquired wealth, has spread.

Corruption is moreover a hidden evil which is rotting the life of society. The fact that it is hidden and that it is not possible to highlight it and punish it is also a powerful motive in the anger of the population. This sentiment has concentrated around the figure of prime minister JanÅia (Slovene Democratic Union, SDS), returned at the head of a coalition government in February 2012, who before the commission investigating his case was unable to plausibly explain the origin of a sum of 210,000 Euros, which led his allies in the government to demand his resignation. But although his government no longer has a majority

in Parliament, JanÅia still refuses to through in the sponge, despite a poll carried out for the daily newspaper "Delo" showing that 80% of Slovenes want him to go.

The mayor of Ljubljana and head of the current main opposition party, Zoran Jankovic, a "centre left" businessman, is also accused of malpractice by the intermediary of his two sons, having not fulfilled his legal obligation to disclose an increase in his bank account of 2.4 million Euros!

The existence of the government is hanging by a thread, despite the fact the prime minister refuses to resign. Upon the announcement of a protest demonstration planned for February 8, JanÅia announced that he will organise a demonstration in his support on the same day, so we are not yet finished with the refusal of the right to recognise its disqualification.

This report was written on February 2, 2013

Slovenia: Interview with Luka Mesec, coordinator of the DPU

What are the main causes of the current political crisis and the rise of mass discontent?

It is a political and economic crisis, a crisis of the neoliberal mode of

accumulation. All the main political parties in Slovenia, right and left, accept neoliberalism. The right has imposed itself brutally, in the manner of Thatcher or Reagan, and the so-called left approves it in general, being at best reticent. This is the source of the current protests. Two years ago, the people demanded the departure of the "third way" government led by the social democrat Borut Pahor, now they demand the departure of the right wing "democratic" government, of Janez JanÅia, installed a year ago.

The immediate reason for the discontent is the brutal reduction in the public sector budget, which has led to layoffs and the reduction of wages (by 8% last spring and now 5%) with the aim of preparing privatisations (telecommunications, railways, oil and so on), as well as the creation of a "dustbin bank" which has spent four billion Euros with a view to guaranteeing claims (including those of the private banks) and again a billion to recapitalise the public banks (which could also be sold off cheaply). Beyond this the government cannot

conduct the social dialogue and tries to limit (indeed suppress) referendum by popular initiative. Finally we can add the corruption and clientelism of the Slovene élites.

All this leads to an escalation of protest, which is undoubtedly the most significant in twenty years. These movements have enormous popular support, according to the polls as much as 76% (whereas the government's support is at 16%). 30% of the population is even convinced that the situation could only be resolved by revolutionary action. In short, people are disappointed by the neoliberal policies imposed by the élites and want a clear alternative.

Some journalists present the consensus of all the social actors as one of the solutions to the crisis. What is your opinion?

The self-styled government of national unity is the strategy of the dominant class, a sort of coalition which should transcend "ideological differences" so as to realise "essential reforms" in

areas like pensions, public sector cuts, privatisation, labour market flexibility and so on. It is probable that this will be the next step of the Slovene bourgeoisie, because the governments of the right and the so called left have fallen into disrepute. But as it is our nightmare, we try to resist with all our strength to show that it is not "ideological differences" which are tearing society apart, but the class struggle. We are currently living through a class struggle, between capital and labour, which is coming towards its climax. The moment where the workers take things in hand is not far off.

Extracts from an interview with Luka Mesec, coordinator of the collective Delavsko-punkerske univerze (University of workers and punks) made up of students, activists and researchers present since 1998 at the University of Ljubljana. This interview was carried out by Radnicka Borba (Workers' Struggle, observer organisation of the Fourth International in Croatia) on January 21, 2013 in Ljubljana. The original, in Serbo-Croat, is available [here](#).

An alternative to the Troika

18 February 2013, by **Peter Drucker**

The depth of the Portuguese crisis, says Costa, resulted from "poor choices by the Portuguese elite that made Portugal one of Europe's most vulnerable countries" - choices for a development model dominated by finance and construction. This led to a big housing bubble; in the now well-known scenario, when the bubble burst, the Portuguese state rushed to bail out the banks that had caused it. In an equally well-known scenario, international speculation then "bankrupted the state", as the banks demanded 5, 6 or 7 per cent interest on bonds - even after the European Central Bank (ECB) started lending them money at 1 per cent interest. So, notes Costa, "the Portuguese public debt is now one of the most profitable

in Europe'. Portugal is being "held to ransom" by the Troika: the International Monetary Fund, European Commission and ECB.

Hunger

Costa describes the Troika's demands, accepted by both the SP and the right, as "a huge transfer of wealth to the bourgeoisie and international finance, and a huge attack on the gains of Portugal's 1974 revolution: labour rights, welfare and even the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution". For example, VAT rates are now among the highest in Europe, 23 per cent, leading to "massive closures" of small businesses. Even before the

crisis the Portuguese were the poorest people in Western Europe, with half of the labour force earning less than â,~700 a month; last year those wages were slashed, with all public and private sector workers losing their year-end bonus (â,~13th month'). Unemployment benefit and pensions too have been slashed; there are now over a million Portuguese pensioners supposed to live on less than â,~300 a month.

"We're seeing hunger in the schools", says Costa, "and other things that had become almost unknown in Portugal in the last 20 years: homelessness and dependence on charity on a mass scale. The work of generations of public servants is

being destroyed. The decline in infant mortality in Portugal was an internationally studied example; we had reached Northern European rates. Last year, for the first time in years, infant mortality went up again.'

For a time people in their 20s and 30s without jobs survived by living with and off their parents or family in the countryside, but now these crucial 'links of solidarity' are breaking down. People are simply fleeing the country; an estimated 70,000 Portuguese have left for Angola alone. At the same time capital is benefiting from the sell-off of profitable state-owned companies: energy, airports, airlines, railways, postal services. In a display of what Costa calls 'blatant class bias', the government even proposed tax cuts for business at the same time as wage cuts and tax increases for everyone else.

Of course these policies haven't rescued the economy. On the contrary, it's shrinking by about 3 per cent a year. 'How can Portugal pay 5 per cent interest and more on its debt when each year there's 3 per cent less?' Costa asks.

Victories

The Troika's policies have drawn what Costa calls 'a line of demarcation through Portuguese society'. This was made unmistakably clear on 15 September 2012, when over a million Portuguese took to the streets in 'Screw the Troika' demonstrations, the biggest the country had seen in 30 years. There have been other big protests: against the closure of a famous Lisbon maternity hospital - led by women who had given birth there - against the abolition of urban and rural district offices - often the only source of public services for people who have no other access to them - and in January against threatened massive layoffs of teachers. These mobilizations have succeeded thanks to a difficult unity between the country's biggest, CP-led trade union federation, the CGTP, and a new generation of indignados-style, Facebook-wielding activists.

And the resistance has forced the right to retreat, in victories that even

the massive resistance in Greece has not yet won. The right gave up the idea of tax cuts for business. The constitutional court threw out the proposed 2011 budget because of its disproportionate attacks on public sector workers. And now the constitutional court is considering throwing out the 2012 budget, on the grounds that it denies rights to education, health care and welfare guaranteed by the post-revolutionary constitution.

Faced with so much resistance, Costa says, the Troika knows it needs 'a Plan B'. The SP, now in opposition, is Plan B. Having accepted all the Troika's demands, the SP voted in parliament against the right's budget - with the Troika's tacit blessing, since the right didn't need the SP's votes anyway. But the SP won't promise to reverse the cuts or tax increases or raise the minimum wage. Hoping for a return to government, it is still trying to show the Troika that it's 'responsible'.

If the right-wing government falls soon, the SP may not have enough time to regain its lost credibility. At the time of the June 2011 elections, Costa says, voters saw no alternative to accepting the Troika's dictates, and deserted the radical left. The Communist Party lost a little. The Left Bloc, a union of three radical parties (including the Portuguese section of the Fourth International) formed in 1999 that had less deep social roots, lost almost half its votes, getting only 5.2 per cent. But since last spring, Costa says, the situation has turned around. 'People are beginning to see that the anti-Troika left was right.'

Although the CP is strong in the unions, its Stalinist past and continuing sectarianism limit its appeal. Costa believes that the Left Bloc has more potential. Once before, in the 2009 elections, it outpolled the CP, with 9.8 per cent of the vote. Today it is still at only about 6 to 9 per cent in the polls. 'The left forces aren't strong enough in the polls, but neither was Syriza in Greece a year before its breakthrough,' Costa says - and in the last Greek elections Syriza got a third of the vote.

Strategy

At its recent congress the Left Bloc declared that the only way out of the crisis is a real left government, which would renounce the agreement with the Troika, denounce 40 per cent of the debt and renegotiate the rest, nationalize the banks and tax the rich.

The Bloc takes a clear stand against leaving the eurozone. Costa says this would mean a drastic devaluation of Portugal's currency, in the interests of boosting exports by Portuguese companies but decimating living standards. 'The EU might expel us from the euro,' he admits. 'But this isn't our policy.' The Bloc means instead to ally with other radical left forces to fight for a transformed, democratic and social Europe.

But how can the radical left win a majority? João Carlos Louça, a supporter of a critical minority within the Bloc, thinks the leadership is going about it the wrong way. 'The leadership is investing too much energy in parliament and elections and not enough in the social movements,' he says. Louça also thinks the Left Bloc lost credibility by supporting an SP presidential candidate last year, and earlier by allying with the SP in the Lisbon city council.

Costa admits that there is some justice in some of the minority's criticisms. 'The Bloc has had a problem of centre of gravity,' he says. And it still hasn't done enough to include in its leadership the new layer of social activists. Costa agrees that winning a left majority is not a question of 'electoral arithmetic'. Perhaps dialogue with the CP is slowly becoming a bit easier. But he sees no signs that any significant part of the SP, which is thoroughly corrupted by 'incestuous links' with corporate elites, is willing to change course and break with austerity.

Real change demands social struggle. It requires dialogue with initiatives like Screw the Troika, and with a range of protesters who are often suspicious of all parties. And in the social struggle, especially the unions, Costa concedes, the Bloc still does not

have the strength that the CP built up in decades of resistance to the dictatorship that ruled Portugal from 1926 to 1974.

Fluid but functional

But Costa rejects Louça's statement that given the current balance of forces with the SP and CP, the Bloc's goal of a left government is not likely to be won in the near future. The Bloc has been proving itself in the movements – if not in the old union strongholds then among teachers, casualized workers and young people, and in fights for abortion rights, LGBT rights and drug decriminalization. "The Bloc is porous to society," he says. "We have relations with the movements that are fluid but functional. We respect their rhythms."

The Bloc has even done well in elections to key works councils, which in Portugal are fought not by unions but by parties and other groups. The Bloc is the biggest force in the works council at Volkswagen, the country's biggest auto plant. Yet even though the Bloc's workplace activists are CGTP members, the CP refuses to make any place for them in the CGTP leadership. "The CGTP hasn't sold out," says Costa, "but it's less and less democratic. Once the CP saw it as a transmission belt; now it's seen as a wholly integrated part of the party apparatus. The unions are where our relations with the CP are the worst."

Fortunately Costa does not see a big risk of the growth of fascism in Portugal. So far there is nothing in Portugal like the Greek Golden Dawn. "A very deep anti-fascist culture has developed in this country since 1974,"

he says. "Of course we have anti-immigrant racism: an assumption that people with darker skins do the dirty work for lower pay. But immigrants in Portugal are often Portuguese-speaking people with deep roots here. There's a lot of intermarriage. So it's hard to scapegoat them. When a small group of Nazis tried to join the big anti-austerity demo the police kept them out."

And in the growing resistance to austerity, the pressures for unity are mounting. With a new day of massive protests planned for 2 March, the CP is sending activists to the Screw the Troika coordinating group meetings – which would have been almost unthinkable not long ago. "The Troika and the right are preparing their next offensive," Costa says. "But we're preparing ours. Only now are the conditions for it beginning to be put in place."

Organizing for Socialism and Freedom in Brazil: an interview with PSOL activist Rodrigo Santaella

18 February 2013, by **Rodrigo Santaella**

ATC: What is your organization and tell us about its activities.

Rodrigo Santaella: Our organization is called Enlace, and is currently an internal tendency inside the broad left party called the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). We have a little more than 300 activists spread throughout the country. Enlace is a revolutionary organization, with deep traditions and seeks a renewal of democratic socialism. Enlace came mainly from another tendency, called Democracia Socialista (DS). DS was – and still is – an internal tendency of Partido dos Trabalhadores [Worker's Party/PT, currently the ruling party of Brazil], and it's possible to say that the majority of DS stayed with the PT in its process of degeneration. After the

former Brazilian president, Lula of PT, was elected, the contradictions within the PT began to really emerge. Inside the DS, the debate was, "should we be part of the government or stay inside the party but outside the government?". When the Lula government began implementing neoliberal policies, especially the pension reform in 2003, it became clear to a section of tendency that we could not participate in the PT government and the party was undergoing a process of degeneration. Even so, some of our most important militants were invited, and accepted, various posts inside the government, and this – among other things – caused the split. We left PT, and with other organizations founded Enlace and began the process of constructing

PSOL.

Enlace, as an organization by itself, is not a section of the Fourth International, but an observer, as is another tendency inside PSOL called CSOL [Coletivo Socialismo e Liberdade]. We retain this relationship with the Fourth International as a result of Enlaces' origins and traditions. But though the organization itself is an observer, all the members of the Fourth International in Brazil are inside Enlace, and we consider the Brazilian section to be formed by "all the militants inside Enlace who assume the tradition and the organization of the IV International." Currently, we are going through an important process of approximation with other organizations inside PSOL, especially

the CSOL, and that's a big chance for our section to grow over the next year.

We're actively organizing in a variety of sectors of Brazilian society. First of all, in the students movement, especially at the universities, we are part of a collective called Levante, which organizes more than 300 students around the country. Levante has considerable social influence as a result of heading some important student unions in a number of universities in the Brazil. We also organize secondary students, especially in Rio de Janeiro, but we are starting to spread this organizing nationally. We're playing increasingly important role in the union movement, mostly in Rio de Janeiro and in the sector of teachers, but also in some other sectors and regions of the country. We also have an important presence in the Brazilian anti-racist and LGBTQ movements in many parts of the country, organizing campaigns and collectives, being part of major organizations, etc. and we have a huge participation on the ecological movement, being the sector that pushes this most vigorously pushes this debate inside the party. We also play a role in the women's movement, formulating and organizing campaigns, struggling for equality inside and outside PSOL, and supporting all kinds of self-organization initiatives inside Brazilian society. We have a website and a magazine, which still has regularity due to a lack of resources, but we are organizing ourselves to publish it more regularly in 2013. After the October's 2012 elections, we now have three municipal councilor mandates, in 3 different cities: Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro and Niterói. Although we have no illusions that an electoral strategy is the best or only way of constructing a new society, we consider it important to be inside institutions to denounce and highlight their contradictions, and on the other hand to support any struggles coming from the social movements (whether we participate in them or not), from where the real possibilities of change can emerge.

Last but not least, we also spend an important part of our energies on the internal disputes of PSOL, which we consider to be an important political

alternative in Brazil, as long as we don't let some tendencies of bureaucratization and degeneration - especially characterized by the priority to the institutional disputes (such as favoring elections over movement organizing), which opens space to private financing of campaigns and alliances with right wing parties, for instance - grow.

ATC: What is PSOL? Why was it formed and what is your section's role within it?

RS: PSOL is the result of an attempt to build a broad anti-capitalist party in Brazil, after the degeneration of PT. It was formed to be a political alternative to Brazilian left forces. The Brazilian left was, since the end of the 70's, all focused on building PT as an alternative political tool for the working class and social movements in the country. After Lula took power in 2002 and embarked on the road of neoliberal reforms, like the pension reform I mentioned, it was clear that the course of PT was looking more and more dire. Some parliamentarians were expelled from the party for opposing such reforms, and the idea of forming a new broad left party started at that point and PSOL was founded in 2005. Currently, after 7 years of this, the course of PSOL is still in dispute, some sectors want to repeat the same strategies of PT, trying to avoid some mistakes, and others - like us - think the mistakes resulted precisely from such a strategy of giving priority to the disputing power within institutions, and adapting to the logic of private financing and alliances with right wing forces to win elections.

Now, Enlace has representatives in the national leadership of the party, and play a very important role in building unity of the left sector of the party to dispute its course. Beyond that, we try to organize party's branches in all the sectors and regions we act, and also try to support all the initiatives of democratization and smooth functioning of PSOL's internal structures, which is still a very difficult task.

ATC: What was the section's role in the PT? How did the PT turn towards neoliberalism?

RS: To summarize, I can say that Democracia Socialista (DS, the name of our FI section at that time) played a central role in organizing the political and legal process of founding the PT in two of the most important states in Brazil: Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais. Beyond that, DS was able to develop and strengthen, both inside and outside the party, the debates about different kinds of oppressions: women's, LGBTQ and anti-racist struggle. Also, our section was important in "holding" PT to the left in a lot of situations. A good example is the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where most of the militants of DS were located and where, on one hand, PT had its major participation in institutions (for example, the PT state government until 2002) and on the other hand was the expression of radical politics in the country. This happened, in large part, because of the participation of DS's militants.

Regarding PT's turn to neoliberalism, it all starts with the international situation and its changes after 1989, with a big crisis of left forces all around the world after the demise of the Eastern Bloc countries and the USSR. Around 1988, PT had begun to grow inside the state's institutions and this started to increase the pressure to adapt to the bourgeois social order, with the same process happening also in the labor movement. After PT's defeat in the 1989 elections, in which the party still had a very radical program and also an activist-centered form of organization, the central part of its leadership, with Lula at its head, proposed that it was necessary to moderate the program in order to achieve electoral power. A right-wing of PT, which papered over the class struggle and sought broad alliances with moderate and right-wing forces, slowly gained dominance within the party. This also started to change the internal organization of PT, and since the 90's it turned from a militant party with the priority of organizing branches to a party organized around elections, with professionalized campaigns, private financing, etc.

This sharpened the internal differences inside the party, especially when the more electorally centered sections of the party began using resources from "state machines" to

finance factional struggles inside the party. The tendency of moderating in order to win elections accelerated, and in 2002, with a big businessman as his vice-presidential candidate, Lula was finally elected. At that point, the compromises and alliances that PT had would leave a definitive mark on its public policies, reforms and government programs that came later. This showed that the party was completely adapted to the neoliberal global order, though with some peculiar characteristics, such as the increase of the social compensation programs like the Zero Hunger campaign.

ATC: How has the crisis affected Brazil? And what is the general political situation in the country?

RS: The most important effect of the crisis in Brazil was the cut in the budget of important sectors like health and education, and also in the government social programs. In 2012, we had \$26 billion in cuts to those areas. Brazil followed the same recipes for helping the bank sector, but with some important differences. The most important one was the encouragement of consumption. Freeing credits and reducing some taxes, the government encouraged the population to consume more and more, and the effects of the crisis were kind of hidden behind this consumption boom we had on the country. Obviously, this is not sustainable in long terms, but until now it has diminished the impact of the crisis on Brazilians.

About the general political situation, we have a very popular government with Dilma Rousseff (Lula's successor and current President of Brazil) from PT. According to the statistics, she may be even more popular than Lula was. So it's a difficult moment to be in the opposition, especially on the left of the opposition. Most of the most important social movements in Brazil are coopted by the government. On the other hand, the big investments and contradictions of the high-profile sporting events we will have in the country over the next couple of years (the Olympics and the World Cup), and the delayed effects of the crisis that are still likely to come, will create a situation where the PT's

development project will start to falter. Some splits in social movements are already happening because of the cooptation process, and some social uprisings have erupted in the past 2 years, such as important strikes involving teachers and postal workers, so there's some light at the end of the tunnel, as we say here.

In this difficult context, PSOL with its own contradictions, is attempting to raise a left alternative in Brazilian politics. We have a difficult situation for the left, but also perspectives on navigating the objective conditions of a social uprising in the country, and in this context PSOL is building itself as a left political alternative to PT.

ATC: What is PSOL's social base? What movements is the party most deeply involved in?

RS: PSOL has a very diverse social base, which includes university students, workers in the public sector, human rights movements, health workers, and also urban popular movements. In the places the party is bigger and has more influence, some classical sectors of the working class and a lot of informal workers, especially the youth, form the social basis of the party's organizing. We also emphasize work in the ecological, anti-racist, women's and LGBTQ movements. We have relations with the MST (Landless Workers Movement), one of the biggest peasant movements in the world, but there are difficulties because of the MST leadership's contradictory relationship with the government.

PSOL currently has more than 35,000 thousand affiliates, but most of them are not very active. We are still in the process of building the party, and in very difficult conditions, so we influence a lot of sectors and people, but we cannot talk about PSOL's "consolidated social basis" yet.

ATC: How did you become radicalized?

RS: I don't really know how to describe my own process of radicalization. I think as any process it doesn't have a unique turning point or a start and an end.

When I was younger, because of some readings about students movement, politics in general, etc, and through talking with my parents, who were not activists, but were politically conscious with a progressive orientation, I participated indirectly on campaigns supporting PT's candidates and on some international campaigns. So my interest in politics started when I was at school, but I wasn't even close to becoming a revolutionary at that time. When I got to the university, I started getting involved in the student movement, and then I had contact with a collective of students, organized in part by militants of the FI section there, but also with other organizations and a lot of independents, called Amar e Mudar as Coisas ["To Love and Change Things"]. The experience of trying to struggle, inside the university, for a more democratic, public and quality education for the people, started to show me the contradictions of the system itself, the class interests that anchored politics both inside and outside the university. Whenever we started engaging in real struggles, such as fights to democratize access to the university, we could feel the power of the institutions and the interests they represented. So, in the process of real struggle inside the university and the formation process inside that collective, I started becoming radicalized. Then, from our own place of struggle we started having contact with other social movements in Brazil, like the MST, as well as some urban movements. Those experiences also contributed to my process of radicalization. I was an "independent" militant for about four years and then I joined PSOL in 2010 and the FI section within Enlace in 2011.

I think my experience inside Enlace, inside PSOL and inside the Fourth International, together with the real struggles I have been a part of in Brazil these few last years are still factors in my on-going radicalization. The issues we have to deal in society, our problems, are more and more radical ones. So I think the process of radicalization of socialist activists has also to follow those issues, that's why, in the end, I think I'm still becoming more and more radicalized.

ATC: What can comrades in other parts of the world do to support your work and learn from your experiences in building broad left parties?

RS: I think the first challenge we have to deal with is the creation of more organic relations between our sections inside the Fourth International. The first step to support or learn of any experience is knowing about, being familiar with the major issues, with a little bit of its history and with the people that are presently part of it. As internationalists, I think this is our first task: build more organic relationships between our organizations all over the world. Even small things like translations of articles, reserving sections of our websites or magazines for

international contributions from comrades, invitations to meetings or activities whenever finances allow for it, virtual meetings of some branches in different countries to think about common issues, and a lot of other simple initiatives like that can help in this task. This first step is the most important and urgent one, and could create conditions for more possibilities.

I think the best way comrades can aid our work in Brazil is initiating or participating in international campaigns on issues, for instance the struggle against the privatization of the universities or public services, against racist violence, against sexist violence, etc. If we could articulate these actions better, it would probably have more impact in the different

countries in which we organize.

To learn from our experiences in building broad left parties, the best way is to stay constantly in touch. It could be helpful to also send U.S. comrades to our party's congresses. A congress of a broad left party is always a very interesting experience and deepens one's understanding of the most important issues inside the party and its relations with the struggles in the society. In 2013 we will have our fourth national congress of PSOL, probably near the end of the year, and the comrades of Solidarity are, of course, invited to send some representatives to observe and participate of it. It would be, undoubtedly, a very good interchange between such different - but also in some ways, so similar - realities.

Appeal by Women of Mali: Say “No!” to the war by proxy

16 February 2013

From the dramatic situation in Mali, there emerges a terrible reality which can be verified in other countries in conflict: the instrumentalization of violence against women in order to justify interference and wars whose objective is to grab hold of their countries' wealth. African women must know this and must make it known.

Although the amputation of two-thirds of Mali's territory and the imposition of sharia law on the populations of the occupied regions are humanly unacceptable, the exploitation of this situation, including the fate reserved for women, is morally indefensible and politically intolerable.

We have, as a result, we women of Mali, a historic role to play, here and now, in the defence of our human rights against three forms of fundamentalism: religious through radical Islam; economic through the omnipotence of the market; political

through formal, corrupt and corrupting democracy.

We invite all those women and men who, in our country, in Africa and elsewhere, feel concerned by our liberation from these fundamentalisms to join their voices to ours to say “No” to the proxy war that is looming on the horizon. The following arguments justify this refusal.

The denial of democracy

The demand for the deployment of African troops in northern Mali, transmitted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) to the United Nations, is based on a diagnosis that is deliberately biased and illegitimate. It is not based on any national dialogue worthy of the name, either at the top or at the base.

Furthermore, this diagnosis also excludes the heavy moral and political responsibility of nations, those who violated Security Council Resolution 1973 by transforming the protection of the Libyan city of Benghazi into a mandate to overthrow the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi and to kill him. The coalition of the separatists of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies, who defeated a Malian army that was demotivated and disorganized, also owes this military victory to the arsenals that came from the Libyan conflict.

Will the same Security Council approve, in the coming days, the plan of military intervention that African heads of state have approved, pretending in this way to correct the consequences of an unjust war by an equally unjust war?

Marginalized and humiliated in the

management of the "Libyan" crisis, can the African Union, should it, embark on this adventure in Mali without pondering the lessons of the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi?

Where is the consistency in the conduct of the affairs of the continent by the African leaders, most of whom opposed in vain the intervention of NATO in Libya, when they agree on the need for a deployment of military forces in Mali, with incalculable consequences?

The extreme vulnerability of women in zones of conflict

The International Crisis Group warns, rightly, that "in the current context, an offensive of the Malian army supported by the forces of ECOWAS and/or other forces has every chance of causing more civilian casualties in the North, of worsening insecurity and economic and social conditions in the whole of the country, of radicalizing ethnic communities, promoting the violent expression of all the extremist groups and, finally, dragging the entire region into a multifaceted conflict, without a front line, in the Sahara " [3].

These consequences are particularly serious for women. Their vulnerability, which is on everyone's lips, should be present in everyone's mind when decisions are being taken, and should serve as a deterrent when war can be avoided. It can be. It must be, in Mali.

It should be remembered that the cases of rape that we deplore in the occupied areas of the North of our country are likely to multiply with the deployment of thousands of soldiers. To this risk there should be added a more or less disguised prostitution that commonly develops in areas of great insecurity and therefore the risk of the spread of HIV/AIDS. Does the plan for military intervention which the Security Council will consider provide for ways to really protect the women and girls of Mali from such a

disastrous situation?

Let us also remember that in the whole of the territory the economic sanctions imposed by the international community on the people of Mali in the name of the return to a discredited constitutional order greatly affect vulnerable groups. Because of the sexual division of labour women are confronted on the domestic level with the enormous difficulty of providing their families with water, food, domestic energy supply, medicines. This daily and endless struggle for survival is already in itself a war. In these circumstances of the precariousness and vulnerability of populations, and of women in particular, the military option that is being prepared is a remedy which is very likely to be worse than the disease, whereas a peaceful alternative, coming from Malian society, civil, political and military, would be constructive.

Inconsistencies of the international community

Each of the powerful representatives of the "international community", as well as ECOWAS and the African Union has had words to say about our cursed woes as women in situations of conflict.

Let us give him his due, the French president, François Holland, who plays the role of leader in defence of the military option, stressed the suffering of women "first victims of the violence of wars" [4].

And yet, he said on September 26, 2012, in New York, at the special meeting on the Sahel, on the sidelines of the General Assembly of the United Nations, "I know that there may be a temptation to conduct negotiations. Negotiate with terrorist groups? There can be no question of that. Any loss of time, any process that drags on could only play into the hands of the terrorists".

"One must know how to end a war", the US and French presidents seem to be saying. "The war in Afghanistan has

been prolonged beyond the initial mission. It is stirring up the rebellion as much as making it possible to fight it. It is time to put an end in good order to this intervention and I make the commitment here to do so"- said the candidate François Hollande, in his presidential inauguration speech.

The American Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Hillary Clinton, whose stopover on October 29, 2012, in Algiers, was partly designed to convince president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to join the war camp, addressed the meeting of African heads of state in Addis Ababa in these terms: "In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the continuation of acts of violence against women and girls and the activities of armed groups in the Eastern region of the country are a constant source of concern for us. The African Union and the United Nations should spare no effort to help the DRC to react to these incessant security crises".

The initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, entitled "United to end violence against women", launched on 25 January 2008, pays special attention to women in West Africa. This was before the wars in Ivory Coast and Libya, which have largely compromised the achievement of the objectives assigned to this initiative. We understand his reservations about military deployment and hope that he will not support the plan for intervention of the heads of state of ECOWAS. War, let us remember, represents extreme violence against the civilian population, including women. It can only take us further away from the objectives defined by this initiative.

Why do the powerful of this world, who are so concerned about the plight of African women, not tell us the truth about the mining, oil and geostrategic interests that are stake in wars?

The president of the commission of the AU, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for her part, stressed: "it is crucial that women contribute to, and engage actively in, the search for a solution to the conflict. Their voices must be heard in the efforts to promote and consolidate democracy in their

country. To this end, have no doubt that you can count on the support of the African Union, as well as my personal commitment." [5].

The appointment for the first time of a woman to this post could be a real factor of political emancipation for women and therefore for liberation of the continent, if Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma agreed to broaden the base of the debate on African women by incorporating the global issues which are being concealed from us.

Our sad status as hostages

Mali is a country that is being simultaneously attacked, humiliated and taken hostage by political and institutional actors who are in no way accountable to us, starting with ECOWAS. One of the expressions of this reality is the huge pressure on what remains of the Malian state. The acting president, Dioncounda Traore, is the first among Malian hostages. If he thought it necessary to remind people, on October 19, 2012, at the meeting of the group of support and monitoring of the situation in our country, that he was not a president who has been taken hostage, it is precisely because he is. Otherwise he would not have repeated three times, on September 21, 2012, the eve of the anniversary of the independence of our country, that he prefers dialogue and consultation, and asked the United Nations, three days later, for immediate international military intervention. "I am aware of being the president of a country at war but the first choice is dialogue and negotiation. The second choice is dialogue and negotiation and", he insisted, "the third choice is dialogue and negotiation. We will make war if we have no other choice..." he said in his speech to the nation, before changing his mind.

Like the interim president, we are all hostages, prisoners of an unequal and unjust economic and political system which excels in the art of breaking down resistance by blackmailing us over money. The abolition of foreign aid is resulting this year, 2012, in a shortfall of 429 billion CFA francs.

Almost all public investment has been suspended. The closure of many companies has led to sackings and layoffs for economic reasons for tens of thousands of workers, while food prices continue to rise. The most important losses are in the building industry and in public works. Tourism, crafts, hotels and restaurants, which have suffered since 2008 the consequences of the inclusion of Mali on the list of countries at risk, have been severely affected, whereas before they represented substantial sources of income for the regions today occupied, including Timbuktu.

When we talk about having the status of hostages it is in no way meant to make less dramatic the unbearable suffering of the European hostages and their families, but to remind people of the equal gravity of the situation of all human beings trapped in systems for which they are not personally responsible. However, the question is to know how to act so that our country gets back its territorial integrity and peace, and that the six French hostages held by AQIM are returned to their families safe and sound, without their release paving the way for military action that would jeopardize the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in northern Mali who are just as much hostages.

The proxy war

The choice of war feeds on a lack of awareness of the real issues. Jacques Attali gives, for those who want to seize it, a key to understanding the situation which proves, if proof were needed, that the proposed military intervention is a proxy war. According to him, France must act "... because this (the Sahel) region can become a rear base for training terrorists and suicide bombers who will attack Western interests throughout the region; and even by multiple means of passage, in Europe. They are still only a few hundred; if nothing is done, they will be soon be thousands, coming from Pakistan, Indonesia and Latin America. And the Niger uranium deposits, essential to France, are not far away. A» [6]

The distribution of roles between France, ECOWAS, the African Union,

Europe and the United Nations is clarified. ECOWAS, as well as many Malians and Africans, did not understand up until now what was behind the idea of a mission to Mali. According to Jacques Attali, the regional organization had to act "to give back to the civil authorities the means to decide, without fear, to restore security, to restructure the military apparatus and to restart economic activity; in the North, to put an end to this secession, it will take military action on the ground, with long-distance logistical support, means of observation, drones and a capacity for acting within a strategic framework. Who can do all that? Obviously not the Malian government alone, which has neither arms nor authority. Not ECOWAS which does not have sufficient military resources to ensure all of the necessary action and which cannot even expect to receive a request from the Malian government, which is under the influence of uncertain forces. Nor the African Union, at least not alone. Then who? the United Nations? NATO? The question will be posed very quickly. It is being posed today. Here again, Europe should obviously be united and get into a position to decide and to act. It is not doing that. However, if the current negotiations fail, it will soon be necessary think about setting up a coalition of the kind that has worked in Afghanistan. Before an equivalent of September 11, 2001 hits us". [7].

So, everything is clear. The war envisaged in Mali would be a prolongation of the one in Afghanistan, where France and the United States are gradually withdrawing after eleven years of fighting and heavy losses in men, in equipment and in money. The Sahel is the zone of influence of France, which takes the leadership of affairs concerning Mali and subcontracts the military violence of ECOWAS. This transfer is made in order to be politically correct and not be accused of colonialism and imperialism, but also to reduce the cost of the war and to avoid French casualties. Public opinion in Western countries tolerates less and less their citizens dying in defence of "our" causes. Thus, in the same way that the Senegalese sharpshooters were (in colonial times),

African troops are called upon to lend France a hand.

The globalization of evils and networks

Religious radicalism has no need, in such a context, of northern Mali to spread in West Africa and in the world. The globalized economy, on the basis of injustice and inequality, is a machine to crush local economies, societies and cultures which provides the necessary fertile ground.

From the Red Sea to the Atlantic, from Afghanistan to Nigeria, from Toulouse, where Mohamed Merah acted and was shot, to Timbuktu, the issues are ideological, civilizational, of identity, but also economic, political and geostrategic. The actors and the opposing forces are roughly the same, with variations that can be manipulated, such as the Tuareg rebellion in Mali.

On the other hand, Afghans, Pakistanis, Algerians and other preachers are not newcomers to Mali. They made their appearance in mosques from the 1990s, at the time when the social consequences of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) on employment, income and social ties began to be felt.

The *badenya* perspective as an alternative to war

Malian and African women, very conscious of the issues at stake and of the deadly workings of neoliberal globalization, do not endorse wars. To the warmongering and predatory values of the dominant economic order, we oppose pacifist values, which reconcile us with each other, as well as with the rest of the world. *Badenya* ("children of the mother"), is

one of these values that we, women of Mali, cultivate more and counterpose to the masculine value *fadenya* ("children of the father") which in its ultraliberal version authorizes the unbridled and fratricidal race for profit, to the point of selling off profitable public companies, ceding farmland to those who dominate us and accepting the partition of the country.

Deeply rooted in the *badenya* perspective, our rejection of war has its roots in a conception of procreation according to which bringing a child into the world is already a way of going to the front (*musokele*). And there are too many of us who perish in giving life. We battle every day against hunger, poverty, disease, so that each child can grow up, work, take their place in society and their share of responsibility.

So in every soldier, in every rebel and every new convert to jihadism, who will fight against each other in the event of war, each of us recognizes a brother, a son, a nephew, a cousin. Yesterday, they were looking for social status through employment, income or even a visa. This was often in vain... Now, they have their trembling hands on weapons of war.

Lucidity and political maturity should be our weapons in this world without faith or law. There is no reason for Mali to become engaged on a terrain where France and the United States of America are retreating, despite the firepower of NATO.

To the war economy, we women of Mali counterpose the economy of life, making of the transition that is taking place an historic opportunity to meet the triple challenge of knowledge, citizenship and dialogue. The way things are evolving on the ground, including the willingness to negotiate of Ansar Dine and the MNLA, the constant modifications in the relationships of forces, as well as the strategies and interactions between the different groups involved, must be considered with the necessary

attention, so as not only to avoid a potentially tragic war, but also to avoid the pitfalls of past agreements.

The national consultations that have been envisaged for months must finally take place, enabling Malian society as a whole to come together and to define itself the basis and the conditions of an agreed (and not imposed) solution to the present conflict. We, women of Mali, will contribute fully to this, just as tomorrow we will contribute to the reestablishment of democracy in our country according to the values of society and of culture that we are familiar with.

We must, in short, make credible and strengthen the capacity of analysis, anticipation and proposition of Malian civil, political and military society.

We ask all those who share our approach to address immediately the main actors of the international community, in writing or in any other forms of expression, arguing that the Security Council should not adopt a resolution authorizing the deployment of thousands of soldiers in Mali. ?

November 20, 2012

Signatories: Aminata d. TRAORÉ; SISSOKO Safi SY; SANOGO Sylvie Kavanagh; IMBO Mama SY; Kadiatou TOURE; Thi Selikene SIDIBE (old); Dickson Rao s; Chris Dhar; DOUMBIA Fanta DIALLO; KONE Mamou Thapa; TRAORÉ Omar Salah. Penda DIALLO TRAORÉ; Dey Kadiatou KOUYATÉ; Aminata BIGGS; Oumou KASONGO. Alicia KAKARA. Awa Kat; Aminata DOUMBIA. Fatoumata COULIBALY; Babu drink; Awa Thapa; Bintou KONE; Fatoumata MARIKO; Mariam KONE; Cheikh DIARRA; Oumou KEITA; Dhee. Ramdas KAUR. Rokia NATARAJAN. Aref Khalid; ADA NANTOUMA; Awa COULIBALY; Gerry DOUMBIA. Fanta KANTE. S Chung; Jaba TANAGER; KATTA Mama DIARRA; Ishmael DIABATE; Karamoko BAMBA; Doumbi FAKOLY. Coumba SCHOEMAN; Pratham SOH-MELOCHE. Nathalie me DELA-MOUNIER.

Campus Fightbacks in the Age of Austerity: Learning from Quebec Students

16 February 2013, by **Alan Sears, Xavier Lafrance**

The newly elected Parti Québécois (PQ) government of Premier Pauline Marois immediately cancelled the 75 per cent tuition hike implemented by the previous Charest government and rescinded the oppressive “back to work” legislation in Bill 78. This is a real victory, though the struggle in Quebec must continue. The PQ government has already made cuts to university budgets and is committed to smaller incremental tuition increases, indexing tuition to cost of living increases. Further, the PQ is organizing a series of roundtable discussions on the future of post-secondary education with a very clear agenda for technocratic restructuring that impedes rather than increases democracy, access and quality.

Trying to Spread the Victory

This is a partial victory, but a real one. At a time when the austerity agenda is rolling on relatively unchallenged, the Quebec student strike offers a crucial lesson in resistance. Yet the knock-on effect of that strike has been relatively limited to date. The Quebec student movement has done serious work to reach out to the rest of Canada and elsewhere to share the learning from this incredible mobilization, but at this point the impact has been limited.

This is unfortunate given the desperate need for effective mobilization to halt the austerity agenda in general, and in particular its application to the post-secondary field. The Ontario government is currently implementing a major restructuring of post-secondary education at a quite rapid pace, aiming to shift university mandates toward a market orientation, shift teaching toward on-line courses,

continue tuition increases toward the goal of full user-pay, and implement cost-cutting “productivity” increases. It would take a mobilization at the scale of the Quebec student strike to really reverse this agenda, but at this point there are not even many ripples of discontent.

A Mobilizing Perspective

In this article, we will try to discuss some of the ways that we imagine applying lessons from the Quebec student strike in coming battles around education, and particularly post-secondary education. At its core, the Quebec student strike modelled a mobilizing perspective grounded in democracy, militancy and audacity.

Over the last three decades, Quebec’s student movement has been divided between organizations gravitating around two models: a lobbyist model seeking collaboration with governments in place, on the one hand; and a democratic, activist student unionism, on the other. Since the early 1990s, the former model has been adopted by the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), while the latter model has informed the activities of the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) [8] du Québec (which regroups 30 local student unions representing some 70,000 CEGEP and university students). We will focus on ASSÉ’s organizing model, which is explicitly “unionist” (syndicale).

The core goal of this unionist model is to defend members’ concrete interests (understood in a non-corporatist way) through their own mobilization. This

organizing model is based on democratic decision-making through general assemblies at which a large portion of student body debates action and decides collectively how to proceed. This democracy can only function in a meaningful way when combined with a constant effort at informing and mobilizing the student population beyond layers of activists, in order to develop a membership which can make change with their own hands rather than engaging in periodic ritualistic and symbolic protest. Democracy of this sort is linked to militancy in that the goal of protest is not to appeal to the conscience of those in power, but to build a counter-power in the streets, schools and workplaces that can push back.

In the era of austerity, many unions and social movements have lowered their horizons and tried not to rock the boat too much. For example, Toronto municipal unions met privatization demands with a campaign that focussed more on public relations advertisements than mobilizing their own members, ultimately resulting in concessions. In contrast, the Quebec students mobilized around ASSÉ (who formed the Coalition large de l’ASSÉ (CLASSE) to launch and coordinate the 2012 strike) dared to challenge the core of the government’s post-secondary agenda and boldly campaigned over a two-year period to win a strike mandate.

The challenge to the government’s agenda combined the immediate demand to halt the government’s 75 per cent tuition hike with a broader call to abolish tuition fees and democratize public college and university education. Many students lined up to fight tuition increases, rallying around a demand that seemed

winnable ("Stop the hike!"). Yet the mass movement raised many bigger questions about democratic governance and the character of post-secondary education that pointed toward a broader, transformative agenda.

This combination of audacity, democracy and militancy in many ways echoes the crucial battles that won trade union rights for workers in the first place, such as those waged by Windsor auto workers in the 1940s or by postal workers in the 1960s. The challenge outside Quebec is to figure out how to apply these methods in situations where there isn't the same level of organization and activism or tradition of student mobilization

A Longer-Term Perspective

This was the ninth general strike waged by Quebec students since 1968, and the 11th year since the founding of ASSÉ as a radical and democratic student union consciously committed to learning from that history of struggle. ASSÉ built for the 2012 strike through a two-year campaign, which used petitions, demonstrations and days of action to mobilize students through leaflets, informal networks and structured organization including assemblies.

All of this seems daunting if you are sitting in a place where that long-term work has not been done, and where it is hard to even imagine a way to begin the building process. There is certainly no magic formula, nor any simple overall technique that will automatically elevate campaigns elsewhere. But there is a crucial orientation that others mobilizing against austerity can learn from - that of militant, democratic unionism. The implementation of this orientation requires a longer-term strategy that is difficult to balance with the immediate needs of the anti-austerity struggle.

ASSÉ was founded on the principles of democratic, militant student unionism in 2001. The people who founded the new organization sought to deliberately learn from the prior history of the Quebec student

movement, both from the impressive victories and the grinding defeats. Indeed, the need to refound the radical wing of the student movement was an indication of the difficult struggles of the 1990s and the decision to ultimately disband the MDE (the previous radical democratic student union). Before ASSÉ, three student unions based broadly on democracy and militancy (UGEQ, ANEEQ and MDE) had developed and ultimately disbanded since the early 1960s.

At the core of these organizations was the principle of democratic, militant student unionism drawn from the student movement in France and expressed in the Charte de Grenoble from 1946 [9]. Article One of this document stipulates: "The student is a young intellectual worker." Historically, within the Quebec student movement, this has meant that students, like workers, are engaged in collective activities, share common interests and can organize collectively - form unions - to promote these interests. Students have immense potential power through collective organization to withdraw their labour (in strikes) and ultimately take collective and democratic control over the process of education.

The power of student strikes comes from the disruption of an education system that the government as well as campus administrations have a responsibility to administer. For example, university students will have to graduate in order to make room for incoming high school students. Semesters simply cannot be cancelled on a large scale without creating an enormous administrative mess that would also have significant economic consequences. Though governments and administrators will use this cancellation as a threat in effort to force striking students back into class, they are in fact worried by this prospect. This is why semesters have never been cancelled in the history of Quebec student strikes, and why these strikes have forced governments to back down on several occasions.

The best way to make this potential power real is to organize along the lines of democratic, militant unionism, which aims to mobilize the mass of the

student body and to win majority mandates for genuine collective action. The general assemblies that are so crucial to the success of the Quebec student movement are grounded in, and indeed cannot function properly outside of, this democratic and activist student unionist perspective. This perspective orients the militant minority toward their fellow students with the goal of discussing and debating in order to win genuine mandates for effective action. This requires constant mobilizing activities, such as printing flyers, publishing newspapers, going from class to class to present updates on campaigns and important issues, and engaging with students in cafeterias and in public spaces. In Quebec, this has generally been organized by mobilization committees in collaboration with student union executive committees.

Trying to adopt the assembly model without this commitment to democratic, militant unionism can lead to the separation of the core activists from most other students. A self-proclaimed assembly of radicals can give themselves a mandate to act in the name of the student body but without the genuine participation of larger layers of students they will remain isolated and they will not be able to build the power necessary to support this mandate. Indeed, one of the problems that lead to the downfall of the earliest Quebec-wide student union (UGEQ) was the commitment of radicals to going it alone, without the patience and strategic orientation to win larger mandates.

Democracy and a Mobilized Membership

Democratic, militant unionism means orienting outward to win mandates for mobilization from the student body. Those mandates will only be meaningful if they are won through democratic and participatory forms of organization. The general assemblies of the Quebec student movement have been foundational in winning mandates through forms of decision-making that involve active

participation, open exchange and direct democracy. Militant students must engage with those who disagree with them in such assemblies, trying to persuade fellow students that action is possible and necessary. These assemblies can be tense, and the outcome is very hard to predict as people respond to the flow of debate and the exchange of ideas. This puts a real premium on serious preparation to consider in advance the likely flow of debates, the main arguments of critics, and the motions that are likely to be able to sway sufficient support.

“The general assemblies of the Quebec student movement have been foundational in winning mandates through forms of decision-making that involve active participation, open exchange and direct democracy. Militant students must engage with those who disagree with them in such assemblies.”

These assemblies only happen after a great deal of work to mobilize the student body. Indeed, the Quebec student movement’s ability to build on the direct democracy of assemblies should not be romanticized or idealized. To build these democratic structures, and to maintain them over time, requires constant mobilizing efforts. Even if such structures are already embedded in bylaws (which is the case for most Quebec student associations), continuous militant activity remains crucial to breathe life into them. In between periods of mass mobilization (mostly before and during actual strikes), general assemblies tend to be small. Still it is crucial to organize them on a regular basis, as it democratizes and enlarges decision

processes beyond executive committees and reminds the broader student population of the existence of the assemblies and their potential collective power. These meetings can become really important formative spaces where new activists have the chance to familiarize themselves with formal assembly rules and with the practice of direct democracy. General assemblies derive from mobilizing practices, but they are also crucial spaces to develop a network of activists that will engage into these practices.

Solidaristic Campus Unionism

Many of us who are active outside Quebec find this model inspiring and face important challenges figuring out where to get stuck in to start building the kind of movement that we have seen in Quebec. The Ontario student movement, for example, has an important and valuable progressive record in many places. Yet it has not been organized on the basis of student unionism that aims to use the strike or occupation as a crucial tool for building student power on campus. There is virtually no prior experience of student strikes in Ontario beyond limited days of action, and even these have seldom ground institutions to a halt.

One of the elements which will be important in building new mobilizing capacities in Ontario and elsewhere will be to develop a militant and democratic unionist orientation among a layer of activists. ASSÉ has quite

consciously worked to develop activist capacities among layers of students who operate autonomously but with strong collaboration on different campuses, through activist education and skills-building camps, congresses and ongoing informal discussion and debate. The development of such an orientation will require lots of discussion and debate about such things as developing strategies for relating to student union structures and determining which issues will have traction in the immediate term. We argue that activists seriously oriented to winning democratic mandates from student bodies must seriously engage with existing forms of organization, attempting to transform them into democratic, mobilizing unions if possible. There will, of course, be vibrant debates about this.

One possible way to start would be to build a network of activists oriented toward democratic, activist unionism on the various campuses where they’re based. The network would provide opportunities for shared analysis, evaluation of activities, and joint strategies where feasible. Labor Notes [10] in the United States provides an example: it’s a project whose publications, workshops and conferences link up activists in many unions and workers’ rights groups who share a commitment to democracy, militancy and solidarity. A multi-campus network might provide the opportunity to build a base of activists with shared commitments to militant, democratic campus unionism.

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Solidarity against repression!

**16 February 2013, by Russian Socialist Movement
(RSD)**

Alas, today this call is even more urgent than before. It is no longer an exaggeration to compare the political

trials taking place right now to the prosecution of Russian populists in the late nineteenth century. The number

of possible sentences resulting from the so-called “riots” of May 6, 2012 has steadily climbed over twenty, and

the majority of the detainees have spent many months in jail awaiting trial.

Their names are Vladimir Akimenkov, Oleg Arkhipenkov, Andrei Barabanov, Fyodor Bakhov, Yaroslav Belousov, Alexandra Dukhainina, Stepan Zimin, Ilya Gushyn, Nikolai Kavkazskii, Alexander Kamesniskii, Leonid Koviazin, Mikhail Kosenko, Sergei Krivov, Konstantin Lebedev, Maksim Luzianin, Denis Lutskevich, Aleksei Polikhovich, Leonid Razvozhayev, and Artem Savelov.

The aim of the prosecution is self-evident: to break the will for political struggle of those unhappy with the current political regime and to systematically demolish the existing political opposition—a significant portion of which is situated on the political left. The Investigative Committee—a structure accountable only to president Putin—has constructed the case as a wide-ranging conspiracy stretching from rank-and-file street protestors to established politicians. Thus on March 10th 2013, the Committee merged two trials: the May 6th “riots” (with nineteen detainees, two people under cognizance not to leave, and ten hiding outside of Russia) and the “organizing of unrest” with which our comrades Konstantin Lebedev, Leonid Razvozhayev, and Sergei Udaltsov have been charged.

The list of detainees continues to grow. Just recently, on February 7th, the 24-year-old Ilya Gushchin was arrested and accused of using violence against a policeman during the May

6th “riots.” A little earlier, on January 17th, while facing similar charges and imminent deportation from the Netherlands back to Russia, Alexander Dolmatov took his own life.

On February 9th, Sergei Udaltsov’s status changed from cognizance not to leave to house arrest. This means that his channels of communication with the outside world have been cut off, and that even the tiniest infraction will land him in jail.

In addition, the prosecution and the judges guided by the Kremlin keep on placing pressure on the detainees, further risking their health and lives. Thus, for example, the eyesight of Vladimir Akimenkov, 25, has continued to worsen since his arrest on June 10th, 2012. Akimenkov, a Left Front activist, suffers from innate defective vision, which has deteriorated in prison conditions and may soon turn into a permanent loss of vision. Akimenkov’s own lawyer, human rights activists, as well as over 3,000 petitioners have asked the authorities to release him. However, the prosecution and the courts have remained firm and extended Akimenkov’s arrest until May 6th 2013.

Another accused, Michael Kosenko, 37, has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder since his military service. Instead of granting him access to medication or releasing him, the court is preparing to send him to “forced treatment” in a prison hospital.

Leonid Razvozhayev, 40, a co-

ordinator of the Left Front, has been abducted from Ukrainian soil by unknown parties and delivered to Moscow. After the abduction, a confession appears to have been extorted from Razvozhayev under threat of torture and harm to his family. Once in prison, he renounced his “confessions,” but his words are still being actively used against others. Currently, Razvozhayev has been transferred to the Siberian city of Irkutsk, where his freedom to communicate with relatives and lawyers is severely limited.

The trial will most likely begin in earnest in April. The prosecutor will claim the existence of a massive anti-state conspiracy in which the accused will be said to have played various roles. We have little doubt that this trial will be biased and unjust. Unless fought against, its probable outcome will be the broken lives of dozens of people (the charges foresee imprisonment up to eight years), conspiratorial hysterics in the state-run media, and a carte blanche for new repressions.

Your solidarity now is crucial for us. On the eve of this shameful trial on 28 of February - 3 of March, we ask you to stage protests in front of any consulates of the Russian Federation in your countries, to disseminate information about the political trials and to urge your government and relevant NGOs to act however possible.

The Russian Socialist Movement

The Left Front

All the region is boiling

13 February 2013, by **Gilbert Achcar**

There’s a lot to cover. The Middle East has been in the news from the assault on Gaza to the situation in Tunisia, from the Morsi power grab in Egypt to the threats against Iran, any number of things. I want to start with a

general assessment of the Arab Spring, what is called the Arab Spring, which began almost two years ago almost to the day, on December 17, 2010, in Tunisia. Can you give us a general sense of what that has meant for the

region?

THE MOST general comment to make is that, for the first time in the history of the region, things are really moving and changing, and changing very fast at that, so that the region entered

what I call a long-term revolutionary process. It is a tremendous change in the history of the region. Blockages of all sorts are exploding. I think it will remain with us for many many years to come.

You mentioned blockages, do you mean in part the existence of sclerotic or aging dictatorial regimes? The first would be Tunisia. Can you say something about that and the present situation in Tunisia?

YES, BUT it's larger than just dictatorial regimes. Of course that's the most visible part of it, what was most directly affected by the uprisings in the countries where they have achieved victories until now. But this is one part of a more general blockage that involves an economic blockage. The region lags behind the rest of the world in economic growth and more generally in development, despite being endowed with very important natural resources. It holds the world record in unemployment rates, and that has been the case for decades, and thus you have a social blockage going on, not to mention the very obvious one related to the condition of women. So you have a whole set of blockages and I just mentioned a few and the most prominent ones, and all this is now bursting out in this huge explosion which started in Tunisia.

It all started in Tunisia on the 17th of December 2010. That is the date when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire, setting the whole country and then the whole region on fire.

The fact that it started in Tunisia is related to the struggles in that country over the whole decade of the 2000s, which itself is related to the existence of an important left-wing tradition there, mostly active through the trade union center of the country, the UGTT [Tunisian General Labor Union]. It is this specific situation which explains why it was in that country that the explosion took place before the rest, but it doesn't mean that conditions were more ripe in Tunisia than anywhere else, as we can see from the fact that the explosion in Tunisia set off a whole series of explosions in other countries. There's hardly any Arab-speaking country which hasn't

been affected by that uprising, from the western extremity of Mauritania and Morocco up to Syria and Iraq on the eastern side.

It seemed at one stage, certainly as a result of the elections in Egypt and previously in Tunisia, that the immediate political victors of the Arab Spring were organizations, Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Can you comment about that first in Tunisia and then maybe move on to Egypt?

YES. THIS of course was something very much predictable. The most common expectation concerning the region was that there would be or will be social explosions, political explosions: you can see from the reports of US embassies in the region made public by Wikileaks that the US itself didn't have much illusions. They knew how tense, how dangerous the situation was. Related to this, the most common expectation was that the explosions to come would propel the Islamic fundamentalist movement to the fore at a time whenâ€”seen from Washingtonâ€”this was regarded as a threat to US interests. Now when the uprising started there were tendencies toward wishful thinking and believing that by some miracle new forces emerging would be able to lead and fuel the whole process and just push the Islamic forces to the background.

It is true that new forces emerged, especially among the new generation, among the youth. It's true that new networks of young people using all the Internet resources played a key role in shaping and organizing, coordinating all these uprisings; there's no doubt about that. But with uprisings calling for free elections, which is a normal demand for people thirsty for democracy, as this is the case, it was obvious that in any short-term election those who would come out victorious would be those having the means it takes to win elections, which cannot be won with the Internet as you know well from the United States. You need political machines. You need money. You need grass-roots organizations implanted where you have a mass of voters, like in the countryside, etc. So this was not to be invented or

improvised in a few weeks and that's why it was very much predictable that the Islamic fundamentalist forces, especially the Muslim Brotherhood in their various branches and organizations, would win. These forces had the accumulated force of many years of building networks, especially in countries where they were able to work openly like Egypt. This wasn't the case in Tunisia, but it has been compensated by the fact that these forces benefited from a lot of oil money, and from the power of television. Many of the television networks in the region are geared toward these kinds of groups whether through religious programs, and you have a lot of religious channels, or through the specific political role of the main satellite channel in the region, which is Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera works very obviously for the interest of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is quite prominent in its team and is sponsored by the government of Qatar, which owns and runs Al Jazeera. So they had these crucial resources and, of course, a lot of money coming from the Gulf monarchies.

It was quite predictable that the Muslim Brotherhood would get the largest share of votes, thus it was no surprise. People who indulged in wishful thinking reacted to these elections by returning from the rosy pictures they adhered to initially into very gloomy pictures with comments like "the spring is turning into winter." Well, the truth is that what was most surprising actually is the weakness of the electoral victories achieved by the religious forces. Most striking of all is Egypt, of course, where one can see how quickly the clout of the Muslim Brotherhood and its electoral achievements dwindled. Look at the number of votes that the Muslim Brotherhood got from the parliamentary election to the presidential election, the first round that is, to the referendum on the constitution: it is obvious that they are losing clout at amazing speed. They are losing ground and that's the most amazing. The same can be said about Tunisia where despite the problem of the division of the Leftâ€”which was ridiculously split into an incredible number of groups and organizations: in the capital city there were dozens of

Left and radical Left lists competing against each otherâ€”if you add up the votes that went for the various Left you get a result that, had the votes been combined, would have translated into quite a significant number of seats in the parliament. Despite all that the Muslim Brotherhood got 40 percent of the votes with an electoral turnout of less than half, which means actually they got some 20 percent of the registered voters voting for them. This is not exactly a landslide. Since then Tunisia has seen a deterioration in the social conditions, and the coalition that came to power involving the dominant Islamic force has been losing ground. It is more and more discredited because of its inability to bring any beginning of solution to the real problems of the country, which are those I pointed to: unemployment, economic problems, social problems, and the like. We have seen in Tunisia as well as in Egypt a rise in social struggles, in workers' struggles, with increasing clashes between these social struggles and the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government in both countries.

In Tunisia, this has reached even dramatic levels with a confrontation between the UGTT and the government which turned violent. The country is heading toward new elections, but also before that new round of electoral confrontation, the social and political confrontations are raging, so everything is boiling. Everything is changing very quickly, very rapidly. Both the wishful thinking at the beginning and the gloomy comments into which it turned very quickly are very impressionistic and quite wrong. The real point is that we are facing a long-term revolutionary upheaval, a long-term revolutionary process that started in December 2010 and will carry on both in those countries where the upheaval led to initial victories and in those countries which have not yet been affected to a significant degree. All the region is boiling.

What happened to the call by the UGTT for a general strike in early December, which I gather was called off?

YES, IT was called off after reaching some kind of compromise. Essentially

the leadership of the UGTT feared that the confrontation could turn sour, because there has been only one precedent for a call of a general strike in the country and that was in 1978, when it led to a very harsh confrontation. So there was some fear about what would happen, and that's why they just accepted to backtrack into a compromise where no one lost face, but the warning is there and the UGTT has been very blunt in its attacks on the government, in its criticism of the way they behave in power, and still demands the dissolution of the militias controlled by the Islamic party. The Muslim Brotherhood whether in Egypt or in Tunisia proved even more effective than Mubarak at having this kind of organized thugery.

So that's what you have, and the prospect in Tunisia is very interesting because it is the only country of the region with an organized workers' movement that is really leading the process. It was already the real leadership of the uprising in December 2010/January 2011. Ben Ali fled the country on the day when the general strike was reaching the capital city on January 14, 2010. The union activists were those who led the struggle, from Sidi Bouzid, the city where it started after the suicide of Bouazizi, to the day when the uprising peaked in the capital. Rank-and-file union activists and intermediary leaders were the real leadership of the struggle. However, after the fall of the dictatorship, there has been a change in the UGTT leadership and this change brought the Left, including the radical Left at the helm. The Tunisian Left finally drew the lessons of its recent experience and managed to unite in what they called the Popular Front. The fact that this coalition of the left-wing forces is dominant in the UGTT is hugely important: it puts Tunisia in a quite more advanced stage of the struggle than any other country in the region.

If we can move from there to Egypt, where since the election of Morsi as President last summer, there has been an attempt to put together an opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. Can you say something about the Left forces there since the revolution?

YES, BUT there's a major difference between Egypt and Tunisia. It's the fact that the role of the Left is much more important in Tunisia because of the fact that the Left has been for a very long time, several decades, very much active in the union movement, in the trade union federation, the UGTT. And even though for most of the time, the bureaucratic leadership of the union would be under governmental control or influence, the Left nevertheless always managed to be very active in local union branches, the most prominent activists of the union belong to the Left. Unfortunately, you don't have the same anywhere else in the region, and that includes Egypt. In Egypt the opposition did organize into a coalition of left wing and liberal forces, including some remnants of the old regime. Of course, this is something that could also happen in Tunisia in the sense that some people on the Left or in the union may be tempted into an alliance with the remnants of the old regime in confronting the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic fundamentalist forces. In Egypt, however, that is happening already with Amr Moussa being part of the coalition, but Moussa, it must be said, represents the liberal faction of the old regime. He is not like Shafiq, the former presidential candidate, who was seen as the official representative of the continuity of Mubarak's regime. Moussa actually ran in the presidential election against Shafiq. So what you have in Egypt is a liberal-Left coalition. Inasmuch as it is a front around democratic demands, it can be seen as legitimate, but the problem is that it went beyond that into becoming an electoral alliance.

The broad Left itself is mostly represented by Hamdeen Sabahi, who is the candidate who surprised everybody in the presidential election in achieving the third position and even winning the vote in Cairo and Alexandria, the two most important urban concentrations. That was absolutely amazing. Sabahi came to represent those seeking a left-wing alternative to both the old regime and the Islamic forces. After the election, he founded the Popular Current in which most groups of the radical Left are involved. Unfortunately, the Popular Current has been currently

superseded by the broad coalition instead of building on the left-wing potential that gathered around Sabahi on the first round of the presidential election.

The movement toward confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood-led regime in Egypt raises the question of the role of the army. Any thoughts on that question, that is both the balance of forces and the kind of likely development given unresolved economic and political problems and a regime which is losing electoral support and in a certain sense electoral and political legitimacy?

THE SPEED at which Morsi is losing ground and legitimacy is the real surprise. I always felt, and I am not the only one who thought so, that the people needed to go through an experience with these guys in power so as to know what they really are and stop being fooled by empty slogans like "Islam is the solution," hiding the absence of concrete alternative programs. But it is going actually faster than expected, and one reason for that is the very clumsy way in which the Muslim Brothers are dealing with the situation. They have displayed so much arrogance believing that it's their day with God's help and they have things firmly in their hand, which is completely short-sighted. Actually if they were smarter than that they would have understood that it's not even in their interest to rule at this stage. Anyone trying to rule the country with the kind of program that they have, which is but a continuation of the economic program of the previous regime, is doomed to fail miserably. The most telling act of what has happened in Egypt is when Morsi signed the deal with the IMF recently. He signed a deal with the IMF, which includes conditionalities deemed by all would-be funders of Egypt as crucial. And, of course, they signed the deal because it corresponds to their own neoliberal thinking, which is not different from that of the previous regime. And it was at the worst moment, when the Muslim Brothers were starting their confrontation with the opposition, that Morsi's government decided to raise prices of basic staples and change the tax

system in a way that would not affect the richest. This led to such an outcry that Morsi had to cancel it a couple of days after through his Facebook page! It became a joke. This shows you how much these guys don't have a clue about any real solution to the deep social economic problems of the country.

Now about the army. There has been much ado about the "revolutionary coup" of Morsi in dismissing Tantawi and the second-in-command who were at the head of the SCAF, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. But the fact is that this was done in full agreement with the military brass, which really wanted to get rid of these guys who were in their posts only because they were imposed by Mubarak against the will of the military. Just look at the age of Tantawi who is far beyond the age for any military position. We know from Wikileaks, again from US diplomatic reports, that army officers used to call Tantawi "Mubarak's poodle." So the fact of signing him off had absolutely nothing "revolutionary" about it. They were given medals and generous sinecures, moreover, including immunity against everything they did while at the head of the SCAF. The belief that the army's position has been weakened is quite wrong.

Look at what happened just recently when the confrontation appeared at its peak between Morsi and the opposition. The new head of the army took the initiative of coming out openly as an arbiter and calling for a conference that would include the president and the government on the one side and the opposition on the other. The army made a few comments before that exactly symmetrical to those they did at the time of the uprising against Mubarak saying that they were not going to repress the people. The message was: "We haven't accepted to be used politically by Mubarak and won't accept to be used politically by Morsi." So the army is playing this game, and one can presume that it is very much advised by Washington to stay out of the feud, to stay in the arbitral position so that they can play the role of "saviors" if ever the situation degenerates totally, with a repetition of the traditional sequence of revolution, turmoil, and

then coup. But the Egyptian people, at this stage at the very least, are too critical toward the army for anything like that to be possible in the short term. Now in the longer term no one can tell.

Before asking you about Syria can I just segue by saying how the question of the Palestinians and Gaza plays into this situation? Because it was interpreted as a coup for Morsi the way he helped negotiate an agreement. As you know, Time magazine called him the most important man in the Middle East only to have him rebuffed the following week, but the whole question of Israel and the Palestinians looms large in this picture. Can you say a few words about that?

WELL, THIS points to an important fact. I mentioned the hubris and arrogance of the Muslim Brotherhood, but one key element in that is the support they have from Washington. That's a key element in their belief that they are in control, that they can rule. Washington was actually taken aback by the uprising at a time when it was at its weakest in the region since the 1991 peak when under Bush Sr. half a million US troops were deployed in the Gulf at the time of the first US-led war on Iraq. This peak of US hegemony at that time also led to the beginning of the so-called peace process between Israel and the Arab states, and then to the Oslo agreement in 1993. All this is behind us. All the main factor in ending it all was the Bush Jr administration, the George W. Bush administration, and the major catastrophe for the US Empire in general, for US imperialism, that the occupation of Iraq proved to be. It turned into a disaster. US forces had to leave Iraq without achieving any single one of the fundamental objectives that they had when they occupied the country. They had to leave the country, without keeping a single base, nothing, and no control over the government, which is much more under Iranian influence. The first thing that Iraq did after US troops left was to negotiate an arms deal with Russia of all places. Iraq was a disaster for the United States.

So they are really at a very weak point. The US feels quite weak in the region and took the backseat in the NATO operation in Libya keeping low profile, unlike in any of the other operations that we have seen until now, whether NATO ones like Kosovo or Afghanistan or non-NATO ones like Iraq. On Syria you can see Washington's impotence very clearly. Facing all this, the only force they found on which they could bet is the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Emir of Qatar arranged the deal, as he has been the main sponsor of the Muslim Brotherhood since the mid-nineties. Washington ended up betting on the Muslim Brotherhood because it lost its usual allies, people like Mubarak and Ben Ali. Because we entered a new phase in the region's history, Washington needs now a force with a real popular base, and the only one they found available is the Muslim Brotherhood toward which they were all the more well-disposed that they had a long history of collaboration. In the fifties, sixties, and eighties up to 1990 the Muslim Brothers were aligned with the United States basically, especially during the fifties and sixties when they were seen in the whole region as collaborators of the CIA. That's the role they actually played, working against Egyptian president Nasser and Soviet influence in close collaboration with the CIA, with the United States, and with the Saudi Kingdom. At that time they were sponsored by the Saudis. That was before they shifted to Qatar in the 1990s.

So Washington is again betting on them, and the role that Morsi played in the Gaza episode was actually carrying on the role that the Mubarak regime used to play, but with a higher

efficiency because of the fact that Hamas is the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian branch. So they have more clout with Hamas and therefore they negotiated this deal and got applause from Washington. Washington is betting on these guys, whether in Tunisia or in Egypt or in Syria for the future, when the regime falls. In the entire region there's no country where the Muslim Brothers are not present and where they don't play an important role, and that's why Washington is betting on them and has been extremely cautious in commenting on what is happening in Egypt. The Obama administration was actually bolder in criticizing Mubarak than they have been in criticizing the Muslim Brotherhood.

Can you comment on Syria? Right now the whole process there has been incredibly arduous and violent on the part of the government and there's no unanimity in the opposition, even of the Left against the regime, since sections of the Left seem to support the regime. Can you comment on the developments there?

WELL, SYRIA is no exception to the whole pattern of the uprising in the sense that you have a very dictatorial regime, actually one of the most despotic in the region, along with Gaddafi's Libya and the Saudi Kingdom. On the other hand, this is a country where the social economic crisis was most acute, with very high unemployment, 30 percent poverty rate, and on the other hand, a ruling family concentrating power and wealth at an incredible degree. The cousin of the Syrian president controls 60 percent of the economy. His personal wealth is estimated at \$6 billion. All this was a very explosive

cocktail, and it exploded.

On the Left, you've had communists participating in the Syrian government. It's a tradition that exists from the time of the Soviet Union, which used to have close relations with the Syrian regime that were continued by Putin's Russia. But most of the Left, if not all the Left in the true sense of the term, is against the regime. The major left-wing party of Syria is represented in the Syrian National Council: it is the dissident wing of the Communists, which split in the 1970s and opposed collaboration with the regime.

To believe that the Syrian regime is on the left or, worse, that Assad is "a socialist, a humanist and a pacifist" as Chávez put it so embarrassingly, is at best ignorance. There shouldn't be any hesitation for anyone on the left in standing completely on the side of the Syrian people in their fight against this brutal, exploitive, and corrupt dictatorship. Beyond that, in Syria as in every other country of the region, you find among the forces struggling against the regimes Islamic fundamentalists. It was the case in Tunisia and Egypt likewise. They should not be taken as pretexts to denigrate the whole uprising. In Syria like everywhere else, the Left should support the popular movement against the dictatorships unhesitatingly, and in doing so, all the more once the dictatorships are down, it should support the most progressive forces within the movement, along the process of radicalization within the revolution that Marx once called "permanent revolution."

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Down with the government of murderers!

7 February 2013

This morning a treacherous and obscurantist hand was raised to assassinate the left leader and activist, comrade Chokri Belaïd, secretary general of the Parti des patriotes démocrates unifié [Party of United Democratic Patriots] and one of the leader of the Popular Front. This assassination follows the warning given by Belaïd, speaking clearly and with revolutionary audacity, of the gravity of the political situation and the escalation of political violence clearly inspired by the Ennahda movement and its cowardly henchmen, its terrorist militias and its criminal leaders. A situation marked by political agitation and excommunication through the pulpits of the mosques, the media, party meetings and political declarations against all opponents, and notably against the leaders of the Popular Front with all its components.

Whether this crime was planned by the Salafist criminals or by the militias of the so-called "leagues for protection of the revolution", it represents a clear message to terrify the people and the radical opposition as a whole, still

capable of offering alternatives. But also to smother the free voices which lift the veil on the process of derailing of the revolution, of betrayal of the people and of mortgaging of the country to the circles of the Gulf and the imperialists; a process of conspiracy against the Arab revolutionary process which benefits the criminal movement of Ennahda and the traitor government who alone have an interest in stifling this raised voice.

This political crime carried out against one of the symbols of the left movement in Tunisia - as well as the Popular Front - known for his political and legal activism against the dictatorship since the 1980s, represents a dangerous turn in the process of derailment and liquidation of the revolution. It reminds us of the assassination of the leader Farhat Hached, but at the same time portends the end of Ennahda's reign in the dustbin of history.

After having led the country into acute crisis and a political impasse, the government is now leading it towards

chaos; it has no political legitimacy after being implicated in political terrorism and having shown its inability to guarantee the safety of citizens. Worse still, the government incites the liquidation of activists and shoots them down in cold blood; it has no way out after having repressed, tortured and used bullets against unarmed citizens; its scandals have left a lasting impression.

Let the blood of comrade Chokri Belaïd unite us to overthrow this government in the regions, in the centres of sovereignty, in all the state institutions, in the particular the institution of the Ministry of the Interior and the Constituent Assembly!

- Get rid of the governors and delegates and elect activist local bodies to create a situation of dual power!

- We call together for civil disobedience and the general strike with the sole perspective of bringing down the regime!

Tunis, 6 February, 2013

Spain is in the hands of thieves

4 February 2013, by Esther Vivas

Mayors, former ministers, regional leaders, senators, councillors, MPs... a total of more than 300 politicians are under investigation for corruption. And sleaze is present at all levels of public administration. And not only. Corruption looms, too, in the General Council of the Judiciary, including the governors of the Bank of Spain and the Royal Family. Here no one is exempt. And we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

The Valencia region and the Balearic Islands have the dubious honour of topping the ranking of corruption and cronyism, although territories such as as Catalonia, Galicia, Madrid and Andalusia follow closely behind. In Valencia, nine members of the Popular

Party are formally charged and former senior officials of the government of Francisco Camps, who, even The New York Times has compared with Silvio Berlusconi. In Balears, there are almost a hundred defendants, between middling and top posts, for the most part from the last Popular Party administration of Jaume Matas, who, incidentally, has accumulated a total of a dozen cases of irregular funding, among others.

In Catalunya, corruption is widespread in both Convergència and Unió [the two parties of the coalition CiU backing recently re-elected Catalonia regional President Artur Mas]. Convergència, whose headquarters have been seized to cover the bail of

3.2 million euros for the diversion of funds from the Palau de la Música and [the alleged public bid rigging] for the ITV [vehicle inspection stations] by Convergència's general secretary, Oriol Pujol [son of former Catalan regional premier Jordi Pujol]. Furthermore, there's the case of the Catalan Health Institute, which forced its president Josep Prat to resign, and now the case of Xavier Crespo, Convergència deputy in parliament, presumed to be linked to a plot of laundering funds from the Russian mafia. The "very honourable" Jordi Pujol seems to be ignorant of this, and is promoting from his think tank a "code of ethics for professionals in politics," based on honesty and transparency. Another bad joke.

And so to Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, or Unió, which was convicted of misuse of 388,000 euros of European Union funds meant for jobless training programs between 1994 and 1999. That's case known as Pallerols. And that culminated, check this out, with an agreement between prosecutors, prosecution and defence to avoid prosecution, and a statement from, among others, the training chief Duran y Lleida, and a reduction in prison sentences to less than two years (initially the Court of Barcelona demanded 11 years!), thus avoiding jail. Justice?

Nor should we forget the 'fake redundancies' plot in Andalusia, led by the Socialists, with about 70 defendants, including former senior regional government officials. Many, it seems, were the beneficiaries, for over at least ten years, of money from the Andalusian ERE redundancy scheme. It was a scandal that followed in the wake of a long history of corruption in socialist ranks since the days of Juan Guerra and Lu s Rold n.

Having said this, most corruption cases occur locally. Today some 80 mayors and former mayors plus several dozen more councillors are under investigation for cases related to the awarding of contracts and urban development. Many of them are charged with crimes of embezzlement, breach of trust, influence peddling and / or fraud. The Pretoria [urban development] case in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, and the more recent case of 'operation Mercurio' in Sabadell, are examples.

The major political parties in particular appear to have done what they wished with public funds, using them as illegal financing instruments and treating collective matters as if

they were private. No wonder, then, that in the last Barometer Sociological Research Center (CIS), in December 2012, politicians and parties were considered the third most important problem that exists in the Spanish state, after corruption and fraud. In fact, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2012 report, the Spanish State was ranked 30th in the standings, tied, coincidentally, or maybe not, with Botswana.

Intimidating the media

And, what happens to those who dare to denounce corruption? Today the most emblematic case is that of Caf ambLlet, a local magazine, with very little means, that reported in early 2102, with a home video, which within a few days was seen by over a hundred thousand visitors in Youtube, how Catalan public health money was being stolen by businessmen and politicians of CiU and Catalan Socialist Party (PSC).

Months later, Caf ambLlet faced legal action by Josep Maria Via, quoted in that video, for allegedly attempting to bring him into disrepute, in an unusually fast trial in which they were not even allowed to speak, and were convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of ten thousand euros. But take note, another major scandal that was uncovered by Caf ambLlet in its Crespo Report, regarding [the CiU's deputy] Xavier Crespo, who in turn threatened to sue the magazine and who at present the anti-corruption prosecutor has asked that he be investigated for graft and bribery. Will anyone compensate Caf ambLlet for the threats received by this character?

Nature of today's corruption

Corruption is not perceived today as it was in the past. Now it is regarded as an intrinsic part of the crisis. The impunity enjoyed by political corruption seems to be over. At a time when the pillars that built the system during the Democratic Transition, and where there's a rapid loss of legitimacy of institutions and political representatives for their subservience to financial power, it is likely that the impact of corruption on public opinion and voting behavior will be more severe. And in so far as it increases unemployment, poverty and insecurity, illicit enrichment of the elites at the expense of the majority it is becoming an unbearable burden. The crisis is no longer seen as resulting from the 'waste' of the current people but as 'theft' and 'fraud' of the ruling class.

Now is therefore the time to act, say stop and take action: demand mechanisms of control over public officials, the revocation of mandates, the de-professionalisation of politics, the end to the accumulation of public posts, a limit on salaries, and transparency in accounts. Yesterday thousands of people gathered outside Popular Party headquarters in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza and La Coru a.

A first step in a new surge in the streets? The Barcenas case is the straw that breaks the camel's back. It is high time that they return all that they have stolen from us.

**Translated by Revolting Europe.*

[+info](#)

Labour Activists Criminalised!

4 February 2013, by **Rakyat Pekerja**

Sulthoni also encouraged unity of workers and at the time took part in

the uniting of unions in the alliance Aliansi Buruh Menggugat (ABM) and

became the coordinator of ABM in the larger Jakarta region. This unity is

now embodied in the development of the Greater Jakarta Workers Joint Secretariat (Sekber Buruh) in which Sulthoni is a presiding member. In 2009 Sulthoni Farras also received a legal aid award, awarded to those that consistently struggle for human rights, including the rights of workers.

True liberation of the working class is not possible without a political struggle and a the establishment of a political party for the working class. Because of this belief, Sulthoni joined the Working Peoples Association that later developed and led to the formation of KPO PRP. Sultoni sits on the national committee of KPO PRP.

One of the struggles that Sulthoni was active in and that led to the criminalisation, was the liberation of PT Dongan workers from the system of contract work and wage theft by the owner of PT Dongan, Park Jung Sik.

PT Dongan employs approximately a thousand workers, mostly women. The plant produces quality wigs for export. Before establishing a union, the workers of PT Dongan were like slaves. Their employment status was unclear despite several years of work at the plant. They were still considered contract workers despite having worked there for between four and ten years. Their wages were always being cut for various reasons, such as for transport and catering. Meanwhile, the government through the Department of Labour, shut their eyes to what was happening.\

Amid the rising labour movement in Indonesia, workers at PT Dongan

became increasingly aware of their rights and power. Starting slowly but surely, the workers at PT Dongan began to consolidate. At first, only dozens of workers met to discuss their rights and the possibility of forming a union, until finally a conference was held and attended by the majority of workers of PT Dongan.

After the conference that established a union, the threats began to haunt them. The company planned to get rid of all workers on contracts. This troubled, and then made the workers angry. The threats continued, even though the workers had been employed there for years. Triggered by the intimidation the workers of PT Dongan became active and forced the company to meet all their basic rights and also make all contract workers permanent workers.

On the 7th of September, 2012 negotiations between the workers and PT Dongan took place going until 9:30pm. From those negotiations it was agreed that all rights (maternity leave, an end to wage cutting for transport and food, provision of food and drink and so on) would be provided). A joint agreement was also decided upon by both sides. (For Chronology of PT Dongan Workers Struggle see: <http://www.rakyatpekerja.org/chronology-of-pt-dongan-workers-struggle/>)

However, in the development of the company PT Dongan, the company has responded by denying these agreements and criminalising the active union workers of PT Dongan.

Sulthoni Farras was then determined as a suspect in line with article 335 KUHP, misconduct, by the Bekasi police.

January 26, 2013

Please send pressure to:

Kapolresta Bekasi, Drs Isnaeni MSI:
+62 817245622

Kabid Humas Polda Metro Jaya,
Kombes Rikwanto: +62 8164266366

DPRD Bekasi Komisi Ketenagakerjaan,
Warja :+62 81311110109

Wave of retaliation and criminalization by the bosses toward workers struggle is happening in other part of Indonesia. Send your data, profile and chronology of the bosses retaliation and criminalization toward workers struggle to:
kpo.prp@rakyatpekerja.org

Send your solidarity statement to:
kpo.prp@rakyatpekerja.org

Solidarity Message:

<http://www.rakyatpekerja.org/pernya..>

<http://www.rakyatpekerja.org/lawan-...>

Protest Against Criminalization of Workers Activist:

<http://www.rakyatpekerja.org/komite...>

<http://www.rakyatpekerja.org/worker..>

<http://www.rakyatpekerja.org/bela-h...>