



IV459 - April 2013

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30 April 2013, by **robm**

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The Manifesto of the Mediterranean Meeting in Tunisia

29 April 2013

We, the representatives of progressive political parties from the Mediterranean region, gathered in Tunis from March 23 to 24, 2013, at the call of the Popular Front, and adopted the following resolution.

27 April 2013

1. - For more than a quarter of a century, neoliberal capitalist globalization has extended its dominance over the entire planet. The processes launched have accelerated the commodization of the world in favour of a minority and have confiscated peoples' citizenship and nations' sovereignty. They are exacerbating economic insecurity and social inequality in the North and South and further widening the gap between the rich countries and the so-called poor countries.

Peoples of the South are subjected to

a particularly devastating regime of structural adjustment policies and free trade policies which impedes a fair development, destroys the environment and deprives them of their sovereignty, thus weakening them even more and exacerbating their dependence on dominant economic areas of the North.

The fate of humanity is now decided by a handful of transnational corporations and by the international financial institutions over which people have no control.

Since 2008, in the midst of a crisis of the world capitalist system, structural adjustment policies have been extended to the countries of the northern Mediterranean, the so-called contemptuously PIGS.

In Tunisia, these policies have been imposed since 1986 by the World Bank

and the International Monetary Fund. In 1995, these were reinforced by the Association Agreement imposed by the European Union and its Member States. The political dictatorship has ensured the application of such policies.

At present, the various neoliberal capitalist globalization actors intend to carry on with these policies, trying to take advantage of the revolutionary crisis, by strengthening and expanding their scope. Thus they seek to block the path that leads to the development of aspirations and the desire for radical change massively expressed by the masses, particularly youth, during the revolutionary uprising of December- January 2011.

2. - The removal of the dictator has disarmed the local neoliberal capitalist order without reversing it have led to some progress. The social system

which is the historical product of imperialist domination and, more recently, of the restructuring of the neoliberal capitalist world, is still standing. But the revolutionary crisis that initiated the insurgency remains active. The victory of the democratic, social and national revolution in Tunisia, as in other countries in the region, still remains a possibility.

3. - The Tunisian revolution marked the beginning of the Arab revolution. To date, four dictators, whose average time in power exceeded 30 years, have been eliminated. These political changes are, without a doubt, the most important occurrence that has taken place in the Arab region and Maghreb in decades. This is clearly a turning point in the history of Tunisia and the Arab region.

This is, in the proper sense of the term, a "historic" moment. In fact, for the first time in their history, the peoples of the Arab region, who have not stopped fighting, are standing up today against their direct oppressors, bursting onto the political scene to take hold of their destiny in their own hands.

4. - The debt -odious, illegitimate- used under the dictatorship as a tool for political submission and as a mechanism for the transfer of income from labour to local but above all to world capital, currently serves the counter-revolution to maintain the neo-colonial economy and imperialist domination in Tunisia. Furthermore, in Egypt, Morocco, Greece, Cyprus, the Spanish State and in many other countries of the Mediterranean basin, debt continues to serve the interests of a minority against the interests of the vast majority. It is everywhere, it is the pretext for the implementation of austerity policies imposed by international financial institutions and the capitalistic states that violate human rights.

5. - Everywhere, both in the North and the South, the same logics of profit, domination and destruction of the planet operate and continue to be imposed on the peoples and on nature. The Tunisian revolution, the Arab revolution, the heroic struggles of all peoples of the world against a neoliberal capitalist order, such as in

Greece, Portugal, Catalonia, Basque country or the Spanish state, are the political founding acts of a new world order; one based on solidarity, that is democratic, feminist peaceful that ensures popular sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples and environmentally friendly- for which all our respective political parties are fighting.

6. - But standing in opposition of this popular will for a radical shift are the ruling classes, the transnationals and global finance institutions. They form a united front to counter-attack and to implement even more antisocial and undemocratic policies in order to break through this liberating popular impulse and momentum, and thus continue to make the costs of the global capitalist system crisis fall on the same shoulders, those of the working people and the planet.

7. - We, the representatives of progressive political parties from the Mediterranean region in the world, are convinced that we must unite our efforts and our actions, both regionally and internationally, to support and contribute to the struggles of the people and of the exploited and oppressed classes, in the region and worldwide, who yearn for freedom, dignity and social justice. We support the revolutionary struggle of the Syrian people to achieve freedom, democracy, social justice, equality and national dignity. We condemn any foreign intervention that goes against the achievement of these objectives.

In order to work together in this direction, we the progressive political parties from the Mediterranean region, that participated in this meeting in Tunisia against debt, austerity policies and imperialist domination, advocate for a free, democratic, social, solidarity-based and environmentally friendly Mediterranean region. We therefore commit to:

• Support the process of mobilization and struggle of social movements, trade unions and social organizations for a citizen audit.

• Promote motions for non-payment of illegitimate debt and the external debt relief in the institutions

in which we participate.

• Incorporate in our political programs the NON payment of the illegitimate debt and the promotion of citizen audit and the support of the struggle for the sovereignty of peoples and self-determination.

• Advance on the development of a network of mutual support between the nations to assist those who decided not to pay the illegitimate debt

Establish a permanent communication network for the exchange of information and experiences.

• Develop a concrete cooperation aiming at developing tools for the struggle and mobilization necessary to achieve our goals.

• Organize the next meeting in the Spanish State.

The progressive political parties in the Mediterranean region and other parts of the world that participated in the Tunisian Mediterranean Meeting welcomed the World Social Forum that was held in Tunis from March 26 to 30, and that allowed to advance towards the realization of the objectives enshrined in the Charter of Porto Alegre.

Finally, we strongly condemn the killing of Chokri Belaid, Secretary General of the Unified Democratic Patriotic Party and leader of the Popular Front, which we refer to as a political crime. We demand the truth to be told about all those involved in this heinous crime.

First signatory organizations (by alphabetical order)

Algeria

Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs - Socialist Workers Party

Mouvement Baath algérien - Algerian Baath Movement

Egypt

Union Populaire Socialiste - Socialist Popular Union

Spanish State

SORTU - Euskal Herria (Basque

country)	New Anticapitalist Party	Voice
IA - Izquierda Anticapitalista -Anticapitalist Left	Les Alternatifs - Alternatives	El Mounadhil
CUP - Comités de Unidad Popular - Catalunya -Popular Union Committees - Catalonia	Greece	Portugal
IU - Izquierda Unida - United Left	Syriza	Bloco da Esquerda - Left Block
France	Italy	Syria
Parti Communiste français/Front de Gauche - French Communist Party/Left Front	Sinistra Critica - Critical Left	Le courant de la Gauche Révolutionnaire Syrienne - Syrian Left Revolutionary Mouvement
Gauche anticapitaliste - Anticapitalist Left	Lebanon	Tunisia
NPA - Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste -	Parti Communiste Libanais - Lebanese Communist Party	Front Populaire - Popular Front
	Forum Socialiste - Socialist Forum	With the support of the GUE / NGL Group at the European Parliament (Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left)
	Morocco	
	La Voix Démocratique - Democratic	

Syria's Bloody Civil War

28 April 2013, by **Gilbert Achcar**

Amanda!: What would you say to those who argue that the Syrian uprising may be an opening for imperialist interests in the region?

GA: We have to distinguish between two aspects of the question. One aspect hints at the kind of conspiracy theory among those that call themselves anti-imperialist and tend to see the hand of imperialism behind everything. But believing that the United States is behind this massive uprising in the region is senseless. The fact is that the US has been confronted with a major dilemma: recent events came at a point when US influence in the region was at its lowest since the first war on Iraq in 1991, and at a time when it the US was preparing for its final withdrawal from Iraq without having accomplished any of the invasion's goals. On top of that, uprisings overthrew faithful allies of Washington, including Egypt's Mubarak, a key strategic partner in the region. To think Washington would have wished for this is ridiculous.

Actually, these events were so

overwhelming that Washington rapidly understood it couldn't oppose the tide; it had to pretend to welcome it in the name of the 'democratic values' to which it supposedly adheres. It had no choice but to renew the old alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood that existed until the 1990s, on which it now bets today, in the same way that it relies on the Emir of Qatar to play the go-between.

In Syria, we see Washington's great quandary. As in Libya, it refuses to deliver weapons to the insurgency despite insistent requests (although it intervened directly in Libya, by bombing). The result is a total disproportion in weaponry and training between the regime's forces and the insurgency, even though the insurgency encompasses a much larger section of the population. The truth is that the war has dragged on much longer than it might have had the insurgency received weapons. And the cost is terrible and tragic because of the loss of thousands and thousands of lives. The war is devastating Syria to the point that the insurgents are convinced - for good reason - that

Washington and the western powers are happy with the conflict because ultimately it will create a weak, post-Assad Syria, which the US and Israel believe to be in their interests.

A!: What are the specific formations that are acting in Syria right now? Is there a class basis to the uprising?

GA: It's not a class uprising in the sense that it has any form of clear-cut class consciousness. But the uprising started with a peripheral movement in poor rural towns, and the poorest, most downtrodden sections of the population were the insurgency's initial force. The bourgeoisie as a whole is very afraid of the whole movement and the chaos that it creates. So there is no doubt that the uprising is a popular movement.

But because of the historical failure of the left in the region, we have a massive uprising without any capable left-wing leadership. It's a very decentralised type of uprising with all sorts of groups waging a common fight against the regime.

A!: Who are the different groups?

GA: Even when they act under a single name, like the Syrian Free Army, they are actually local groups with little centralisation. You also have Islamic fundamentalist groups intervening, including one that Washington has recently put on its terrorist list. So here is an uprising, a section of which is seen by Washington as al-Qaeda, and yet you have people saying this is a US plot; this is just ridiculous.

A!: What about the reported conflict between popular democratic and fundamentalist forces?

GA: Well, there are tensions, but no direct clashes because everyone understands that that's not in their interests. They would rather wait to fight against the common enemy, which is the dictatorial regime. It's clear that when the bulk of Syrian territory is liberated, you will have nothing better than what you now have: there will be various armed groups, and it will be quite difficult to build a new unified armed force for the post-Assad state. As in Libya, there may well be clashes between these armed groups. This is, I would say, a natural and inevitable outcome of uprisings in countries that have been under dictatorial regimes for decades, with armed forces functioning as praetorian guards so that there is no way of toppling the regime without a civil war and without destroying the military machine of the regime.

A!: How do you see the role of Washington in the evolving situation?

GA: Recently Washington has intervened through Qatar to impose a new kind of body, the Syrian National Coalition, to supersede the National Council. The crucial point is that Washington wants a deal with the regime that would preserve the state, because it is afraid of chaos, especially in such a strategic location. But this strategy is doomed to fail in Syria. The degree of violence, the numbers of

people killed, and the hatred that has accumulated, as well as the completely sectarian structure of the Syrian state, all make it illusory to believe that this kind of compromise is possible in Syria.

A!: To what extent has the monarchy in Saudi Arabia used the uprising to tip the balance towards fundamentalism?

GA: The Saudi kingdom has propagated Islamic fundamentalism in the region for a long time. Wahabi fundamentalist circles in the kingdom send money to people who think like them. So of course this is a problem. But in a region where Islamic fundamentalists have been the dominant force in the expression of mass discontent for three decades, it's impossible to believe there can be an uprising without these currents playing a role. It's everywhere - in Egypt, in Tunisia . . . But very rapidly these forces are losing ground because the dynamics of the uprising, and the depth of the socio-economic problems, are such that the fundamentalists have no solutions and therefore their failure is inevitable.

A!: What are the socio-economic and political aims of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Syria and in the Middle East more broadly?

GA: The Muslim Brotherhood is actually a bourgeois reactionary force in the social field. They have opposed the regimes because they curtailed their freedom of action, so they were in a common front against the common enemy. But they don't share the same values and goals as other factions of the uprising, especially the young people, the workers' movement, or the women's movement. Their agenda is a reactionary one. Their economic programme is neo-liberal. After years of pretending to have a radical anti-Zionist or anti-Israel and anti-US policy, they have suddenly, since coming to power, become friends of Washington, even continuing Mubarak's policies toward Israel.

A!: What are the implications of

what is happening in Syria for Israel and Palestine?

GA: Overall for the Palestinian people the whole Arab uprising is ultimately a major boost. It shows how much the Palestinian issue, as one of the burning issues in the region, is a destabilising factor. Also I would say that the Syrian regime has not been a friend of the Palestinians; it intervened several times to crush the Palestinian forces during the Lebanese civil war, kept Palestinian refugees in Syria under heavy control, and recently bombed Palestinian camps in Damascus. There is a further dimension in that Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The question is whether the Palestinians will have their own assertion of the people's will both against the so-called authority of Mahmoud Abbas and against Hamas.

A!: What do you see as the main accomplishments of the past two years in the region?

GA: The main accomplishment is that the popular movement is boiling everywhere. This is something completely new in the region, which for decades has been under very despotic regimes, where any expression of mass protest was harshly repressed. And now there is a major explosion of popular struggles, which is not being stopped even by the elections. Many thought that after the elections in Egypt, it would be back to business as usual. But there are daily demonstrations and social struggles that are not reported by the media. So this is just the beginning of a long-term process which may take years to get to any new kind of stabilisation in the region. The left in Tunisia was very scattered and divided at the last elections, but they can now draw their own lessons. The trade unions are gaining more and more leverage, and people have been responding with mass outpours to the political assassination of Belaid.

15 April 2013

See *Amandla* [here](#).

Tragedy in garment sector: support needed

27 April 2013, by **Badrul Alam**

A 9-storied building completely collapsed to ground and the garment workers inside the building were stuck. It caused a huge death toll and injuries. Until now the 297 dead bodies were found and more than 2 thousand injured and mutilated people were rescued with the help of army personnel, police, Rapid Action Battalion, fire brigade and local people. Nevertheless, an unknown number of people inside the debris and rubble of the collapsed building are calling over their cell phones and urging their nearest and dearest to save their lives. Unfortunately the rescue operation is going on slowly as they do not have modern technology of rescue. There is a blame that the people responsible to rescue task is not serious and the ordinary people dissatisfied took the responsibility on their own trying to find out the dead and survivors inside the wreckage.

The owner of the building called Rana plaza belongs to the ruling party, Awami League. The owner fled from the area at once.

In protest against the incident the garment workers in the city staged a demonstration and demanded punishment for those responsible. They also demanded proper security at work.

An incident like this is not something new. In 2005 in the same area the building of Spectrum Garments also collapsed and huge number of people died. However, the surprising is that the responsible never get punishment. So the incident is on the rise. Last year almost in the same area another fire incident in Tasreen Garments factory 111 garment workers were brutally burned. So far the guilty was not brought to book in proper way.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation is

seriously concerned with the magnitude of the incident. It thinks it is not a normal thing that is taking place frequently. It is a failure of the system which does not care for the workers' lives and livelihood. It says it is reported that there was a big crack identified in the building just two days before the incident. Nevertheless, the owner of the building forced the workers to go into the building to work. This is a crime and the perpetrator should be brought to justice.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) wants to stand by the victims materially. Although BKF is working among the peasantry of the country it will prioritize the issue because most of the victim workers, both men and women, hailed from the village. They have their rural background. They came to the town for job, for their very survival.

Therefore, BKF wants to go with relief and financial support for treatment to the victims and their families in solidarity.

As BKF is a subscription based organization working among the marginalized peasants of the country it is alone not capable to support the victims who need material supports. Thus, we asked to our friends, well-wishers and sympathizers to contribute to our efforts in this regard. Any kind of support of you will be highly appreciated.

All the best regards,

Badrul Alam

President

Bangladesh Krishok Federation

BKS has a bank account in Australia

Financial solidarity can be sent directly to it:

Account Name:
Friends of BKF and BKS
BSB: 633 000
Account Number: 145 327 037
Bendigo Bank
Australia

International financial solidarity can be sent through the Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF) account, based in France. Please indicate "Bangladesh" on transfers.

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux
(00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044
5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

To use Paypal please go to ESSF
[Bangladesh - Tragedy in garments sector: support needed.](#)

Breaking the silence

26 April 2013, by **David Barsamian** , **Pankaj Mishra**

Pankaj Mishra writes for the New Yorker, the New York Review of Books, the New York Times Book Review, and the Guardian. He is the author of *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana*, *An End to Suffering*, *Temptations of the West*, and *From the Ruins of Empire*.

ISR regular contributor David Barsamian, host and founder of Alternative radio (www.alternativeradio.org), whose latest book of interviews with Noam Chomsky, *Power Systems*, has just been published by Metropolitan Books, spoke with Mishra in Boulder, Colorado.

DB: In your introduction to a collection of essays *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom*, you wrote: "Once known for its extraordinary beauty, the Valley of Kashmir now hosts the biggest, bloodiest and also the most obscure military occupation in the world. With more than 80,000 people dead in an anti-India insurgency backed by Pakistan, the killing fields of Kashmir dwarf those of Palestine and Tibet.

In addition to the everyday regime of arbitrary arrests, curfews, raids, and checkpoints enforced by nearly 700,000 Indian soldiers, the Valley's 4 million Muslims are exposed to extrajudicial execution, rape and torture, with such barbaric variations as live electric wires inserted into penises."

And then you proceed to ask the logical next question: "Why, then, does the immense human suffering of Kashmir occupy such an imperceptible place in our moral imagination?"

PM: There are several reasons for this, particularly in the last decade or so, there has been this idea of India emerging as a great economic power and also as a strategic ally of the

United States. There has been a lot of bad news coming out of India that's not been reported internationally, certainly not in the Western press. I think the government also places very heavy restrictions on reporting out of Kashmir, even on foreign correspondents.

Many of them start their tenure by going to Kashmir and being shocked and appalled, because nothing has prepared them for what they see there, so they go and do these anguished reports about this horrific situation. Very soon the government cracks down on them, and they are told to stay within their limits. And for the next of their three or four years in India, they observe those limits, because the price is you might have to leave your job or it might become harder for your newspaper to maintain a bureau or an office there. So there isn't really enough reporting happening of the kind that happens, for instance, in Tibet. Even though the Chinese government does not allow journalists to go there, still reports filter out all the time. And when there is a massive event there, like the riots in Lhasa back in 2008-09, it's on the front pages and in the headlines for days on end.

DB: You observe that whole libraries of books are devoted to Tibet and to Palestine, but not to Kashmir.

PM: The situation is inherently complicated. And I think the Kashmiris themselves until quite recently have been absent from this discussion of Kashmir internationally. It's only recently that Kashmiri writers have started to tell their stories and to write books. That is definitely making a difference. I'm thinking of Basharat Peer's memoir, and Mirza Waheed's novel. Those books are making a lot of people sit up and take notice. Sanjay Kak has edited a fine collection of essays called (Haymarket Books) But

otherwise we've had very little academic writing on the subject. One of the unfortunate omissions has been that Indian intellectuals have rarely taken up this subject. Because, once again, you can alienate and exacerbate and anger a large and powerful constituency in India if you talk about Kashmir in any kind of frank and objective way.

DB: This is not just an internal conflict between the people of Kashmir and the Indian state. One-third of Kashmir is occupied by Pakistan, two-thirds is occupied by India, and a small sliver is occupied by China.

PM: I think at least the Indian-Pakistan bits of this conflict can be resolved. There are parameters. And there actually have been serious talks on these issues, and the broad outlines of a solution have been clear. It's also been clear for a long time that, instead of being an eternal problem in India-Pakistan relations, Kashmir could actually be a solution to the larger problem of India-Pakistan relations. That once you have a border which is easily crossed by people on both sides of it and trade happens, very soon we move away from these narrow and harsh ideas of national sovereignty, which is good for South Asia as a whole.

We so badly need to entertain those ideas at this point. We've invested so much in defending our respective territories. We've invested so much emotional and physical and national energies in this whole project of consolidating the nation state, fighting several wars and sinking billions and billions of dollars over the decades into building up nuclear bombs, into building up these great militaries. I think we can step back from this completely mad process if we start to think of Kashmir as a way forward to a sort of South Asian federation of sorts, where people can travel, where you

have extensive trade links across the subcontinent, of the kind that have existed for centuries and centuries.

Kashmir was a great gateway to Central Asia, and large parts of what is now Pakistan were gateways to the Silk Road and larger markets across Central Asia. And one should still think of these places in those terms and not just sort of lock oneself into this very impoverished imagination of the nation state.

DB: It's striking, when you travel from Lahore to Delhi, to see the similarities. The major visible difference is in the signboards. In India, Devanagari, the Hindi script, is dominant; in Pakistan it's Urdu. But the spoken language, the food, the music, the clothing—the similarities, except for religion, seem to be greater than the differences.

PM: This is one instance where you could say the ruling elites of these two countries are almost entirely responsible for this problem: in creating this problem in the first instance, in the years leading up to the Partition of India, and then carefully sustaining this problem, very carefully feeding this over the decades. I think the elites have really remained very invested in Kashmir, in making their respective national claims on Kashmir because nationalism for them has been this great self-legitimizing ideology. This is true both for the unelected regimes that we've seen in Pakistan and for the elected governments that we've seen in India.

DB: A prominent lawyer, Prashant Bhushan, was physically assaulted for speaking out on Kashmir. Arundhati Roy, the writer, was threatened with sedition charges. There's a price to pay for speaking out on the issue.

PM: Very much so. I think especially in the last few years there has been a sort of intensifying atmosphere of intolerance, not just on Kashmir but on various issues in India, and any number of non-state actors now. The state really doesn't have to do much, because it can always rely upon various extremists to bully people into silence. I think anyone speaking out

on this subject is exposing himself or herself to that kind of intimidation and violence.

DB: While I think the evidence is overwhelming that in 1947 the majority of Kashmiri Muslims would have wanted to accede to Muslim-majority Pakistan, I'm not sure that's the case today. In the brief inquiries I did when I was there, I didn't find anyone having a good word to say about Pakistan. They know what's going on across the border. It's not a state that's very attractive to them.

PM: The infatuation with Pakistan, even during the most intense years of the anti-Indian insurgency, was limited. And that romance is pretty much dead. From my sense of it, they want to be equidistant from both India and Pakistan. I think that's why the whole sort of propaganda in India, certainly among Hindu nationalist circles, that certainly these people all want to be Pakistanis and if you give them any degree of autonomy, they will go and join Pakistan, is utterly false.

DB: One aspect of this, I believe, too, is the intensity of Kashmiri identity. When I first went there in 1966, I went overland from Delhi, people asked me, "Did you come from India?" I was taken aback.

PM: That been their historical experience. They were never really part of this political and administrative entity that we know as India, which, mind you, is also a creation of the British. In many ways Kashmir was culturally connected to the rest of India, through Buddhism, through Sufi Islam, but it also within the Valley nurtured, and developed certain traditions, which were quite different from Islamic and Hindu Buddhist traditions elsewhere in the country.

So it had a very clear sense of its identity and being geographically located where it is in this Valley, relatively isolated, which allows people everywhere, wherever they are in mountain valleys, to develop. There are many books on this subject, about Southeast Asian hill communities, how they are very different from the rice-

cultivating communities near the coasts. So there are real differences to be observed there. And I think they also had a very clear sense of their political identity, which in the years leading up to the Partition was formed by an active opposition to the very decadent, dissolute Hindu rulers of the Valley. So their political journey, their cultural identity has departed in significant ways from the rest of India. And, very obviously, post-partition South Asia, post-partition India, the government did very little to make them feel part of this larger entity called India. In fact, their sense of alienation deepened all through those early decades when Jawaharlal Nehru was in power in Delhi.

DB: There were also the broken promises of plebiscites.

PM: Indeed All through these decades they felt more and more isolated and more and more alienated from the rest of India. Yet again, that cultural identity, I think, also prevents them from embracing the fundamentalist project, which is the one that many Pakistanis, many Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operatives, many people in the Pakistani army try to foist upon the Valley, which is sort of militant versions of political Islam—fundamentalist ideas that, again, did not really find a foothold in the Kashmir Valley because their own traditions were so much stronger. So that's one reason, again, why that propaganda about them being closet fundamentalists or Pakistanis is so false.

DB In late 2009, a report came out called Buried Evidence, about mass graves all over Kashmir. Many thousands of Kashmiris have gone missing. What's interesting is that this report itself was buried and disappeared. There was hardly any commentary on it.

PM: There have been some of us writing about this subject, and also pointing out that the uncovering of 3,000 corpses in mass graves anywhere else in the world would prompt a media firestorm. You would have headlines and commentary for days and days on end. But here we are. All the evidence is there. It's been well documented, it's been verified,

certified by very respectable authorities in the realm of human rights. And no response. The government does not feel obliged to say anything about it.

There have been reports by various human rights organizations. But they have been met with silence. So this is a measure of just how all of us conspire in maintaining this conspiracy of silence over Kashmir: the international media, the various international governments, the Indian media, the Indian newspapers, television channels.

DB: These are not two ordinary countries. These are nuclear-armed states with the ability to deliver those weapons of mass destruction. There have already been multiple wars in the Kashmir area. The danger here is acute.

PM: We should all worry about this. And one reason why Kashmir remains an urgent issue, even though we don't really pay much attention to it, is because, as you point out, it is a dispute between two nuclear-armed countries. Here we've already got two countries which have fought major wars over this issue and are full of any number of belligerent people. Both of them have extremely jingoistic media. So this is something to be extremely worried about. We know from bitter historical experience how major wars can erupt out of tiny sparks. War has this completely irrational, illogical momentum, and it becomes very, very difficult to stop.

DB: One of the unusual characteristics of the Kashmir situation is something known as half-widows. There have been various reports issued about women who have lost their male provider, be it father, brother, uncle, or husband, but they don't have the death certificate. They've gone missing. The Indian state says, "Well, they've gone over to Pakistan or whatever, they've fled." Thus the women are unable to collect any kind of compensation. And of course they live in an emotional limbo. It is a painful and unresolved circumstance.

PM: I remember when I first went there and I was in my early days as a reporter, I remember tactlessly asking a Kashmiri journalist who had told me precisely about this problem. I said, Where can I find these people? and he said, Knock on any door. He was more or less right. So this is a very widespread problem one of the many. You have people who are suffering from various trauma-related injuries who haven't recovered psychologically from the various scars reflected not just on the physical body but on their psyches. There are a number of documented cases of depression and suicide. You're really looking at a society that's undergone a very serious and long trauma. So you have all kinds of pathologies and all kinds of problems there. This is just one of them.

DB: That describes some of the effects of occupation on the Kashmiris. Have you thought about or looked at what the impact of the occupation has done to India itself in terms of civil rights and human rights?

PM: This is a problem that we have seen for decades, for centuries. Various writers, philosophers, thinkers have pointed this out. Colonialism, military occupation not only brutalizes the obvious victims, the people who are occupied, but also brutalizes the occupier, the colonialist. So you see a rapid deterioration in the political and intellectual climate of India. You see growing intolerance and the way in which the security forces, for instance, behave, the kind of impunity they enjoy, whether in central India or even increasingly in urban centers.

One of the things that has emerged from this recent horrific case of an assault on a young woman in New Delhi is how people actually fear approaching the police because they fear they might actually be further victimized by the police in all kinds of horrific ways. And there's no redress against that. There's no recourse to justice against the might of the police.

So I think the kind of damage this military occupation in Kashmir and the Northeast, this frequent recourse to brute force in these areas is really incalculable. We see the effects today.

We see it all around us, in the way the political climate has been poisoned; in the way we talk about certain issues. Also, the army used to be regarded as a largely apolitical force. We never really used to hear from military chiefs in the way we do now. Every time something happens in Kashmir or on the border, suddenly the army chief is doing multiple interviews. I think the enhanced role of the army in political affairs is an extremely disturbing development. The fact that the local army chiefs in Kashmir can publicly overrule the elected chief minister of the state tells you something about how things have deteriorated there politically. So I think in various parts of India you can see the effects of this kind of long and brutal military occupation.

DB: India has, to the surprise of many, one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, approaching, I think, 200 million people. They're cricket stars, Bollywood celebrities, the foreign minister is a Muslim, several presidents have been Muslim. But the parallel track to that is the destruction of the Babri Mosque, massacres in Mumbai, a major massacre in Gujarat in 2002. What is the status of Indian Muslims?

PM: It's a very demoralized and depressed minority at this point. Economically, in every index you look at of human development it's lagging behind.

DB: Because the state is not attending to its needs?

PM: The state is completely unresponsive to the Muslim minority. But, mind you, the state is unresponsive to even members of the so-called majority, so that is not an exceptional case at all. But I think what has happened since the advent of Hindu nationalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), as major forces in Indian politics is that Muslims have been marginalized and they have lost even the kind of political voice they used to have at one point. They're purely an electoral vote bank for many politicians, who still claim to speak for them. The fact is that all kinds of affirmative action

projects to improve their capabilities and improve literacy levels, or improve employment levels in the government, for instance, are torpedoed by various political parties. They don't really get anywhere.

DB: How has the Indian state and media interpreted what has been described as Tahrir Square before Tahrir Square, where hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris turned out to peacefully demonstrate in 2008, 2009, and 2010, completely flying in the face of the narrative that these are jihadis, militant fundamentalists supported by Pakistan? How have they navigated that? And isn't it interesting that nobody here, at least in the US, even knows that these demonstrations took place.

PM: Its been interesting. Because for a long time , when I first started writing about Kashmir, I used to hear this argument among Indian liberals, that if only Kashmiris were to renounce violence and terrorism, if they were to take to the streets in large numbers and demonstrate, India would be faced with an unanswerable moral dilemma. And that is precisely happened, as you say, in those years, when hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris demonstrated.

It was a difficult thing , I think, for most people to understand, because many people in the Indian media had already kind of subscribed to the propaganda that Kashmir has now been settled, infiltration from across the border is down to historically low levels, the militants have been routed, and basically the whole thing has been resolved. And suddenly this younger generation of Kashmiris were on the street. So it was a very difficult thing to figure out, to explain, to analyze. For a while the demonstrations were on the front pages. And soon enough the propaganda machine started cranking out reports of how these people are really in m contact with their ISI handlers across the border, and various transcripts of phone conversations were published by outlets of the Indian media demonstrating that this is obviously true, that once again Pakistan is b behind these demonstrations . So that's where it ended, basically, that

even these big and spontaneous expressions of public anger and disaffection in Kashmir could yet again be repackaged as a Pakistan-backed campaign against India.

DB: What role does water play in terms of strategic power and an incentive for the Indian state not to relinquish control over Kashmir?

PM:I think it's playing an increasingly important role. Water is going to be a source of conflicts not just in South Asia but across Asia. You already see a lot of tensions with China over the damming of the Brahmaputra when it flows through Tibet, and the same kind of tensions cropping up between India and Pakistan. That was one success story of the whole relationship, the Water Treaty. But that's beginning to unravel. We see in Pakistan a number of extremists who want to keep alive the idea of India as the great enemy. When I was there last year, among the extremists there was constantly this discourse about how India is basically responsible for the floods in Pakistan, for the drought, for basically everything bad that is happening in Pakistan. But water kept cropping up a s the most important theme. Having failed to g et their way in Kashmir, having failed to really inflict a serious defeat on the Indian military, what they have now cottoned on to in order to make themselves relevant to the Pakistani masses is this idea that India is cheating us out of our legitimate share of water. This is going to become, I think, a more serious issue between the two countries.

DB: Large areas of South Asia are described as water-stressed. I was in Uttarakhand a couple of years ago, where a major dam was built. People in towns, like Tehri, and in villages there don't have water to drink or for bathing. The water they were once using is now going to New Delhi.

PM: The water table has been plunging across North India for quite some time. This is one of the stories that isn't reported. What we don't hear is just how unsustainable this particular m o d el of economic growth that we've signed up to is. For

example, the fact that so many of India's limited resources are being diverted to basically providing for these growing urban populations. We're seeing a slow catastrophe developing in large parts of rural India: water tables plunging , soil becoming uncultivable, even in the great granary of India, the Punjab, where we're seeing the long-term effects of the Green Revolution now playing themselves out. These are some of the most important, the most serious stories that are emerging out of India today. And very little attention is being pa id to them because that's not what makes money circulate , that's not what gets foreign investors excited, that's not what makes for stimulating conversations at cocktail parties in Delhi, where so much of this knowledge circulates and then makes its way into the international pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post

DB: Is there much focus on or attention being paid to climate change in India?

PM: Not as much as it should be. Definitely not. Because this is going to affect a vast majority of India's population who live in rural areas and depend on agriculture . Moosoon patterns have been shifting alarmingly. We know that major rivers, like the Ganges, are going dry at very important points in their journey towards the ocean.

DB: The Yamuna in Delhi is a veritable cesspool. It stinks.

PM: And its all visible. That's the other thing. It's not like you have to do a lot of research or lose yourself in some library or archive for days on end to uncover this. It's in front of you. It hits you the moment you leave an air-conditioned mall. It's just all out there. But there is very little concern about this. Sometimes I feel there's more discourse about environmental issues in China than in India today. I think we really sort of close our ears from that whole conversation at this p oint and have completely de vote d ourselves to building ourselves up as this great superpower all set on this uninterrupted trajectory all the way up to international superpowerdom.

DB: V. S. Naipaul once described India as a country of “a million mutinies.” Indeed, from the Northeast, to Chhattisgarh, to Kashmir, there are various uprisings, rebellions, revolts, resistances. What accounts for this impressive pushback to corporate and state power from underprivileged, poor people?

PM: At some point people feel that they have to respond, they have to resist. One of the great things about India today, which gives me hope, is the network of activists and various organizations around the country : political, environmental people active in the field of adult literacy or fighting on behalf of the tribals being dispossessed of their land, trade unionists. Any number of people out there working very hard to create lives of dignity. One of the ways in which a lot of people realize you can live a dignified life is through actively engaging in resistance. Not forming political parties or standing for elections. That's absolutely the wrong way of entering politics. But this is one way many people across India have chosen, that we will not let ourselves be trampled into the earth by the combined powers of multinational corporations and the state, that we will resist. This idea has gone around. When Naipaul spoke of the million mutinies, he was thinking more in terms of individuals rising and claiming their share of the wealth. He did not really mean these various sorts

of movements that have sprung up in India over the last two decades or so, which are more important than this individualistic aspiration for consumer modernity that he was describing. I think this is more crucial and probably more significant for India's future.

DB: What you see happening in Kashmir? Can the occupation go on indefinitely?

PM: I don't think it can. It's ultimately unsustainable in the sense that it can undermine many democratic institutions it has already done that and remain counterproductive. You can keep up the bare bones of the occupation, obviously. India has a very large army, so it can afford to keep that many people in the Valley and continue the occupation as long as it can, technically at least. But I think the price it is paying for that occupation in terms of the damage being to civil rights and human rights, to the security infrastructure, to the future of democracy in India generally, that has just been too high a price to pay. I think if we continue to pay that high price, we're just going to see a lot more violence, not just in Kashmir but also within India today, and a lot more repression at the same time, a lot more authoritarianism. In that sense I think the occupation is unsustainable, not because India can't afford to have that many soldiers in the Valley.

DB: So the call for azaadi, for

freedom, is still some distance away.

PM: Yes. And I think we have to specify what is meant by and in what context can it be realized. There is not just one context. I think for an outsider, especially for an Indian citizen like myself to say, look, is virtually impossible in the present circumstances, is a harsh thing to say, and I would hesitate in saying that. But the fact is that we have to think of innovative and creative ways in which we can think of , in which we can manifest the real meaning of and not just think of yet another nation state which becomes this buffer one between two hostile nation states, becomes hospitable to all kinds of imperialist interventions in the region.

We have to remember also that Kashmir itself is a multinational, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, if we are thinking of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. So the whole idea of national self-determination there also has a different cast. So there are all these complexities that open up once you start examining the idea of As an aspiration for an end to brutal military rule, it makes perfect and clear sense. But I think when we start thinking about it slightly more deeply, about political alternatives, then we have to be slightly more creative than thinking along these lines, which have led India and Pakistan into the trap which we find ourselves in, which is these unwieldy nation states.

A few remarks on the question of government

25 April 2013, by François Sabado

An old debate

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of government - workers' government, workers' and peasants' government, popular government - has been one of the issues at the centre of the strategic discussion in the workers'

movement. This discussion rebounded after the Russian Revolution, when the Communist International discussed the perspective of a "workers' and peasants' government" distinct from the "dictatorship of the proletariat" identified with the power of the workers. There was a genuine debate about whether a workers' and peasants' government was simply

synonymous with this dictatorship of the proletariat or was in fact proposing a governmental formula which, in the heat of the crisis, would be intermediate between the power of the bourgeoisie in crisis and the revolutionary working-class upsurge.

At the time, the majority of the International chose to experiment with

this type of government. It was a question of defining the first steps towards a break with the bourgeoisie and the programme of a transitional government between a capitalist power which was collapsing and a working-class power that was emerging from the revolutionary crisis: an "already no longer" bourgeois power, in general a bourgeois state in the process of dislocation, and a "not yet" workers' power.

This discussion had started in Russia, when the Bolsheviks proposed a government emanating from dual power in the spring of 1917, a government of the soviets, a socialist-revolutionary/Menshevik government before the seizure of power by the soviets and the formation of a Bolshevik government. It continued, in the light of the revolutionary experiences in Germany in the 1920s during the German revolution and in Spain in the 1930s during the Spanish revolution: a government responsible to the workers' councils of Saxony-Thuringia, in Germany in 1923; the Central Committee of the militias in Catalonia between July and September 1936.

In the 1920s in France, in a situation that was not directly revolutionary, Trotsky also evoked this perspective of a workers' government in the form of a government of a Socialist-Communist majority that could emerge from the mass struggle, but also from an election victory. While considering that "a workers' government worker can result from a "parliamentary beginning of the revolution", "it is the slogan of a massive movement of the proletariat counterposing the idea of its own government to all the bourgeois parliamentary combinations". (Trotsky).

In the 1930s, he defended a Socialist-Communist government on the basis of a system of transitional demands. It must be understood that in the 1930s, the differences between revolutionaries and reformists were in the context of the declared objective of the overthrow of capitalism. Trotsky believed then that "the crisis of humanity is concentrated in the crisis of leadership of the workers'

movement. He also thought that a change of leadership of the workers' movement under the pressure of events was possible, even though "the social-democratic leaderships went over after the war of 1914-1918 to the side of the bourgeois order" and that Stalinism had become definitively bankrupt in the struggle against Hitler in Germany. He was convinced that the workers' movement could no longer count on these leaderships, but that it could still rely on the propulsive force of the Russian revolution, which stimulated working-class radicalization, despite Stalinism.

With hindsight there were certainly also illusions in the workers' movement at that time: the strength of the movement would be such in the whirlwind of the war-revolution that the leaderships of the Socialist and Communist parties "could go further than they would like". These governmental formulas were taken up again in the period after the war and in the 1970s, when revolutionaries demanded that the Socialist and Communist parties take power to ensure the satisfaction of demands.

But after the Second World War, the situation changed: social-democratic and Stalinist bureaucratic domination stabilized and crystallized, both in their dealings with the union bureaucracies and in parliamentary institutions. The formulas of governments of the Socialist and Communist parties to implement an anti-capitalist programme had the advantage of giving a credible government perspective but the disadvantage of distilling illusions about the ability of these parties to ensure the beginning of a break with the bourgeoisie.

Beyond these historical experiences, it should be remembered that the discussion on these transitional governments is linked to moments of acute crisis - socio-economic, political - when the political crisis is exceptional and the upsurge of the masses is equally so. This discussion came back in a very sharp way in France in May 1968 and in Portugal in 1974-1975. In May 1968, the French Communist Party (PCF) opposed the popular revolt: all forms of government including the PCF or the

social-democratic formations were rejected or discarded by the movement.

The young revolutionaries of the Revolutionary Communist Youth (JCR) put forward then the demand for the departure of De Gaulle and the call for a "popular government" based on all the organizations in the May movement: assemblies, committees, unions. In Portugal, in 1974, the carnation revolution put on the agenda the liquidation of the dictatorship, the election of a constituent assembly and, very quickly, the construction of a new power. Many revolutionary organizations, each in its own way, put the accent on a government relying on the mobilization of the masses, self-organization and the revolutionary sectors of the army.

A historical change

We have a new historical situation, where the transformation of social democracy into social liberalism historically condemns any form of alliance or government with Socialist parties. These parties, "more and more bourgeois and less and less working-class", directly support the austerity policies of liberal capitalism. Although the existence of a popular base of these parties makes necessary policies of unity in action when the situation allows it, it is first and foremost unity with the Socialist trade union activists in the workplaces and with the voters.

Parliamentary or governmental alliances are unacceptable - this is the core of our disagreement with the Left Front in France and more particularly with the PCF. Admittedly, the dominant parties of the Left Front do not participate in the government and often vote against bills of the Socialist Party, which creates the conditions for joint action. But by refusing to position themselves as a "left opposition" to the government of Hollande-Ayrault, they reaffirm, at the same time, that they are part of the parliamentary majority and that they are working for the reorientation of this majority with the social liberals.

We have a radical disagreement with this approach. Social democracy transformed into social liberalism has removed itself from a possible governmental equation for social transformation. This is a historic change in relation to the terms in which the question was posed during a good part of the twentieth century.

An “algebraic formula”

But a question is directly posed to us: if you are fighting the Hollande government what do you suggest instead? How many times has Olivier Besancenot been asked these questions? They are questions that flow from the depth of the crisis and the feeling that exists in the country against austerity policies. This poses the question of government, without giving us a concrete formula.

Trotsky discusses this question in his writings on France in the 1920s. “The workers’ government is an algebraic formula, in other words a formula to whose terms no numeric values are fixed. Hence its advantages and also its disadvantages”. And he goes on: “advantages as a unitary political perspective of the whole workers’ movement. Disadvantages in a purely parliamentary interpretation of this slogan”. We must therefore be careful, but this does not lead Trotsky to rule out the perspective. On the contrary.

All the formulas of “workers’ government”, “popular government” or more specifically “government against austerity” are therefore general - algebraic - formulas which give a first response to the question of power. We define them by their tasks. In this case the implementation of emergency measures, which are vital for the population (employment, wages, public services), policies of funding of these emergency programmes by the cancellation of the illegitimate debt, an anti-capitalist taxation policy and a first reorganization of property by taking over banks and key sectors of the economy. To begin to implement this programme, we must put an end to the present “austerity governments” and rely on the mobilization of the

peoples. It is the situation and policy of each left organization or social movement that will determine what organizations will be likely to participate in or support a government in the service of the workers.

This general propaganda prepares the ground for intervention in major crises, where the governmental formula will take on a concrete meaning.

Once again on Syriza’s government of the Lefts

This is where the Greek situation has a particular dimension. Because, to our knowledge, this is the only country where the perspective of government is no longer just general and where it is not only a question of propaganda. In Greece, the acuteness of the crisis, as a national crisis, is such that the question of government can be posed, concretely, “in fixed terms” as Trotsky put it. This is the only case in Europe where a party/coalition of the radical Left has achieved an electoral result of more than 25 per cent, where the Left as a whole has more than 35 per cent, which can make it possible for it to win a parliamentary majority and therefore pose the question of government. The next elections are due in 2015, but the crisis is such that we cannot rule out early elections.

It is in this context that the proposal for a “government of the Lefts” takes on its full importance. Of course, there are issues around the definition of this government and its programme. The points of equilibrium are under discussion between the different currents of Syriza. The formulations vary depending on this or that declaration. But, at this stage, Syriza continues to advocate “a government of the Lefts who are opposed to the memoranda of austerity policies of the government and the Troika”. This proposal should be made clearer in the following directions, which is what the left of Syriza is trying to do:

* A government of the Lefts, that is to say of Syriza, the KKE, Antarsya and

left personalities and not a government of national salvation or of class alliances.

* An anti-austerity government, which refuses any sacrifice for the euro, defends all the vital demands of the population and begins an anti-capitalist transition: nationalization of the banks and key sectors of the economy under social control.

* A government which comes from from a mass mobilization to overthrow the present Samaras government and which creates the conditions for a social relationship of forces in favour of the popular movement.

* This “government of the Lefts”, is only a moment in a strategy of struggle against austerity.

To satisfy the vital demands, a confrontation with the ruling classes and the EU will be necessary. Such a government must deepen measures for an anti-capitalist break and lay the foundations of social control and of elements of popular power in towns, cities and workplaces.

These issues are under debate in Syriza. At this stage, the left reformist currents remain on an anti-austerity line, which creates the conditions for the joint action of all the forces of Syriza. But their horizon remains limited to a left government in the existing institutions and a return to the equilibrium of before the crisis. Once again, a “government of the Lefts” may have, on the basis of an electoral victory, a parliamentary beginning, but it can only seriously combat austerity by starting a radical transformation of the economy and of politics, by creating the conditions for a new power. This is a possible transition; it is not the point of arrival. This is the meaning of our support to this proposal. The problems of an anti-capitalist break, of a dismantling of the old state institutions and of the creation of the conditions for a new power are not only theoretical issues. They can quickly become critical issues. They remain the blind spot of the leadership of Syriza. They remind us that, beyond lack of foresight and unexplored trails, there is a definite functionality to the strategic debate between reform and revolution.

There is and there will be discussion on all these issues. All hypotheses are

open: the continuation of the current parliamentary and governmental combination; but also a sudden worsening of the crisis with a polarization between, on the one hand, the fascist offensive and/or an authoritarian regime under the pressure of the military, and on the other, a social and political radicalization.

In this situation, the leadership of Syriza may yield to the pressures of the ruling classes and the European Union.

But another hypothesis can also be retained: a fierce resistance of the

Greek people and of Syriza which finds the forces for an anti-austerity government. Of course, such a government will be "in dispute" between forces which express the pressures of the dominant classes and other forces which reflect the pressures of the movement from below; such forces exist in Syriza, in its left but also in sectors of its leadership. Let us not forget that "in exceptional circumstances - crisis, crash, war - all the political forces of the Left can go further than they originally envisaged", (Trotsky, in the *Transitional Programme* of 1938). Above all, and this is a big difference, bureaucratic crystallization is not as

strong in Syriza as it is in the leaderships of the Communist parties of Europe.

In any case, a victory, even partial, in Greece will be, at this stage, the combination of a radicalization and of a consistent anti-austerity policy of Syriza. Defeat is also possible, but the role of revolutionaries is not to denounce Syriza, in anticipation of possible betrayals tomorrow. On the contrary, it is to support it against the austerity policies and to do everything possible to strengthen the anti-capitalist dimension of its struggle. Because, let us say it clearly: a defeat of Syriza would also be our defeat.

The challenge after Chavez

25 April 2013, by **Guillermo Almeyra**

The official campaign was very poor: a great deployment of nationalist rhetoric, no ideas on the deepening of the social process, and still less on socialism, repeated appeals to loyalty (directed partly to the internal struggle inside the state apparatus), no encouragement to popular initiative and self organization, silence on the organs of popular power and a mix of religiosity and mysticism. The campaign of Capriles, insidious and mendacious, was more subtle by its insistence in differentiating Chávez from his successors and attaching the latter by continually stressing the privileges, corruption and scandals of the Boli-bourgeoisie and maintaining silence on his own plans and his links with imperialism. The Chavista votes that he won and the votes lost by those who abstained in no way represent a vote of confidence but a protest against inflation of 20% which eats up wages and the negative effects of the devaluation on the popular sectors. A protest also against delinquency, violence and corruption.

Capriles is now demanding a recount of the votes despite the fact that the theft of ballot papers is impossible in Venezuela. The US government, which

remained silent on the scandalous electoral manipulations of 1988 and 2006 in Mexico, backs Capriles and prepares a coup disguised as a campaign for democracy. Washington and the anti-Chavistas are now linking up with the right wing of Chavismo and with the most conservative sector of the armed forces. The following stage will be a campaign combining sabotage, capital flights, press campaigns, employers' lock outs, student demonstrations intended to create victims and attempts to corrupt civilian and military personalities in the official circles.

The immediate danger resides in the Chavista right which will interpret the slim margin of votes which allow continued government as a signal to slow the rhythm of the process and to negotiate with the opposition and make concessions to it. But if the 1,600 expropriated companies function badly, it is not necessary to privatise them but rather to administer them correctly under workers' control. If the organs of popular power only half function, they should not be eliminated, but freed from asphyxiation by the state apparatus and given more

responsibility. If there is widespread delinquency, control and organization in the neighbourhoods should fight it by all means necessary rather than relying on a corrupt and corruptible police force.

Democratic rights are assured by the recall referendum but to give a positive outcome to the discontent, and hold back the "democratic" momentum towards a coup, it is necessary to extend all the public offices. Instead of banning strikes and repressing unions and workers it is necessary to discuss with them on a basis of equality. Instead of transforming socialism into a propagandistic word devoid of meaning, it is necessary to discuss publicly with everyone and without restriction, what should be the measures to take to aid its realization, and how to avoid bureaucracy and corruption, with the conscious and organised participation of workers, students and intellectuals.

Instead of embellishing reality, it is necessary to identify difficulties so as to correct them. Instead of paternalism and loyalty, what is needed is room for initiative,

creativity, innovation, criticism, the construction of citizenship. Maduro has promised massive and immediate wage increases and he will pay a heavy political price if they do not come. But with very high inflation and food shortages, a black market, and real wage reductions these increases can only at best compensate for the loss of purchasing power. Venezuela cannot exclusively depend on the price of oil; it should produce and increase productivity.

Measures are need to put an end to

inefficiency and corruption inside the administrative bodies which favour big importers and it is necessary to urgently train young administrators and technicians who are effective and innovatory.

It is also necessary to learn from the past and instead of being guided by a deformed and mythical image of the Peronist experience, understand seriously why Péron in the 1950s led the Argentine economy into a cul-de-sac before being overthrown and why he repeated this course in the 1970s opening the door to a ferocious

rightist dictatorship. It is fundamental that Latin American history and socialist history are discussed without limits to learn from the past or it will be impossible to prepare the future. Faced with a pro-coup press we need to stimulate the creation of a press for the left, unions, groups and organisations: if it criticizes some government measures it will be necessary to correct them or convince the critics they are wrong. In a word to reduce the influence of pro-coup sentiments, it is necessary to appeal to the workers and deepen the process.

The vote on gay marriage

23 April 2013, by **Gabriel Girard**

On Tuesday 12 February, a little before 5pm, the French National Assembly voted by a large majority for the so-called "marriage for all" law, which gives same sex couples the right to civil marriage and to adopt children. Although this is a first reading, with the law yet having to be examined and voted on by the Senate, there is no doubt that the text will be definitively adopted before the summer, since the left holds the majority in both chambers.

This vote comes after several months of intense debates within French society between supports and opponents of equal rights. The satisfaction of an old demand of the LGBT movement is an undeniable success. However, the formal equality thus acquired does not end the fight against homophobia and transphobia. The adoption of the law, an indispensable stage on the road to equality, could however accentuate the process of differentiation developing among gays and lesbians. For the better off, a homosexual lifestyle is becoming increasingly one option among others. A banalisation barely detectable in the more precarious fringes of the community (youth, transgender, women, ethnic minorities, the HIV positive and so

on), while the economic crisis strengthens dependency on the family, undermining the material conditions of emancipation. Awkwardly, some critical actors in "homo-nationalism" have in recent weeks wished to stress the existence of these fractures, in particular in the popular neighbourhoods and among young people of immigrant origin. [1] Some dangerous positions which have revived controversies on racism and imperialism in the LGBT communities, which run through the movement at an international level. Not a very good climate for a constructive debate on these issues

Developing an approach of critical emancipation of hetero-normality, which is however attentive to the rhythms of mobilisation and politicisation of the majority of LGBT persons is the challenge for radical activists and the left of the LGBT movement.

The context

Contained in the manifesto of the candidate of the Parti Socialiste, François Hollande, during the presidential campaign of 2012, the demand for the right to same sex marriage has been raised for 15 years

by the French LGBT movements.

In 1999, the left government had established the PaCS, a contract of civil union offering a legal framework to same sex couples, but without granting them all the associated rights of marriage. At the time, this first advance, however timid, had raised heated debates on the left, some fearing that the recognition of same sex unions threatened the "symbolic order" of the family. As an illustration of this, the adoption of the PaCS had been delayed for several months by the weak mobilisation of left deputies, who were in the minority in the Assembly during the first vote on the text. For the LGBT movements, the PaCS was a protective gain notably for couples including an HIV positive partner. But it was immediately challenged as a discriminatory law, because it established a legal inequality between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

From 2000 onwards, in a context where the right was in power, equality of rights rapidly became the main demand of the LGBT movements. In 2004, as Spain legalised the right to same sex marriage, a Green deputy, N. Mamère, participated in a marriage between two men, taking advantage of a loophole in the law: the sex of the

married couple was not specified in the Civil Code. This symbolic action of disobedience had a high media profile, but remained isolated, with no other elected representative following. In subsequent years, the demand for marriage remained a priority on the agenda of LGBT struggles. But the perception that a victory would not be possible while the right was in power led most organisations to await a left electoral victory. Hence, while equality remained the main theme of Gay Pride Marches, no significant political campaign was waged on the subject.

The weakening of a perspective in terms of construction of a relationship of forces on these issues explains to a great extent the relative disorganisation of activist groups at the time where the right and Catholic Church entered the debate in September 2012.

The forces on the ground

During the debate on the PaCS in the late 1990s, the right and its fringes close to the Catholic Church had already led a heated opposition to the project, organising a demonstration of nearly 100,000 persons in Paris. The emblem of this anti-PaCS right, the deputy Christine Boutin, had not hesitated to brandish the Bible in the National Assembly to support her arguments. In a general manner, debate gave way to a deluge of homophobia. Meanwhile the left and the LGBT movements remained barely audible, and the Socialist Party was divided on the subject.

In 2012, the context was very different. The Socialists had just won the elections; the right was defeated, weakened by an internal leadership race and electorally rivalled by the Front National. The UMP leaders thus sought subjects to oppose the left, since the austerity policies pursued by Hollande left it with little room to differentiate itself. The draft law on "marriage for all" gave it an opportunity. In contrast to the debate on the PaCS, opponents advanced an apparently more "subtle" approach.

Openly homophobic discourse was abandoned, at least publicly, and the arguments centred above all on issues of parenting (adoption, medically assisted procreation, surrogate parenting). The figureheads of the "anti-equality" movement – two gays against marriage and a second rate singer/humorist – sought to offer a less political face to this combat. The critique of the "right to the child" and the defence of family values provided the rhetorical framework for the right. However, without surprise, opposition to the draft law rested on a highly reactionary movement very much anchored to the right and the Catholic networks. And during the demonstrations, homophobic slogans dominated. Two big demonstrations were organised, on November 17, 2012 and January 13, 2013, which attracted hundreds of thousands of people, supported by the UMP and the Front National, as well as the main representatives of Catholicism and other monotheistic religions. The Catholic Church put all its strength into the battle, massively organising the transport of demonstrators to Paris.

Occupying the media terrain, the anti equality forces adopted an essentialist and sexist discourse on gender and the heterosexual family order. They succeeded in polarising the debate around parenting and mobilised deputies opposed to the draft. The confusion reached its target, when Hollande wobbled, evoking a "conscience clause" for mayors hostile to the law. This, coupled with the massive demonstration of November 17, had the effect of an electric shock for LGBT activists and their supports. All the more in that the discourse of the right gave new life to everyday homophobia. On December 16, at the call of associations, trade unions and left political parties, nearly 150,000 people demonstrated throughout France in support of equal rights. The political left as a whole (NPA, Front de Gauche, Socialist Party, Greens) gave its support to the draft law. This demonstration, followed by a new, still bigger, march on January 27, was an unexpected event. They marked the most significant mobilisation for the LGBT movement in the past 40 years, apart from the Gay Pride Marches (which in recent years have attracted

nearly 500,000 people in Paris).

However the government continued to send contradictory signals. While stating its determination, it retreated on the issues of parenting, explaining that access to assisted fertilisation for female couples would not be part of the draft law. Meanwhile Hollande personally received the organisers of the anti-marriage demonstrations, and the government unambiguously denounced surrogacy. The law voted for on February 12 satisfied some of the major demands of the LGBT movement but remained short of hopes.

Even if it is still too soon to draw the balance sheet, the mobilisation in favour of equal rights in autumn and winter constituted an important vector of politicisation in the LGBT communities. During these demonstrations, poles of radicalism appeared: the Pink block, articulating anti-capitalism, anti-racism and the fight against hetro normality; or the collective "Oui, oui, oui", notably around the Panthères Roses, defending a clear demand for equality faced with the hesitations of the socialist government. More broadly, hundreds of thousands of gays and lesbians have gone onto the street, taken part in social networks, in their places of study or work, expressing the force of a daily resistance to the homophobic discourse of the right.

The strategic issues for the LGBT movement

The limits to this mobilisation should be noted however.

Strategically, it has at first rapidly appeared indispensable to agree on unifying demands. But with the pro equality movement being established above all in reaction to the right wing mobilisation, and according to the legislative calendar, demobilisation could be strong once the law is definitively adopted. The institutional bodies of the movement (the inter-LGBT in particular) bear a great share of the responsibility for this. At a time when the recrudescence of homophobic discourse and acts

observed during recent months has cruelly underlined the need to continue a basic struggle on this terrain.

On the “content” of equality, the recent mobilisation has not allowed

deeper debates to emerge. Hence, the feminist critiques of the institution of marriage or the necessary debates on surrogacy have been inaudible. For the left activists of the LGBT movement, a “progressive” strategy has been imposed: to win first on

marriage and adoption so as then to push forward debates on family and conjugal norms. However, in the absence of democratic structuring, the potential political space for these debates could be significantly reduced in the coming weeks.

The spiral of provocation

20 April 2013, by **Pierre Rousset**

Washington, Seoul and Tokyo all have an interest in the rise in tension. The US justifies the consolidation of their military bases (South Korea, Okinawa) and the reinforcement of the Seventh Fleet. The Japanese right pushes for increased militarization and prepares public opinion for the idea that the country should equip itself with nuclear weapons. Seoul and Tokyo profit from this “state of emergency” to marginalize (and severely repress) the social resistance to austerity policies, the pacifist movements or the democratic opposition post-Fukushima to nuclear energy.

The Chinese regime will regret North Korean “excesses” but cannot accept the perspective of a reunification of the peninsula under the control of Seoul or remain indifferent to the rise in power of the USA in this part of the

world. It has engaged on a very significant programme of development of its military fleet both in the South China seas and the oceans: Beijing disputes influence over the Maldives with India, participates in international operations of “securing” of seaways in the Indian Ocean, and has symbolically sent a flotilla to the Mediterranean.

North Korean weaponry is too rudimentary to threaten Japan or the US. Nobody believes that we will see the start of a new war in Korea. But, given the provocations and counter provocations (deployment of B52s or missiles), we cannot rule out still more violent military “incidents” than those we have seen in recent years, which could get out of control. Whatever happens, the Korean crisis is already feeding the militarisation of East Asia

as a whole, together with the nuclear proliferation and authoritarianism of a good number of political regimes.

As conceived by the powers (or by the authoritarian states), the policy of “security” leads to a very worrying militarist spiral, whose consequences for the populations are increasingly felt. Security from the viewpoint of the peoples is on the other hand borne by democratic and social movements independent of the established powers; by the fight for universal nuclear disarmament and its corollary, the end of nuclear energy; by anti war mobilizations and opposition to right wing nationalism.

International solidarity is built by the meeting of these progressive movements. With internationalism as their crucible.

Catalan “national transition” process

16 April 2013, by **Josep Maria Antentas**

The right nationalist CiU (Convergence and Union) party has to manage a situation in which the Catalan financial establishment is alarmed at the dynamic of institutional instability opened and wishes to reverse the momentum, while the social base has shifted towards the option of independence in the absence of other credible alternatives. Its

political future will depend to a great extent on its capacity to resolve these tensions, in a context which is far too turbulent for a formation of conservatism and order.

The weakness of the Mas government, the fruit of an unstable pact between the CiU and the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, a moderate

left pro-independence party), offers social and political forces opposed to austerity policies a greater opportunity to influence this process of “national transition” than that initially envisaged, although the relationship of forces and the point of departure are still very unfavourable.

In this volatile context, there are two

challenges: firstly, to guarantee that the exercise of the right to decide will go to the limit and that the referendum on independence takes place while maintaining the social pressure on the CiU not to backtrack and neutralizing the repressive manoeuvres of the Rajoy government, with the complicity of the PSOE.

Secondly, to ensure that the CiU and ERC do not capitalize on the process to their own profit. The social and popular movements and the Catalan social and political left must not leave the initiative in the hands of Mas and Junqueras. They should attempt to articulate a broad social pole favourable to the exercise of the right to decide and opposed to austerity policies.

We defend the right to self-determination without making independence an "a priori" and we consider that the concrete option to defend should be determined according to what will be most favourable to the interests of the majority, we should stress that a "yes" to independence in a future referendum appears now as the option with the greatest democratic content and the greatest potential for rupture. It should be done based on a firm internationalist conviction and the defence of a horizon of a free federation of the peoples of Europe. It should also be done on the basis of the defence of an idea of nation or culture combining the firm defence of the Catalan language with that of a Catalonia which is multilingual and multiethnic, and with a vision of Catalan culture which is not reduced to the popular indigenous traditions.

The main strategic political question is to benefit from the democratic potential opened by the debate on independence so as not only to generate a democratic rupture with the current institutional framework, but also to go beyond the derisory

framework fixed by the CiU and ERC and enlarge the "right to decide" to other spheres of society. Faced with independence as a miracle recipe the debate to be posed is what Catalonia we want, what model of country and society.

Catalonia is not a homogenous entity but a society traversed by social contradictions. We are not all in the same boat and even if we were, some travel first class while the others are in the holds. Why can the Catalan people decide on independence and not on austerity? Why can Catalan women decide on what relation they wish to have with Spain when they cannot make decisions concerning their own body? Sovereignty? And what about food sovereignty against agro-business? Controlling our destiny? Fine, why not begin in the workplace?

What is the point of demanding "independence" in relation to the Spanish state if we remain trapped by the policies of the European Union? The acceptance of the diktats of the EU by the Mas government empties the right to decide of its content. Independence under the supervision of the Troika and Merkel would be sovereignty without content. A contradiction in terms, Real sovereignty involves a break with the policies of austerity and neo-colonial submission to the Troika. To do this, the referendum on independence cannot be associated with the acceptance of an EU policy which instead of giving more freedom to the people robs them of this freedom in the interests of a financial minority.

Starting from the official discourse on the "national transition" it is necessary to develop an alternative proposal which demonstrates the contradictions and limits of this discourse so as to use the democratic momentum of the independence drive and avoid it being diverted against the

social struggles opposing austerity and the process of legitimating of the regime opened after the rebellion of the indignant.

The debate on independence and a state should serve to stress the need for a constituent process for Catalonia in which the new institutional framework and model of society can be defined. That is the central question. There are a series of strategic battles to prepare to fix the new rules of the game. What electoral system? What model of work relations? What citizenship rights for immigrants? What defence policy? And many other questions.

At the same time the pro-independence dynamic should be linked with the need for a break at the scale of the Spanish state with the decrepit regime born from the Transition so as to avoid the respective rights capitalizing on the current situation. That involves, outside of Catalonia, an effort of political explanation of the process underway on the part of the Catalan democratic and pro-sovereignty forces and above all the strategic comprehension by the indignant and anti-austerity forces that the democratic resolution of the national question is a fundamental element for breaking the edifice forged by the false "consensus" of the Transition.

It is about making sure that the Catalan people decide their future freely and that an act of sovereignty for Catalonia, far from contributing to legitimate an ever more discredited political and institutional model, serves as a decisive element to unleash a deep crisis of the regime throughout the Spanish state and opens the way to a dynamic of specific national constituent processes, independent but coordinated and feeding off each other in their common search for a new order which is just, democratic and solidarity-based.

"The People Want - A Radical Exploration of

the Arab Uprising”

15 April 2013, by **Gilbert Achcar , Jacques Babel**

Why have you entitled your book simply "The People Want"?

This formula, "the people want", has been used in recent movements to express all kinds of demands, from the most basic to the famous "the people want to overthrow the regime", the best-known slogan of the general uprising. Originally, this comes from two verses of a very famous Tunisian poet, which are in the conditional tense, whereas the affirmation is in the present tense. What the slogan reveals is the emergence of the people as a collective will on the public stage, the people as a political subject. A large mass of individuals who for decades lived under conditions of despotism is now entering into a revolutionary era which - as I constantly stress - is in its infancy. It is a long-term revolutionary process.

You deal extensively with "the particular modalities of capitalism in the Arab region".

We are witnessing a revolutionary shock wave which covers a particular region. This indicates that there are common specific factors in the region concerned, which have to be analyzed. In a Marxist approach, we are not going to settle for the explanations that refer to cultural factors or to the fact that there are uprisings against despotic regimes. These factors exist, certainly, but they do not explain why this explosion has become general in this way and at this moment of history.

In a Marxist approach, you explore the physical roots of the explosion, the socio-economic factors underpinning what is happening. This is the approach that I have taken and I show that there is common to the region a dismal socio-economic situation, with world record unemployment rates held for several decades.

This is not the conjunctural crisis that we have in Europe, due in particular

to German economic policy. This has been going on for a long time and testifies to a blockage of development which is particular to the region, even when you compare it to other regions of the Afro-Asian ensemble, as I do in the book. The question that arises is: what are the reasons for this blockage? They do not reside in capitalism in general: by explaining everything, this explains nothing. The reasons for the blockage are to be found in the particular modalities of capitalism, of the mode of production, of the relationship between the economic and the political in this part of the world. In any case, this is what I try to show.

You speak about the rentier and clientelist regimes that have stifled these societies...

It is a question of rentier and patrimonial states and of a crony capitalism, politically determined, where the dominant share does not depend on the "laws of the market" as the ideal model of capitalism would have it, but rather on collusion and connections with the regime. All this produces a blockage which has been becoming steadily worse for decades.

For quite some time now we could feel the explosion coming and see a social agitation manifesting itself wherever it could, wherever repression did not make it impossible. We have seen a rise in social struggles, especially in the two countries where everything started: Tunisia and Egypt are countries which experienced in the decades that preceded the current explosion an obvious rise of social struggles, and especially struggles that reflected this explosive potential, which eventually exploded. The self-immolation of the young Bouazizi was the spark that detonated a situation which was very obviously highly explosive in the whole of the region.

A widespread idea asserts that the

Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions have been suffocated by the reactionary Islamic forces...

This is a perception that prevailed after the elections, in Tunisia and then in Egypt, resulted in the coming to power of fundamentalist forces, forces which had made religion their stock in trade. But I believe that today many of those who let themselves be seduced by the religious discourse are disappointed. This is shown by the scale of resistance to the new governments that have come from the fundamentalist movement, and even the continuation, indeed the rise of the social movement in the two countries concerned: Tunisia and Egypt. Moreover, do not lose sight of Libya, where the elections were proportionally much more massive, and resulted in a defeat of the fundamentalists.

In Egypt and Tunisia, where there were victories of fundamentalists which obviously have to be put into perspective, especially in the Tunisian case, the populations are very quickly realizing the inability of these governments to manage the situation, to provide even the beginning of a solution to the social crisis that is the fundamental problem. People have overthrown regimes not only because they wanted democracy and freedom, as is claimed: the movement started off, both in Tunisia and Egypt, on social grounds, with clear social demands, on employment, on social justice, on the high cost of living.

The demands were very clear, and it is on this level, which is the basic driving force of the explosion in the region, that the fundamentalists have no solution, no response. They just continue the economic policies and perpetuate the socio-economic structures that existed previously. They just continue the same relationships with international financial institutions. They accept the

conditions of the IMF, with as much zeal as the regimes that were overthrown. This produces what we can see: after this first stage of the regional revolutionary process, we are already seeing emerge the contours of their failure. The crucial question that arises, therefore, is what type of alternative can emerge.

On Libya and the Syria, many people say that these uprisings have been taken over by imperialism and are only leading to chaos and despair.

Let's talk first about Libya. We heard a lot, after the intervention of NATO, that the uprising had changed its nature. And some people even drew the conclusion that Gaddafi should be supported. However, the Libyan uprising demonstrated an acute awareness of its sovereignty by refusing, early on, any intervention of international troops on the ground. What overthrew the Gaddafi regime was the civil war in the country, the insurrection in Tripoli. NATO certainly contributed to the military victory of the insurrection, but it was the insurrection that won.

When there is the overthrow of a dictatorship of the totalitarian kind that has been in place for more than forty years, of an autocracy with a pronounced grotesque aspect, when such a regime is crumbling under the blows of a mass uprising, there is always an anarchic and chaotic situation created. Every revolution experiences that. You can handle the situation if there is a centralized leadership of the revolutionary uprising, or if the regime has been brought down by a disciplined revolutionary army. This was obviously not the case in Libya.

In the absence of leaderships that correspond to what we would wish from a progressive point of view, so much the better in the present conditions of political underdevelopment of Libyan society, because of what it lived through for forty years. Today, there is a tremendous effervescence in the country, in which the media are absolutely not interested. Over and above the chaotic situation created by the armed militias - but this has been

experienced in many situations, particularly in Lebanon in 1976, when the army collapsed in the first phase of the civil war - the security situation is remarkably moderate compared with what might have been feared. It was being said "This will be another Somalia", and that is far from being the case.

There is a social movement that is emerging, continuous political demands, political protests, including against the armed groups, a veritable explosion of newspapers, of means of expression, of public discussion. There is even a movement of women, and a federation of independent unions that has arisen, linked with the one in Egypt. The balance sheet is really interesting. Having said that, it is difficult to say how things will evolve. What is certain is that there has been a major opening up of the situation in Libya.

And Syria?

The attitude of the Western powers in the Syrian case is very different. You only have to compare the posturing of Sarkozy on Libya, full of hypocrisy, and the absence of posturing on the part of Holland on Syria. And this is not a question of a fundamental difference between their policies. The issues at stake are not the same, nor are the risks and costs. In both cases there is a desire of the Western powers to reach an agreement with the regime. They tried to do that until the final days in Libya, by negotiating with Gaddafi's son. This is what they have been trying to do for two years in Syria.

That is why they refuse to deliver weapons. Washington has refused so far any delivery of weapons. Recently, there is apparently the beginning of an American green light for the allies of Washington in the region to send weapons, in response to the obstinacy of Bashar al Assad, who persists in refusing a negotiated solution whose first condition would be his own resignation. We can see the result.

This attitude of the Western powers, faced with Russia and Iran which fully support the regime, has helped that regime massacre quietly for two years. The figure of 70,000 dead is cited.

Many people say that there are many more. The number of refugees is extraordinary. The situation is absolutely terrible. When we say 70,000 dead, this means that the number of injured is much greater. This is an absolutely tragic situation and there is a criminal complicity of Western powers dictated by their own interests, their own strategic considerations.

The same mistrust that they had towards the Libyan uprising, they have towards the Syrian uprising, and even more so, considering the geographical situation of the country. It is this criminal attitude of imperialism that should be denounced if you want to be anti-imperialist, and not the insurgency, as some people are doing.

So what hopes are there for this process in the long term?

From the analysis that I make of the uprising, the logical conclusion is that the only positive outcome would be the emergence of leaderships based on the workers' and popular movement, with a programme of a progressive nature, centred on the satisfaction of social needs and able to engage the countries of the region on the path of development, taking into account the multiple dimensions that this term has acquired, a development in which the state plays a central role, in absolute contradiction with the neo-liberal dogmas that dominate throughout the world. The situation differs from one country to the other.

Tunisia is probably the country where this type of alternative is the most likely, potentially at least, considering the role of the UGTT and its combination with the Popular Front, the coalition of the Left in Tunisia which is today at the head of the UGTT. This combination has the potential to be the dominant force in what happens in the country. The Left must work to involve the workers' movement in the political battle and understand the need for the affirmation of an independent left pole, on its social programme, without mixing the banners with oppositions, whether they are liberal or, worse, composed of members of the overthrown regimes. With such allies,

you cannot define a programme for a break with neoliberal policies.

The same problem is posed in Egypt, where there is a potential represented by the Popular Current that is led by Sabbahi, the Nasserite candidate who came third in the first round of the presidential election, and the new workers' movement, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions. The same problem is posed, the assertion of a left alternative, which fights on the social terrain, without that being inconsistent with broader alliances for the defence of democratic conquests.

It is important to put forward a different socio-economic identity from the liberal oppositions or those linked to the former regime, which all have in common with the fundamentalists in the government to have no alternatives to the socio-economic policies that previously existed. Unless there is the emergence of progressive alternatives, there is a risk that the crisis can lead to reactionary regressions.

In Europe, do we have responsibilities in this regard?

Indeed, the workers' movement, the radical Left in any case, the one that defends an alternative to the system, must forge links with the corresponding forces in the regional uprising. This is not only an internationalist and altruistic duty, it is in the best interest of the European Left itself that what is happening on the other side of the Mediterranean should lead to a social radicalization. Synergies can be established today with the crisis that is shaking Europe and the radicalization that is under way in such countries as Greece and Spain.

â€™Politics' stalled but austerity continues... and kills

11 April 2013, by Dave Kellaway

Romeo was a bricklayer who was unemployed and also was finding it difficult to get paid for work he had done. Annamaria had a small pension of about 500 euros a month. They had debts and a mortgage to pay, a little time before he had gone to the local council seeking work. Due to recent austerity measures he was not able yet to take a pension. The police have no doubt that economic difficulties were the reasons for these terrible events. They lived in what is considered a more prosperous region of Italy - the Marches which has always been governed by the centre left. They were ashamed to go the social services which anyway would not have changed their material circumstances. Of course there has been a chorus of moral handwringing by all the leading politicians but nearly all have supported austerity policies that have led to this sort of situation.

You may think this is exceptional but as soon as friends talked about this they added that somebody did the same thing a few weeks ago here in Salerno. We know that the same thing is happening in Greece and there is an increase in the suicide rate in Britain

too.

A close relative, we can call him Arturo, owns a small clothes shop with a partner, and he tells me that they have not paid themselves a salary for at least two years and have a significant debt. They tell me also that 60 shops have had to close since Xmas in a small town of 60,000. Nearly everyone I meet during this short stay has a story to tell about how the crisis is affecting them. Many friends or relatives' children in their late twenties and early thirties have never had a proper job with a permanent contract and have had to leave for the north or another country to find some sort of work. A son put in long hours working for a company connected to the local authority but is still trying to get paid - this is a common problem since my niece has experienced the same problem in Florence. Another young man thinks he is lucky because he can get some free work experience with an estate agent. All my teacher or public sector friends have seen their salaries frozen for years and their pensionable ages disappearing across the horizon. Pensioners like my father-in-law now pay more and more for their medicine. Only 17% of new

labour contracts are permanent with reasonable conditions and just as in Britain more and more are obliged to become self-employed without rights or protection but are actually working for a company. I could go on and on.

Family structures

Remember this is in a country where there is hardly any housing benefit and no income support. Without the continued resilience of extended family structures and the charities - particularly the Catholic Church - there would be an even worse crisis of basic living conditions. Like the mushrooming of foodbanks in Britain we have â€™poor people's canteens' which are overwhelmed with demand. Hundreds of thousands of young people are leaving Italy to search for work in London, Paris, Berlin or elsewhere. They will have to squat, share rooms or work in the informal economy. But anything is better than endless years reliant on their parents chasing the fewer and fewer unregistered jobs in bars or babysitting that they are overqualified for. Another looming problem if this crisis continues for years to come is

that the grandparents/parents' 'safety net', which subsidise the younger generation, will be used up or disappear as they pass on - the pension dies with them.

On the television yesterday there was another of those interminable political discussion programmes where politicians, professors and journalists pontificate for considerably longer than on Newsnight. However, at least this one had a live link with a group of workers from the Merloni factory in Umbria which had been closed down. One of the workers, who had been on a special unemployment benefit (cassa integrazione) of 500 euros a month for 5 years, which was now ending, exploded in rage at all the empty talk in the studio about the constitution and the 57 ways the next government could be stitched together. He basically said that the politicians and the commentators had no idea of what was actually happening on the ground. It is precisely this anger and at times despair that explains what happened in the last elections with the extraordinary breakthrough of Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement (M5S).

All my friends and most of my relatives (apart from a small Berlusconi wing) have always voted moderate or more radical left. This time many had voted Grillo. Why? As several said not because they particularly approve of Grillo's occasional vulgarity or every denunciation but because they believe that the political system needs a huge shake up. Some pundits in Italy (or Britain) say that his mantra that the M5S is neither right nor left and it wants to clear out the whole political caste is a sign of incipient fascism, but they are mistaken and are not listening to ordinary people. For most people their direct experience at least for over 20 years is that the centre left and the centre right parties (and that includes the ex-communists now in the PD -Democratic Party) have mostly done the same thing. These parties have cut their wages, reduced their pensions, made them work longer, cut social spending, failed to create jobs and have obeyed the Troika. If you add to that the way the political caste (PD included) have paid themselves huge salaries and incredible privileges not just in parliament but in all the other

levels of government then you can understand the anger. Worse of all these super-remunerated representatives have for decades failed to create public sector organisations that function efficiently at even the most basic level. Renewing a license or official document can take for ever and people regularly travel hundreds of miles to avoid having operations in their local hospital. The politicians have used the public institutions as a means of raising more funds through bribes or contracts with their own companies or placing their supporters at every level. People are also angry that their taxes then also publicly finance these corrupt parties.

M5S

Consequently the M5S focus a lot on policies that attack what they call the 'partocracy' head on. They say all politicians should by law only be able to have two terms of office, that nobody who is being charged or is guilty of crimes should be allowed to take office (in recent years 25 or more MPs were in this category), that public funding of political parties should end and that there should a law on conflicts of interests. The latter obviously deals with Berlusconi or others that own huge areas of the media and can still be involved in a political system that regulates such matters. Many of M5S's other policies such as ecological opposition to mega projects like the high speed train link in the Val de Susa as well as the idea of a basic citizens income also attracted voters and were to the left of the PD coalition.

Where are we now forty days after the vote? People have joked here that even the Church has managed to elect a pope more quickly than the politicians have formed a government. Essentially the February elections produced three more or less equal minorities:

the PD who have a relative majority in the lower house and hence get a bonus guaranteeing that, the PDL/Lega (Berlusconi and the Northern League) whose votes in the Senate elections got a bonus due to the infamous Porcellum electoral mechanism that Berlusconi had

introduced which blocks a PD majority in the Upper house and the M5S who are a whisker behind the PD as the second party with 163 MPs in both houses.

You need a clear working majority in both houses to govern. Although Berlusconi did far better than expected his party still lost millions of votes compared to the previous elections. The M5S has gone up in the three years since its foundation from scores of around 3% to 25% plus today and is the main factor for what everyone is called the 'stallo' or the stalled political situation today. The president, who operates more or less like the British Queen, in that he/she dissolves parliament and calls on party leaders to form a government, first gave Bersani, as the relative majority party leader, the chance to form a government.

Bersani for a week desperately tried to work a deal, primarily with the M5S. Moving smartly away from the PD's previous attacks on the movement as anti-political, crypto-fascist or rightwing populists he drew up an 8 point plan that basically included a number of Grillo's key policies on the political caste e.g. reducing politicians pay, cutting the number of MPs, limiting the number of mandates, changing the electoral system etc. Despite some wavering from a few of his MPs and petitions by over a hundred thousand of his voters on the web calling for a deal with the PD, Grillo resisted any conciliation. Most of my friends who had voted M5S criticised this position and said that a deal for a short term government to carry out some of the key demands would have been a step forward. However Grillo has reiterated that if people voted for his movement thinking he would do a deal with a part of this 'partocracy' then they were not listening to what he was saying. Consequently Napolitano had to recognise that Bersani did not have the numbers needed to govern and made his next move.

This week the president has established two commissions, one on the economy and one on the political system made up of ten 'wise' men or sages. Indeed they are all men and are mostly aligned with the main political groupings although excluding

the M5S. The latter is far too maverick for the Troika or the Italian oligarchy. They have to come up with proposals within eight to ten days that the parties can discuss as a basis of a new government. In the meantime Monti's government continues on an operational basis particularly in terms of reassuring the European Troika. Napolitano had to deny that Draghi (European Bank boss) had telephoned him to entreat him to stay in post and to come up with a holding measure to reassure the markets. The president's spokesperson said that it was Napolitano that called Draghi - so no pressure there then! Faced with an explosion of anger in the press from women who felt that wisdom was not limited to men Napolitano apologised for this. Just yesterday one of the wise men, Valerio Onida, was tricked into talking to a radio show and admitted that the whole thing was just a delaying measure that probably would not produce much. He also added that they just needed a way to allow Berlusconi to enjoy his old age in peace and that would help them move forward. As usual these days Grillo came up with the best one liner - *i saggi sono le badanti della democrazia* =these sages are the terminal care nurses for democracy.

Berlusconi has repeatedly called for Bersani and the PD to form a government with the PDL - accepting Bersani as the prime minister. Bersani up to now has refused. On the one hand he thought a reform government might attract Grillo or enough M5S MPs to work and on the other hand a deal with Berlusconi would cause huge problems in the PD. Berlusconi of course is also keen to be in government since it makes it more difficult for the judges to finally nail him. He has gone along with the wise men manoeuvre without much enthusiasm and has said either there is a deal with the PD or Italy should return to the polls as early as June. Bersani (and Napolitano) have both said it would be bad for Italy (i.e. the markets would not like it) if the uncertain political situation continued with new elections.

Napolitano unlike Queen Elizabeth

A complicating factor in all this is that Napolitano, unlike Queen Elizabeth, has a limited term of office which ends in May so there has to be a new election for his post. This post has not always been so important but where you have a complex electoral outcome the president is more important. Hence it is now likely that the president will be elected before the government is formed. Berlusconi has sworn total war if the centre left get one of their people as president. Already contacts are underway between the PD and PDL on this question and there might be a subsequent movement on a government agreement. In the meantime Renzi, the leader of a current in the PD that got 40% in the primary elections for the leadership of the left coalition, has made his move. He has criticised the week long negotiations Bersani led to form a government and has said there should be a deal with the PDL or new elections. Although careful not to call directly for a deal with the PDL at this time Renzi represents the 'modernising' neo-liberal right wing inside the PD and along with D'Alema, Veltroni and others he has always been more favourable to that. Renzi knows that if Bersani can do a deal it delays his possibility of taking over the leadership. Berlusconi and the PDL are happy for the Renzi people to cause havoc in the PD but are aware that in any new elections if Renzi were to be the new PD leader he could take more votes from them.

So where does all this byzantine political manoeuvring leave those Italians whose small businesses are going under, who are losing their jobs or any unemployment benefit?

In an earlier article before the elections we said that whatever happened Monti would win. The paradox is that although his slate did badly (just around 10% or less) and people largely voted against his austerity measures he is still the current prime minister. He might even feature in some new Bersani or grand coalition government. In another

sense he also wins because his austerity policies are still firmly in place and the competing parties either endorse them (PD/PDL) or have weak or incoherent alternatives (M5S). Grillo's people have many correct positions on the political caste and some of the reforms can be supported by the radical left but at the end of the day there is an illusion that if political representation can be cleansed and democratised with the help of the internet then the economic questions can be resolved. The centres of real power over the economy are not challenged in Grillo's world. True, there is talk a soft exit from the euro, of the state helping small and medium businesses, of a citizen's income but there is no plan to really deal with the deficit, with the troika or with the bosses who run the key pillars of the economy. The M5S does have many activists who are involved in social or ecological movements like the NO-TAV campaign or the successful anti-water privatisation referendum but it does not have any orientation to the workplace or to working people as a class with potential political leadership. It relates to citizens, or the people or to the idea that each person is equal on the internet. It is essentially an inter-class approach to politics.

Another serious weakness in the M5S movement is the lack of internal democracy or structures which allow activists to express different views to the leadership. In its rejection of all parties it has substituted a web based structure where individuals can express opinions but mostly it is used to relay the line or policies from Grillo or Casaleggio (the internet entrepreneur and other key leader). So the candidates were voted for and selected online. The political brand is owned by Grillo and where there is any dissidence it can be removed. The problem arises when the movement becomes as big as it is now and there are 160 MPs and likely to be many more at local or regional level. Probably Grillo never thought that at this election they would be big enough to be a player in government negotiations so there would not have been pressure to work with the PD. The M5S would have been a straightforward opposition. Already with the discussions on forming a

government there have been strains and disputes. Up to thirty MPs have expressed a desire for some debate with the PD on a government formula. Yesterday all 160 odd MPs were bussed in 3 coaches to a location outside Rome for a heart to heart with the leader. Reports suggest that things have been smoothed over. It is hard to see how it can maintain such a monolithic structure.

Stalemate

It seems clear that Grillo's strategy is to be the opposition to a PD/PDL stitched up government. He is not necessarily opposed to new elections, he believes his refusal to deal will not lose him votes on his left. Some polls suggest he may be right but there are some risks. He thinks that the stalemate will encourage more people to vote for the M5S so they can form a government on their own to carry their big reform.

Today's situation reminds us of one of the great lessons from Ed Miliband's dad's book - *The State in Capitalist Society* (Ralph Miliband). There has been a stalemate in the political system for over a month but the ruling class is still in full control of the levers of power in the economy or other apparatuses of the state. Of course it is a problem for the ruling class if their political system is not working, particularly if people become angry or oppositional to it. Who knows where it might lead? It is a problem that has become more acute not just in Italy but in many countries faced with the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s. Even Britain is experiencing at a lower level the same alienation of people from the mainstream parties and the establishment's political leadership is more complex than in the past - see the coalition.

The class struggle left in Italy is in some disarray. Indeed the break-up of the Rifondazione project - a left-wing split from the old PCI (part predecessor of the PD) as a result of participation with the PDS in the Prodi government left a big space for the M5S to grow. A significant number of Grillo activists were involved in the social anti-global movements that saw huge mobilisations at Genova among

other places. The failure of the Ingroia slate in the recent elections where it failed to reach the quorum necessary for MPs was certainly in part due to the way the mini apparatuses of the radical left like Ferrero's PRC or Di Pietro's Italy of Values party took over a promising coalition around the Cambiare Se Puo appeal. Their main concern was not to build an independently organised electoral coalition linked to a longer term process of building resistance to austerity but rather to do everything to save or regain their representation in parliament. During the election campaign Ingroia spent a lot of time complaining that Bersani was not responding to his offer of collaboration. Predictably its component parts are no longer together.

Vendola's SEL party (Sinistra, Ecologia e Liberta = Left, Ecology and for Liberty), through its alliance with the PD in the elections, now has MPs, indeed the speaker in the lower chamber is a member, and has thus emerged relatively reinforced as a part of the radical left. However its willingness to support a PD that backed all of Monti's austerity policies and to provisionally to have ministers in a new PD led government that Bersani had publicly committed to remain within the Troika framework, means that it is difficult to define it as alternative to the PD. It remains a pressure group from the left to condition somewhat the PD line. Nevertheless it is well placed to recombine with any left wing split from the PD if Renzi were to win the leadership. Then the Vendola leadership would be in a position to build a party with greater influence. Vendola has also been much more active in trying to reach out to the M5S MPs and in trying to find some common ground to work with them on particular issues. It is important to recognise the progressive tendencies in this movement particularly among the local activists. Those who label M5S as fascist or rightwing populist (some in Britain have likened them to UKIP or even talked about Grillosconi) are not just wrong but create a barrier to winning a sector of their base to more class based progressive positions.

Sinistra Critica

It is clearly a time for reflection, rebuilding and perhaps recomposition on the radical left. There is an interesting debate that has been publicly aired by the comrades in Sinistra Critica. It revolves around how you judge the situation in the labour movement. Some are arguing that defeats have been so great and the apparatuses of the movement have become so removed from defending the basic interests of working people that we have to talk about a reconstruction of the labour movement. The task of left activists is to take part in all the independent movements and to build up their space and strength. Putting forward the need to build a revolutionary party is less important at this time than these basic tasks. Other comrades say that although the situation is not great it is not as bad as to talk about rebuilding the structures and that as well as building the campaigning movements there are still opportunities to work in trade union oppositions, to develop membership of an openly revolutionary party and to relate actively to other radical left groups.

We can see how the M5S phenomenon, the break up of the Rifondazione project and the experience of the Ingroia campaign provide the framework for this discussion. What is admirable about this debate is that the group has not split and the different positions are openly discussed and arrangements are made for common work and for different perspectives to be tested out. Some lessons for the British left here.

Despite the despair and resignation that exists there is still an abundance of anger reflected in the spectacular growth of the M5S. Organised resistance has not disappeared, there was a very big demonstration in the Val de Susa after the elections, student struggles were extensive last year and the political instability may lead to further openings. One thing is clear, none of the political parties are preparing any sort of break with Monti's austerity policies. For this reason the troika and the Italian oligarchy will work for a PDL/PD government - most of Napolitano's

efforts are being made in this direction. A lot depends on whether the Bersani wing of the PD holds out

against this and if it does (that is not certain) whether it can win a majority in the party for going back to the

polls.

Salerno, Italy, Saturday April 6 2013

Upon contact with reality at boiling point: positive chemical reaction

9 April 2013, by **Éric Toussaint, Sergio Ferrari**

Sergio Ferrari: What were the most important aspects of this new edition of the WSF?

Eric Toussaint: There was a strong Tunisian presence in many activities. For example, we observed this in the workshops and activities on the debt. Also in the Social Movements Assembly on Friday the 29th. The great interest youth and social movements showed towards this initiative was obvious. This is a very positive aspect of our evaluation.

Q: Does this mean that the WSF comes out of this Maghrebi session strengthened ?

E.T: No doubt about it. WSF has been going through an obvious crisis for some years now. In particular, its International Piloting Committee, as a facilitating body, has faced huge difficulties finding a new dynamic. At the same time, the Social Forum indisputably remains the only worldwide arena and framework where social movements can meet. In this sense, in the absence of an alternative, the WSF remains very important. Since Tunisian and the region's civil society remain actively mobilized, this is a breath of fresh air and renewal for this international occasion. The Social forum, in coming into contact with a society in movement, in ebullition, has produced a chemical reaction; a very interesting interaction that we have observed during this edition.

Q: According to your assessment, holding the WSF in a country and region in turmoil could also be a future antidote against any risk of

institutionalizing this global occasion...

E.T: Precisely. We could imagine an upcoming edition of the WSF in Egypt if a group of organizations there proposed to host it. In fact, Egypt is experiencing a completely electric situation with a trade union movement proportionally stronger in the industrial sector than in Tunisia, with a peasantry hard-hit by the World Bank's neoliberal policies and land privatization; but social explosions could take place in other parts of the world and different scenarios are imaginable.

Q: How can the difficulties and the sort of paralysis faced by the WSF International piloting committee be unblocked?

E.T: I don't have these solutions. I see that a series of forces on the committee want to continue to play this role. Tunis teaches us that a certain point we have to free the terrain and make way for new forces. The CADTM will continue to be a member of the International committee, there are very interesting and dynamic players within it, with whom we collaborate closely. We also know that there is a series of very institutionalized forces that manage the Social Forum "Brand" according to their interests.

Q: Despite all this, you think that we should continue to strengthen it?

E.T: Without a doubt the WSF is useful. We can see, as happened here, that a very positive dynamic is

developing independently of operational problems.

Q: Within this optimistic assessment, what are the negative aspects that emerge from this edition?

E.T: USAID was among the organizations that set up stands. It is a US cooperation agency present in all destabilization operations around the planet. It is an instrument of US government international policy. This organization has no reason to be at the Forum. This is cause for concern, all the more so as it involves a violation of the 2001 Charter of Principles. So I understand the participants who ejected this organization from the perimeter of the El Manar university campus where the Forum was taking place.

We have also seen - just as happened during the earlier 2011 Social Forum in Dakar - that the Moroccan monarchy sent a hundred or so individuals paid to pose as members of non-governmental and social organizations. Some of these were police, whose mission was to prevent anyone from raising the demand for an independent Sahrawian State We saw that in Dakar, and it happened once again on Friday the 29th at the social movements assembly... Provocateurs linked to the Moroccan regime swarmed the floor in an attempt to prevent any reference being made, in the Social Movements declaration, to the necessary solidarity with the Sahrawian people. This was another negative aspect, though it was not the WSF's responsibility. In particular, we have to find ways of

defending Moroccan activists who have the courage to speak out for the democratic right to national

sovereignty.

From Tunis, 30 March 2013

Translated by Marie Lagatta and Mike Krolkowski.

Even the IMF agrees... IMF declarations that do not please European leaders

1 April 2013, by **Éric Toussaint**

Meanwhile, if IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde hinted that the beginning of some austerity measures should be spread over a longer period of time, and that it might be possible to increase some public spending in order to stimulate the economy, this is because she is under pressure from IMF members from emerging countries (especially the Brics, led by China and Brazil), which are fearful of the boomerang effect of the drop in European imports, and criticise the importance of the IMF's financial engagement in Europe. The IMF's Managing Director expressed this point of view in Tokyo, at the annual assembly of the IMF and World Bank in October 2012. The IMF document and Christine Lagarde's recommendations made European leaders react with discontent. For example, in Tokyo, Wolfgang Schäuble, the Finance Minister of Merkel's government, publicly criticised Christine Lagarde for her untimely remarks. [2]

Wolfgang Münchau considers that the reservations expressed by the IMF on the depth of the austerity measures will in no way modify the attitude of European leaders who are sticking to a hard line position: "European policy makers are paranoid about their credibility, and I expect them to hold on to austerity until the bitter end, when the policy implodes" [3]

The tension between the IMF and the European Commission was expressed publicly again on 14 November 2012. Christine Lagarde contradicted the optimism expressed by Jean-Claude Juncker (Luxembourg), who is President of the Eurogroup,

concerning the outlooks for Greece. The IMF seems to want to put pressure on the Commission in order to increase its influence on the direction that should be taken in Europe. Emerging countries and the United States have been taking action within the IMF to influence the solutions adopted concerning the European crisis, especially since they are being asked to make a financial contribution.

The IMF looks back on the historical failures of brutal austerity policies

Much has been written about another IMF study, a chapter in its World Economic Outlook report, which was published just before its annual assembly in October 2012. In this chapter, the IMF studies 26 public debt crisis episodes since 1875, in which public debt was greater than 100% of GDP. It analyses the policies that were applied to resolve these crises. One of the episodes analysed was that of the United Kingdom after the First World War. British public debt stood at 140% of GDP. The British government applied a radical policy of fiscal austerity combined with a stringent monetary policy. By making large cuts to expenditures, the government achieved a primary fiscal surplus of nearly 7% of GDP (before the payment of interest) throughout the 1920s, in order to reduce British

debt by strictly paying it back. However, public debt did not decrease: in 1930, it was 170% of GDP, and three years later in 1933, it was more than 190% of GDP.

Martin Wolf, the chief economics commentator at the Financial Times, states that the real objective of the British government policy "was to break organised labour. These policies resulted in the general strike of 1926. They spread a bitterness that lasted decades after the second world war." [4] This is exactly what is being done in Europe today. [5] Wolf suggests that European policymakers and the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy want to push down wages drastically by using unemployment as a weapon. He states that: "Meanwhile, Spain's real GDP is shrinking. Efforts to tighten fiscal policy are sure to reduce it further." He continues his analysis by stating that the Italian government has been inspired by the same policy. He concludes with a statement that may seem unusual coming from a star journalist at one of the principal financial dailies on the planet: "But fiscal austerity and efforts to lower wages in countries suffering from monetary strangulation could break societies, governments and even states." In fact, as Martin Wolf has been insisting for months, it is because of austerity measures that countries are heading straight for disaster. As proof of his analysis, he points to the overwhelming electoral defeat of Mario Monti in March 2013 in Italy.

As Wolfgang Münchau writes, European policymakers are going to

continue pursuing and aggravating these policies.

Why are European policymakers pushing for such harsh austerity policies?

It would be a mistake to believe that European policymakers have become blind. Their motivation is neither to return to economic growth, nor to balance the asymmetric relationships within the eurozone and the EU, so as to create a more coherent whole in which prosperity would reign. Corporate leaders, who shape government action, would like to push forward their great offensive against the hard-won social rights obtained in Europe after the Second World War. From this point of view, the policies pursued recently have been very successful. With the austerity policies that have increased unemployment, workers find themselves in an increasingly precarious position, their capacity to resist and fight has been radically decreased, wages and the various social benefits have been reduced while the tremendous disparities between workers within the EU have been maintained so as to increase the competition between them. One of the objectives pursued by European policymakers is to improve the capacity of European companies to increase their market

share throughout the world. To accomplish this goal, the “cost of labour must be radically cut”, as they would say. That would imply inflicting a major defeat on European workers. Other objectives are also being pursued: pushing even further the offensive against public services, avoiding as much as possible a new crash in the banking sector, further strengthening the executive powers (the European Commission and national governments) over the legislative powers, imposing tighter constraints through treaties that set in stone policies that favour the Capitalist agenda...

The political and electoral price to pay may be high, but generally speaking the major political families that dominate European politics have made the bet that even if they lose in the current elections, they will win in the next ones and return to power. In any case, moving over to the opposition does not mean losing a whole set of privileges already acquired in the central State government apparatus, and European institutions, not to mention the local powers they may have (in big cities, regional governments, and so on).

What is complicating the European policymakers' project is the Obama administration's decision to pursue radical austerity policies in the footsteps of the Bush administration. In particular, fiscal cuts in public and social spending are going to be even deeper in the United States. These reductions will not help European companies win market share there.

Only Japan seems to be willing to adopt what is only a half-hearted stimulus policy, but this must still be confirmed.

Conclusion: In light of the objectives described above, there is a total convergence between the IMF and European policymakers. Furthermore, since December 2012, when the Obama administration announced that it intended to tighten austerity measures in the United States, we have no longer heard any critical declarations by Christine Lagarde or other leaders aimed at the IMF concerning the policies pursued in Europe.

We must not misjudge the deeper meaning of the IMF's declarations: if it has taken a bit of distance with respect to European policymakers, it is not to convince them to abandon the structural adjustment policies that are favourable to privatisations and a more intense offensive against the social rights won after the Second World War. It would like to have more influence on the decisions made, and impose its own. We shall see in the upcoming months whether or not it continues asserting that it would be a good idea to slow down the rhythm at which European policymakers want to balance their budgets. While the research produced by some IMF departments contains arguments that contradict dominant policies more or less clearly, the IMF's actions throughout the world have not changed an iota. These are the actions against which we must combat with all our force.

Ecosocialist Network ready for action

1 April 2013, by **Bernard Rioux**

They included members of existing collectives in QS such as Masse critique, Gauche socialiste, Alternative socialiste and Socialisme international. But the majority by far were members independent of any collective. The meeting adopted a

statement of principles (base de regroupement) and some statutes, and elected an executive.

By no means merely an ideological coalition, the Réseau hopes to be a center for action-oriented initiatives.

The meeting was opened by four panelists who discussed the bases for ecosocialism, the major ecology concepts, the role of social movements in the process of social transformation, and the ecosocialist experiences in a number of “left of the

left” parties, especially in Europe.

What is the basis for coalition and action of the Réseau écosocialiste?

Following a presentation on the draft statement of founding principles, the meeting then discussed it along with a series of proposed amendments.

Here is a summary of the major propositions adopted. They point to a triple crisis in the period opened by the Great Recession of 2008: an economic crisis; an environmental crisis arising out of an unsustainable mode of production and consumption; and a crisis of democracy, which is emptied of any content by an all-powerful financial oligarchy. In short, we are experiencing a global systemic crisis that demonstrates the impasse of contemporary capitalism, increasingly incapable of meeting the fundamental needs of humanity.

Ecosocialism is a new political project developed in response to this impasse. To overcome the present crises, we need to end the search for maximum profit, consumerism and productivism. While ecosocialism undertakes to deepen and renew the emancipatory project of socialism in 21st century conditions, it differs from the “20th century socialisms” which failed in terms of ecology, democracy, and social equity.

That is why ecosocialism values democracy, self-management and egalitarianism and rejects the green capitalism defended by Social Democracy, which claims we can overcome the present ecological crisis without challenging capitalism, the system responsible for this crisis. Ecosocialism proposes instead a democratically administered economy that breaks from the consumerism, commodification and privatization of all aspects of life. Ecosocialism poses the need to participate in social and environmental struggles alongside all those who are resisting.

This essentially entails reorganizing the economy on a radically democratic foundation, renewing democracy at all levels, and promoting the convergence of social and political struggles. Instead of domination by the private sector, it means establishing ecological and participatory planning oriented to meeting the real needs of people in a way that is respectful of ecosystems. We need to break with the production priorities of the major energy, mining or industrial proprietors and the banks, which profit only them.

The founding principles of the Réseau écosocialiste emphasize in particular the need to link Québec solidaire to the social movements, not only by demonstrating the needed solidarity with them but by participating in their debates, to help define together some common perspectives for resistance to the plans of Big Business. In order to contribute to this process, Québec solidaire must be attentive to those of its members who are active in the various social movements.

Some tasks for the Réseau écosocialiste...

These tasks will be organized around the following themes:

Establish a center for the development of ecosocialist perspectives, in order to be able to participate in the programmatic and tactical debates of Québec solidaire;

Propose campaigns and activities in opposition to the austerity, anti-ecology and patriarchal policies of the ruling classes;

Defend democracy within the party and help to deepen it;

Build and consolidate the presence of Québec solidaire in the various social movements and adopt structures that can facilitate this task;

Organize and lead debates and educational on ecosocialist perspectives; and

Build links with ecosocialist organizations on a global scale.

The discussion at the Montréal meeting revealed a broad unity of views around the proposed

orientation. Participants were explicit in their recognition that the ecosocialist current worldwide is characterized by varying sensibilities, but they felt that the proposed founding principles were sufficiently flexible to welcome these differing approaches. Much of the discussion focused on how to strengthen the anti-patriarchal dimension of the ecosocialism that we defend. It was felt that ecosocialism must also include the abolition of patriarchy among its objectives. The establishment of an ecosocialist society must take into account the demands of women and the fundamental nature of the fight against patriarchy.

Important debate on the statutes

The statutes define the terms of membership, the role and powers of the general assembly as the highest body in the network, and the status of the regional assemblies and the inter-regional coordinating body. They also define the tasks of the executive committee and the division of labour within it.

The debates focused mainly around two issues: the conditions for membership in the Réseau and the statutory creation of working committees in which the members can be involved.

The first debate was over the proposal that “the members of the network are members of Québec solidaire who adhere to the basis of unity and contribute to the financing and activity of the Réseau.”

Questions were raised about the degree of openness of the Réseau. If it was to set its task as one of working in particular to develop Québec solidaire as a party of the streets, it followed “according to the supporters of this option” that participation in the Réseau should be limited to members of Québec solidaire. Others, however, argued that the ecosocialist perspective could have a broader appeal, and it seemed desirable that anyone defining himself or herself as an ecosocialist should be able to join

the Réseau. The debate produced a compromise solution: anyone who is a member of Québec solidaire or in political solidarity with the party could join the Réseau. This proposal was adopted.

As for the working committees, this founding meeting agreed to establish the following committees: a women's committee, a communications committee, an educational committee, and a committee for "a party of the streets." These choices demonstrated the members' desire to engage in action as rapidly as possible. As it happens, these committees, which are formed on a volunteer basis, recruited a fair number of members — especially the committee for "a party of the streets."

Election of the executive

The draft statutes proposed to elect an executive committee "composed of six persons, including at least three women" and "representative of the regions." In order to guarantee better representation of the diversity of members, the meeting decided to increase the number of members of this committee and to include at least four women. The elections produced a very welcome surprise; the executive will be composed of five women and three men. Unfortunately, some very valuable nominees were eliminated, but there is no lack of outlets for involvement in the Réseau.

The Réseau écosocialiste: an achievement for the left of the left, an achievement for Québec solidaire

The founding of the Réseau écosocialiste is an important moment in the consolidation of the left of the left in Quebec. It is part of the process of unifying the political left in Quebec that began more than a decade ago. It will constitute an achievement because it will strengthen the capacity of Québec solidaire to enter into the essential debates and struggles to come in response to the ecological crisis of the capitalist system, and will help to attract to the party some sectors of the youth who radicalized during the printemps érable, the Maple Spring.

From [Climate and Capitalism](#)