



IV468 - January 2014

Thanks to the "Dieudonné affair" we will no longer confuse anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism

30 January 2014, by **Julien Salingue**

But thanks to the recent "Dieudonné affair", such accusations are no longer relevant. Things are now in fact clear, and this is perhaps the only positive element of the balance sheet of the tragic political sequence of events that we have just experienced. It will now be difficult to confuse anti-Zionism, understood as a political critique of the foundations, structures and policies of the State of Israel, and anti-Semitism, understood as hatred of Jews. It will now be difficult to imply that opposition to Zionism, a political position which is open to question but which is legitimate, conceals in reality a purely racist rejection of Jews as such.

"Anti-Zionism, a legitimate ideology"

Where does this certainty come from? From the tenor of the debate that has accompanied the "Dieudonné affair", and the clarification that it has made possible; from the motives put forward by those who wanted to ban the performance of *The Wall*; from the positions adopted by certain figures who claim to be combating anti-

Semitism. Let us take as an illustration of this the following quotation from Alain Finkielkraut, whom we will not waste time, for the sake of brevity, in presenting to our readers [1]: "Anti-Zionism, even the most militant, even the most radical, seems to me a legitimate ideology. We have the right not only to criticize the policies of the State of Israel, but even to question the legitimacy of this state".

Amazing, is it not? For those familiar with Finkielkraut, especially those who remember that he accused the Israeli director Eyal Sivan of "Jewish anti-Semitism" after the film *Route 181* came out, will not fail to be surprised. But it is only fools who do not change their minds, right? Let us rejoice indeed because the "Dieudonné case" has opened the eyes of Alain Finkielkraut and many of his colleagues: "The anti-Zionism of Dieudonné has nothing to do [with anti-Zionism]. It is not geographical, since it bestows on those it calls Zionists the two attributes of omnipresence and omnipotence. This is not an opinion, it is a criminal ideology".

Here we find the core of the argument of those who have demanded a ban on

Dieudonné's performances: the problem is not that he criticizes Israel (or even that he questions its legitimacy), but that he makes anti-Semitic statements and develops anti-Semitic arguments. You only have to watch the symptomatic indictment of Alain Jakubowicz of the LICRA [2] during Frederick TaddeÅ's programme, "This Evening (Or Never!)", broadcast on January 10, to be convinced of it: the incriminating declarations of Dieudonné are insults and abuse against Jews (or Jewish personalities), the minimization and trivialization of the Nazi genocide is emphasized, as are his contacts with characters like Soral and Faurisson [3]

But at no time is there mention of what Dieudonné might have to say about Israel or the Palestinians, in other words about Zionism, understood as the project of the establishment in Palestine of a "Jewish State", its creation, its structures, its development and its policies. This is an implicit recognition that a critical, even a radical evocation of Zionism, is not tantamount to anti-Semitism, it is not a crime and therefore cannot be condemned by a court. It is an implicit recognition that therefore there is a qualitative difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, that it is

contrary to intellectual rigour to seek to confuse the two, and that there must be an end to many bad kinds of criminal proceedings.

Obviously, some people, like the CRIF, Pascal Bruckner or the unspeakable Arno Klarsfeld, have tried once again to amalgamate Zionism and anti-Semitism [4]. That is in no way surprising on the part of this institution and these individuals who are in fact, like the most Zionists among the Zionists, the inverted reflection of Dieudonné and others, because they claim like them to essentialize Jews by systematically identifying them, in spite of what they might think, with a State of Israel that further defines itself, let us remember, as the "Jewish State." But the editorialists and political leaders who have transformed the "Dieudonné affair" into an affair of state have recognized, aloud or in murmured tones, that it was not the anti-Zionism (real or perceived) of Dieudonné that was in question. And some even went further, stating that the "Zionism" denounced by Dieudonné was a fantasized construction, far from the real Zionism, and that it was intended to conceal a stigmatization of Jews in general.

Dieudonné, an anti-Zionist?

The above opinion is shared, for very different reasons, by the author of these lines. People will remember, for example, this striking declaration by Dieudonné during an interview with the Iranian television channel *Sahar TV* in 2011: "Zionism killed Christ. It is Zionism that claims that Jesus was the son of a whore". Zionism, for Dieudonné and his cronies (I am thinking of Alain Soral and Yahia Gouasmi) is primarily Judaism. Zionism, for Dieudonné and his cronies, is then a transnational entity, vaguely defined, which dictates its policies to banks, Western governments and the media. Zionism, for Dieudonné and his cronies is the source of the economic, political and social crisis affecting people in the four corners of the earth. We are very far from Israel and the Palestinians. Is it therefore a coincidence that on the

posters of the "Zionist List" presented in the 2009 European elections, we do not find the words "Israel" or "Palestine"? Is it a coincidence that in the 15 points of the programme of the "Anti- Zionist Party", allied with Dieudonné and Soral during those elections, we do not find the words "Israel" or "Palestine"?

Obviously not.

As we have been reminded by various organizations in solidarity with Palestine, Dieudonné and his clique do not serve the Palestinian struggle. In reality, Dieudonné and his clique are using the Palestinian struggle, which when it comes down to it they do not care a fig about, in order to occupy the political space vacated by the desertions and betrayals of the Left. They occupy it by exploiting very real social and political issues, reducing them to a struggle against an imaginary "Zionism", while abandoning the field of battle against the really existing Zionism, only referring to the Palestinian question when it is in the news. Furthermore the State of Israel is quite aware of this, and is much more concerned about the development of the international BDS (Boycott - Divestment - Sanctions) campaign than by the "dumplings" of Dieudonné and the monologues of Alain Soral.

Some people will obviously try (and are already trying) to use the "Dieudonné affair" to discredit all the organizations and individuals which affirm their solidarity with the Palestinians. But, paradoxically, the sequence of events that we have just experienced enables us to clarify things, and hence to combat this type of specious reasoning. Indeed, the political class, the vast majority of intellectuals and almost all editorialists have just (unintentionally) reminded us of this essential truth: anti-Zionism, understood as a political critique of the foundations, structures and policies of the State of Israel should not be confused with the superficial "anti-Zionism" of Dieudonné and his cronies, and cannot be amalgamated with anti-Semitism.

The fiercest critics of Dieudonné have ultimately, despite themselves, done a job of cleansing the public debate:

they have given recognition to political criticism of the State of Israel and to genuine anti-Zionism, distinguishing them carefully from anti-Semitism. Will they continue on this path? Nothing is less certain. They will probably do not ask for the repeal of the Alliot-Marie circular, which criminalizes the boycott of Israel, a political campaign that has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. They will probably not demand that anti-Zionism, a legitimate political position, can now make its voice heard in the media during debates on Israel and the Palestinians.

Indeed, it is most likely that they have not realized, absorbed as they were by their crusade against Dieudonné, the service that they have just potentially rendered to all those who are sincerely convinced that the best service that can be rendered to the struggle against anti-Semitism is, in the last analysis, to combat a confusion that ultimately serves those who want to make all sorts of amalgamations.

But the breach has been opened.

Appendix 1: the official poster of the "anti-Zionist List"



Appendix 2: the programme of the "Anti- Zionist Party "

Political programme of the Anti-Zionist Party

1. Remove Zionist interference in the affairs of the nation.
2. Denounce all politicians who are apologists for Zionism.
3. Eradicate all forms of Zionism in the nation.
4. Prevent companies and institutions from contributing to the war effort of a foreign nation that does not respect international law.
5. Free our state, our government and our institutions from the domination and pressure of Zionist organizations.
6. Free the media, for a plurality of information to promote freedom of

expression.

7. Promote the free expression of politics, culture, philosophy and religion and free them from Zionism.

8. Restore power to France and to the French people according to the new geopolitical and economic rules, on the major issues that engage the responsibility of the nation.

9. No longer involve France in wars of

colonization and repatriate our armies stationed in Africa, Afghanistan and everywhere in the world.

10. Demand a referendum on any new engagement of France abroad.

11. Establish a bill to prohibit those with dual nationality from participating in wars without an explicit mandate from the nation.

12. Prohibit all militias, regardless of their religious denomination.

13. Initiate a national dialogue to raise awareness for a project of society that excludes any advocacy of Zionism.

14. Establish proportional representation so that all the components of society are represented.

15. Advocate the establishment of a society of justice, progress and tolerance.

The Bolivarian Process without Chávez: 2013 a year of uncertainty, 2014 a year of definitions

30 January 2014, by Alexander Marin, Carlos Carcione, Gonzalo Gomez, Juan Garcia, Stalin Pérez Borges, Zuleika Matamoros

So this is not just one more balance sheet. It has historic features . Is it possible to advance towards the final conquest of Independence ? Will we be able to break the ties with Venezuela's dependent and parasitic capitalism ? Will it be possible to move forwards to the remaining tasks of the Bolivarian Democratic Revolution , turning this into a transition to anti-capitalism and socialism ? Will the leaders of the Process be up to the task? Or conversely, will they go all the way in applying the counter reforms demanded by the bourgeoisie and which these leaders have shown some readiness to apply, in exchange for a political system that is not that of the Process? These questions, among others, marked the level of uncertainty that reigned in 2013 and the answers to them will decide the future of the Revolution.

The death of the Commander had the impact of an earthquake. For more than ten days, in a huge parade of loyalty, the Bolivarian People mourned their leader. Over 7 million people

paid their last respects and swore to continue the struggle. They did not obey the order to close the doors of the chapel where Chávez lay in state, and as on so many occasions before, they imposed their will. They had not rescued their president from the April coup and the country from the bosses' lockout to stand outside the gates at this most painful of all the moments of the past 20 years.

They had to see and to swear. And they did, even though just a month earlier, on February 8, the standard of living of the people had received a great blow. The devaluation previously denied by the authorities, was enacted on the Friday before the Carnival holidays, in the best neoliberal style, leaving the people poorer.

Since then, the most serious economic crisis of this period became clear for all to see. It is a crisis which, whether through the passivity, innocence or complicity of sectors of the government, the right-wing opposition turned into a War against the Process,

with the aim of defeating it. The numbers of this crisis speak for themselves: inflation at over 50 %, 30 % of shortages in essential goods, gross manipulation of prices, the evaporation of people's wages, blatant speculation with the parallel dollar, disproportionate growth of the fiscal deficit, the application of gangster-like procedures to appropriate the dollars assigned for imports, among many other things, are the emerging evidence of a structural economic phenomenon: the struggle over the control and distribution of Venezuela's Oil Rent, which now, without Chávez, the local bourgeoisie and foreign capital associated with key sectors of the state bureaucracy, felt it was time to recapture completely.

Forty days after the death of Commander Chávez, the presidential election gave Nicolas Maduro the slimmest of victories. The country's streets were stained with blood, 15 revolutionary militants (one associated with Marea Socialista) were killed by the counter-revolutionary call to

"express your anger" made by Capriles who would not recognize his new defeat, a crime that remains unpunished. The opposition launched a national and international campaign to further weaken the government. And encouraged the discontent that already existed because of the crisis that its local and international financiers were promoting, turning it into an economic war.

For his part, President Maduro and the government political team, instead of calling on the Bolivarian People, sought the support they thought they had lost in the vote, by building an agreement with leading businessmen and their chambers of commerce, in the vain hope of solving some economic problems those same sectors were creating. You could see the impudence with which Lorenzo Mendoza [5] asked Maduro on national television that the state food companies be handed over to him so that he could get them producing. Yet the fact is you still can't find the Harina Pan [6] that his companies are supposed to be delivering to retailers. And so, while the government sought stability, yielding to the demands of the employers, the crisis deepened and the situation came close to the brink.

The turning point came on November 6. When President Nicolas Maduro decided to take emergency measures against speculation and usury, measures that were strongly supported the people. These measures boosted the morale of the Chavista people who were upset, disoriented and, with their discontent about to burst, were pressing for a change of course. The pressure generated a strong current of opinion on the left of the process, leading to a debate and proposals that the government, previously paralysed, took on board. And the beginning of street demonstrations, although quite weak, showed the importance of popular participation in the development of policy. So in the streets and in workplaces, the shift in mood could be clearly felt. You sense that people were in tune with these emergency measures taken by the president. And an important side effect was the disorientation of the opposition, which was left exposed, defending the

usurers and speculators, with the purely ideological argument of the defence of private property... that of the speculators. This change was expressed very clearly in the municipal elections on 8 December. We will not go here into the numbers, but in general we support the analysis by Javier Biardeau in his document: "Analyse with a cool head: the electoral difference between government and opposition", <http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a...>

First the emergency measures and then the election results gave the government a new lease of life. However, given the structural severity of the crisis, if it does not deepen this new course, the recovery will not last and, indeed, it is already showing signs of running out of steam. Leaving aside the substantive measures such as the creation of a Single Centre for Imports and a Foreign Trade Corporation, which the government has scarcely mentioned since, it seems that the idea is simply to move toward a reorganization of the old scheme of a mixed economy. Moreover, the meeting between President Maduro and the opposition mayors and governors, full of "Christmas goodwill", shows worrying signs in relation to the type of political system the government wants to agree, all in the pursuit of "stability", with the political leaders of a "united" opposition, which has for now run its course and which is beginning to lose credibility among its own supporters.

In 2014, a year with no elections in sight, will see all these points of conflict come into the open. After the economic measures and the municipal elections that gave victory to the government, what we are seeing is the frozen image of a photograph that will burst back into movement. The hostile forces that the government wants to bring together with a call for "peace" - which ever since Chávez came to power in 1999 the oligarchy has shown it does not respect - are irreconcilably opposed to one another and will clash under pressure from the depth of the economic crisis. What position the government adopts in the face of these clashes, which have already started, will determine whether it is strengthened or weakened. 2014, free from electoral

distortions, will undoubtedly be a year of definitions.

Putting order in the mixed economy or moving towards a new, independent and sovereign model?

The latest economic announcements suggest that the chosen path is to sort out and clean up the old model of a mixed economy, expanding the opportunities for private capital to accumulate. That means the participation of the bourgeoisie in the distribution of the oil rent. The adjustment of the economy's highly distorted prices is starting with an attempt to eliminate "subsidies" without touching the structural basis of this distortion, and to administer in a more "orderly" fashion the allocation of dollars for imports.

The promised consultation on increasing domestic petrol prices - a consultation that will not be genuine unless based on a referendum as provided for in the Constitution - is an example of this approach. However, there is no mention of other profoundly outdated prices, like that of wages for example. This is not the place for a detailed study, but just taking the minimum wage and comparing it with the prices of basic goods, it is clear that its purchasing power fell by at least half in the last year. The proposed gradual increase in the price of petrol will have a sharp regressive impact if it is not accompanied by at least a similar adjustment in wages. This said, such a mechanism can only work as an emergency measure.

The policy of regulating prices in the domestic economy through administrative procedures, while necessary in the emergency, has a strongly voluntarist character. It does not take account of the fact that, given the rentier character of Venezuela's dependent capitalism, these prices are

formed in a dispute between different social sectors for the appropriation of oil revenues, that is the wealth captured abroad by selling oil. Therefore, unless the dependence on oil rent is broken, and a new productive model established, these prices which today are held in check with legitimate emergency measures, will not be corrected over the medium and long term through simple administrative regulation.

However, it is not just any productive model that has to be built. If we want to defend the Bolivarian process, and given the evident failure over the last ten years of the mixed economy model, we have to move in the direction of taking structurally anti-capitalist measures. In this sense, to be faithful to spirit of the Bolivarian Process, there are three economic levers that should be applied as the beginning of a plan:

a) Not one more dollar to the bourgeoisie. Absolute state control of oil rents and of the dollars in which this is expressed.

b) Monopoly of Foreign Trade with strict social control.

c) State Monopoly of credit allocation, in order to finance the new productive model.

Only in this framework will the correction of prices that profoundly distort the domestic economy, like that of petrol, achieve their objectives. Otherwise, they will feed an inflationary bonfire whose consequences will be suffered first and foremost by who live on their wages. This is why the proposed debate on the price of petrol or that proposed for electricity prices, should be in the context of an overall discussion, including: a new tax system involving the elimination of anti-popular taxes such as VAT, combined with higher taxes on profits, financial speculation and luxury goods, among others. That is a tax regime that makes those who have more, pay more. Similarly, recovery of the dollars stolen from the State through the falsification and manipulation of imports revealed in SITME, and now in CADIVI too, is an essential step in financing the plan. In

other words, we say the debate has to look at the whole picture, and not just petrol prices.

What's behind the social clashes to come

The sense of emerging political stability resulting from the Chavista victory in the municipal elections is the superficial expression of a combination of temporary factors:

a) The emergency measures against usury and speculation that had highly positive impact.

b) Being November and December, it's the time of year when year-end bonuses are paid, meaning those who work to live get on average two and a half months additional pay.

Once this temporary situation has passed, the crisis will again show its cruellest face. In fact, even if the measures against usury and speculation affecting basic items such as food and property are maintained and extended, as the people hope they will be, and even if they succeed in bringing prices back down to the level they were at last May, wages will not have recovered their purchasing power, because at that point they had already suffered a depreciation of about 30%.

This, coupled with the counter-reforms already being promoted by private sector employers and state-sector managers, which are attacking the economic, social and socio-economic gains won by workers, herald a situation of intense conflicts. Here are some examples:

a) The failure of private companies and ministries to pay their workers' HCM health insurance contributions, has caused acute problems of medical care. One example is that of teachers; an large part of the country's 600,000 primary teachers have no health cover, and this at a time when the public health system is in a state of collapse.

b) The paralisation of important collective bargaining agreements.

c) The inadequate and unfair character of many collective agreements that have been signed, leading to a serious lag in wage levels, as in the case of healthcare workers.

d) Discontent among car workers as a result of a decree intended to control car prices, but which is favouring vehicle importers and damaging the contractual rights of car workers, for example their annual quota to buy cars directly in factories where they work.

e) Dissatisfaction among cultural workers as a result of the decree to intervene in the Teresa Carreño Theatre, decided without consulting the workers and putting at risk the rights they have won.

f) And the irregular and inadequate functioning of the workers' and house-to-house MERCALs and PDVALS (subsidised food markets).

There are also other practices under way that for want of a better name we will also call counter-reforms:

a) The anti-trade union policies of the Ministry of Labour that favour the employers. For example, nearly two years without legalizing any new unions. Barriers and obstacles to normalizing the situation of those that already exist. The dismantling of the occupational health and safety system, and the attacks on health and safety reps. Plus the obstacles to trade union normalisation demanded in the Organic Labour Law of the National Electoral Council, the CNE.

b) The refusal of employers to implement key clauses of the new Labour Law, for example in adjusting the working week.

c) Finally, we cannot fail to note that the role of new managements or interventions in state enterprises by the military, is causing increasing discontent among the workers in these companies and a paralysis of production that seems in many cases to be deliberate.

We shall not dwell on this list which of course could be much longer. But it was necessary to spell out some of them because these are the real causes of discontent, which once the

holiday season is over, will reappear in full force and lead to conflicts and struggles.

The political expression of these social forces

The conflicts that will develop after the Christmas period is over will take the form of struggles over specific demands and will most likely be isolated from each other. And it's probable that for this reason they will be unjustly attacked, even though they will not lose their strength and impact. However despite the specific nature of these struggles, they will express the economic and political dispute over the need to build a new anti-capitalist, productive model, as an effective way, from the workers' point of view, of overcoming the current crisis.

In this period it will become clear if the CSBT (Bolivarian and Socialist Workers' Central, the main pro-government union confederation) is going to continue playing the role of firefighter in such conflicts, maintaining its extreme dependence on the government. Because if this role does not change radically, workers will not wait for a few leaders far removed from their members, but will take their own path. Reality will push them in this direction. If, as is rumoured, one of the main political advisers of the CSBT is appointed to head the currently lacklustre and discredited Ministry of Labour, the pressure of the workers will also demand that this body take a more forceful role, which it hasn't done so far. [7] At the same time, because these coming conflicts will be profoundly political, similar in content to the fight that led to the nationalization of the steel works, Sidor, in 2008, they will also put to the test those that currently claim to be the political leaders of the Bolivarian People.

In this sense the role played by the PSUV (Venezuelan United Socialist Party) and the Great Patriotic Pole (the alliance of pro-government parties around the PSUV) in the municipal elections, should not

confuse their leaders. If the leadership of the PSUV believes, as it is currently claiming, that the party has consolidated its hegemony as the representative of the Chavista people, it will find itself confronted with an even more serious haemorrhaging of its membership than in the recent past. Strictly speaking, the municipal elections were the PSUV's last chance but one as the party seen by the Chavista people as their own in the electoral field. In the last few years it has tended to squeeze out grassroots activists and cadre with any critical attitude or even just with political concerns. It has changed its organizational form to make it almost impossible for anyone to play an active part unless they come under the umbrella of one of the various power groups within the government. It has become a party of cronies trading official posts and seeking to control decision making bodies. It functions as an electoral machine that has lost any kind of democratic practice. As a current within the party we can confidently say that this is not just our view, but that of many prominent leaders, cadres and activists whose criticisms are even sharper than ours. In any case, the calling of the PSUV's long overdue Congress is essential to try to make the profound changes needed in the PSUV as it currently stands.

On the other hand, the parties of the Great Patriotic Pole - and we are talking about the parties that really exist as tendencies within the Bolivarian project, not the shameful electoral franchises that have appeared recently - should reflect seriously on their role. After a good electoral performance in October 2012, they have faded as alternatives to the vices that the Chavista people criticise in the PSUV. The new period we are entering means they too must contemplate a progressive transformation, breaking with clientelism, and promoting democratic practices that make it possible to develop revolutionary policies in a plural and critical way.

In terms of the organization of the political forces of the revolution we are also entering a defining moment. For now, we hope to have the opportunity to present our positions

and to feel represented in the Party Congress, so that we can fight there for the transformation of this administrative machine into a living, democratic and pluralistic movement, where different currents of opinion they can feel represented and get heard, and thus help deepen the Bolivarian process in an anti-capitalist direction.

This point would be incomplete if we didn't also note the profound crisis in the political representation of the right-wing opposition. The municipal elections showed, from the political point of view, and aside from the numbers, the weakness of this opposition as an alternative to Chavismo for working people. Without this support, it is unlikely they will be able to return to government through electoral means. The defeat they suffered on 8 December, more than just electoral, which it is, is political. Their project of "unity", seeking to become the alternative to Chavismo and build a new political system that could fill the space left vacant by the death of Commander Chávez, was defeated. This crisis and its internal dynamics of squabbles over leadership and possible splits, is, for the moment, a factor in favour of the government and its political stability, albeit an unpredictable one. But here too we can expect new developments.

The challenges of 2014 for working people

While continuing to fully defend the gains of the process, i.e. the revolutionary legacy of Chávez, the Bolivarian People, and beyond them, all those who live from their labour, will face three key challenges in 2014. These are the same challenges that will face those of us who, as part of that people, seek to move forward in the transition to socialism. They are:

a) To restore living standards lost in the crisis. Today, in the middle of the Christmas period, people are finding it difficult to maintain their standard of living. The shortages have not gone away, but above all the crisis and the economic war have evaporated the

purchasing power of wages. From every rank and file union body, from every Federation, every Workers' Council, every organised group of workers, the demand must be made loud and clear for the restoration of the family income. This will be to begin with a local struggle, but we must also take it to the national level. Therefore it is essential that from each of these struggles there is pressure on the CSBT to demand of the government a solution to this serious problem.

b) To use the government's proposal to discuss price lags as a way of opening up a national debate in which we as working people can outline the new production model of the transition. The task of building this new productive model should be in the hands of working people. We can not wait for a solution to drop from the sky. There are sectors of our working class who have already generated important inputs to this debate, such as the Socialist Guayana Plan. We can begin this debate by discussing in each company the government's plan to increase the price of petrol. This debate is an opportunity to propose including wages in the prices that are out of date. And it is also an opportunity to ensure that the consultation takes the form of a referendum. In this way we will begin to build from the grass roots the Workers' Constituent Assembly [8] and kind of production we need to define the new productive model that this Process needs.

c) To develop the programme and the organisational form of the current, movement, or political party that can represent the left of the Bolivarian process. The year 2013 has clarified the political differences within the Chavista camp over the future course of the Process. Important debates have developed, especially over how to confront the crisis and the economic war. These discussions have shown that the radical left of the Process has important contributions to make, and these were clearly seen in the way the emergency measures were applied. But there are other areas in which the left of the Process has positions and contributions to make, for example in the field of the defence of the democratic rights of

social activists like Julian Conrado [9] or Basque Asier [10]. Or the fight against impunity for those who carry out or plan the murders and persecution of social activists, like the indigenous leader, Sabino, [11] or peasant and labour movement leaders. Or the opposition to giving an amnesty to those responsible for the Llaguno Bridge massacre and other crimes committed during the April 2002 coup and sabotage, for example, Simonovis. [12] Or the struggle for the effective implementation of gender rights or in the field of environmental rights. Or the deepening democratic participation in the construction of anti-capitalism and our socialism. Or in the field of workers' control and social oversight. Or in the area of active and concrete, international solidarity with peoples struggling around the world, like the heroic Palestinian people who are suffering the greatest genocide in history at the hands of the Nazi Israeli regime. Or in many other areas where so many of our currents, platforms and other organisations share the same approach. The development of a shared programme for this political space on the Left of the Process is crucial to make all these positions visible and break the media boycott imposed on critical thinking.

d) One of the most characteristic features of the Bolivarian process was, from its inception, making visible those hitherto invisible. It began to give voice to those who had had no public voice. Critical thinking was given importance. Fundamental rights were extended to those who had been excluded. As a result there was an intense process of debate and of politicization of the Bolivarian People. Conferences, meetings and a multitude of international activities found in this country a place to meet and discuss, as well as to express their solidarity the Process. Our people came together in squares and streets, but also in a vast array of halls and meeting spaces that could be used for all the essential debates of the Bolivarian Process, without anyone asking which revolutionary organisation had called the meeting or debate. The different spaces available could be used by all, to strengthen the education, organization and awareness of the revolutionary people.

Countless groups formed, a strong and vital movement of popular communication was born and developed in the heat of the moment, driven by highly committed activists and often getting support from the State. Community radios and TVs, alternative newspapers, websites, all defending the Process, were the vehicles for hearing the voices those who previously had been silenced and made invisible. Today that democratic and participatory explosion is in danger: the space for debate is drastically reduced, and only those sectors or groups that toe the official "line" get a hearing. Popular and alternative communication is finding it harder and harder to carry out its mission, the frequencies of community radios are squeezed out, there's no more support for printing popular newspapers, the alternative media that show the people's struggles or give space to critical voices are coming under pressure, and many of the leading figures of this democratic expression have been removed from the public media. Critical thinking is demonized by those with institutional power. This lively and creative movement, a true expression of democracy, where important sectors of the Bolivarian People could express themselves in all their diversity, is languishing. This was was the everyday demonstration in practice of the democratic approach of the Process and of the Government, which gave the lie to denunciations made by imperialism and the bourgeoisie that the Revolution was undemocratic and that Chávez was a dictator. The recovery of this spirit of diversity of thought, of respect for different currents with the Process, in an open and frank debate, is essential to save the Revolution. Otherwise this will decay or change its democratic and participatory content for the old formulae of formal democracy, where those who "know" speak, where domesticated academics do the thinking, and a single orthodoxy reigns, ultimately suffocating the rebellious and irreverent creativity of our people. The recovery of this spirit and these spaces is one of the central struggles of the next period. It means putting back into action one of the main drivers of the Process: as Bolivar called it, "Morals and Education"

("Moral y Luces"). And this requires encouraging democratic participation, freedom to express differences and respect for critical thinking.

Defending the Government of President Maduro and the achievements of the Bolivarian process from the attacks that may occur, requires increasing effort in the fight against the economic crisis and

the war over who appropriates the Oil Rent. This is the main priority now. But this must not stop us from seeing what is at stake in the coming period. That is why we put forward these proposals to shift the course of the Process. The determination of the Chavista People to defend the Bolivarian Process was demonstrated once again on 8 December. Overcoming a year of painful events and uncertainty, they showed their

desire for change remains intact. The working people, who responded to President Maduro's call for the 8D elections, and proved their strength, now face the coming struggles to defend the gains of the Process. That's why 2014 will be a year of definitions.

24/12/13

[Marea Socialista](#)

IV468 - January 2014 PDF

30 January 2014, by **robm**

IVP 468 PDF magazine available to [download](#)

Miguel Romero ("Moro"): Revolutionary dignity

28 January 2014, by **Manuel Garí**

For that reason, already much ravaged by disease, he was in his element in the plazas of 15-M and amidst the mareas or in meetings and educational activities with young people of Izquierda Anticapitalista. Just like when he began to participate in the student movement of the 1960s, or was present in the pickets and general strikes or the first mobilizations for amnesty, then against NATO entry and the presence of the North American bases, in solidarity with the thwarted Nicaraguan revolution or in whatever cause was worth the trouble. Most particularly in all the attempts to organize the international resistance to global capitalism; thus the intense activity that he displayed in the activities of the World Social Forums like that of Porto Alegre.

With the same courage he fought to conquer liberties faced with the brakes and restrictions of the

Constitution, daughter of a Transition that neglected the aspirations of the workers' movement of the whole Spanish state and the peoples of the nationalities. He escaped jail under Francoism, but his articles in the dossier "¡Viva la República!" in the magazine "Saida" earned him a month in prison for refusing to pay the security that the court demanded of him. One of life's paradoxes, somebody that dedicated his youth to bringing down the dictatorship was jailed by the new democrats to defend a form of democratic government and state. He was irreducible, he never accepted the farce of the Pacts of Moncloa nor of a regime, that of the reform which is now foundering and in which the fed up, rebellious and indignant youth now have no confidence.

Moro - the name by which his companions and friends knew him,

and with which he fully identified, was part of the generation of 1968 when it seemed that we could change the world, when - in spite of the repression - winds of hope and generosity blew, times in which it was neither mad nor peculiar to fight for the socialist Revolution, which we conceived of as very different from the Stalinist dictatorship, and which, on the contrary, we saw as the condition for a society of free and equal women and men. Times of generosity and commitment, well removed from the cursed governing principle of the cost/benefit ratio.

Precisely then we met, in times in which, to use some words he dedicated to Silvino Sariego, we forged "a close friendship, created more ago than forty years, when friendship and revolution were inseparable". Moro, in addition to being a fighter, an activist and a lucid

politician - who never received a penny from the public coffers - was a close and unconditional friend to those who were proud to receive his affection and confidence. And shared life. And there was born my friendship and co-militancy with Moro, Jaime Pasto, Lucia González (how I miss you), and the new people who continued arriving in our lives: Chato Galante, Justa Montero, Marti Caussa, Petxo Idoyaga and many, many more on a list impossible to reproduce.

Political participation in 1966 was wishing to organize politically, there was no argument on the need to do so do, it was enough to make an appointment with him. Soon I realized the quality of the "signing". And since then every single day of his life was to be organized to fight. Because Moro always conceived that action is collective and shared or it is not emancipatory. And democratic. The action and social organization of the social movement, for Moro and those who have shared the experience, must be impregnated with democracy, self-management, self-organization. For there is no worthwhile party that is not totally democratic in its functioning, even in the worst conditions of repression.

He was first active in the Frente de Liberación Popular (FLP) and after its dissolution was one of the founders of the group Comunismo, embryo of the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria (LCR) whose leadership he was part of and which he for several years represented in the bodies of the Fourth International, where he shared debates, projects and ideas with people like Ernest Mandel (his maestro), Francisco Louça and Daniel Bensaïd - "Bensa", his French friend, with whom he maintained a permanent dialogue until the death of the philosopher and activist on January 12, 2010.

Moro played a key role in the rapprochement between ETA VI and the LCR that culminated in the fusion of both organizations. For years he impelled the development of the revolutionary organizations in Latin America, years in which he was editor of the Castilian edition of "Inprecor", the bimonthly political magazine of the LCR. But most of his journalistic

work was focused on his articles for "Combate", the newspaper of that organization of which he was editor at several stages, until the fusion of his party with the Movimiento Comunista (MC). After the failure of that unification, he was involved in Espacio Alternativo, a current in IU, which in 2008 left the coalition and became Izquierda Anticapitalista, an organization in which he continued to actively participate.

He created the bimonthly magazine "Viento Sur", a publication with an important influence in the alternative left, of which he was editor and main instigator over the 131 issues which have appeared until today. This was his main contribution in recent years, including those of his long illness. Journalistic work which he combined with participation in forums and round tables, conferences and educational talks, working for several years in ACSUR-Las Segovias and authoring works like "¡Viva Nicaragua libre!" (1979), "La guerra civil española en Euskadi y Catalunya: contrastes y convergencias" (2006) and "Conversaciones con la izquierda anticapitalista" (2012) or his participation as co-author in "Porto Alegre se mueve" (2003), "1968: El mundo pudo cambiar de base" (2008), "Enrique Ruano, memoria viva de la transición" (2009) and "Pobreza 2.0" (2012).

Moro lived life intensely, expressed everything that was worthwhile. He enjoyed his family until the last moment, the broad Romero clan of which he boasted. And with reason, I should add, once you knew them. Apart from his stage of Paris, all his adult life was spent in Madrid, except for short stays in other cities, forced by clandestinity. But always he professed to be an Andalusian. An Andalusian able to understand other peoples and to respect their right to decide. He enjoyed his friendships both old and new. Old people and new arrivals. He did not lose the capacity to connect with the following generations. He enjoyed every moment. The need to seize the day governed his routine. Through his character and vision of the world, "nothing human was alien to him". Everything interested him, from the impact of biotechnology to the

meaning of Brecht's work.

But above all he had affections. Great ones. An enthusiast for flamenco and Enrique Morente, he also enjoyed Mozart's 40th symphony or Tristán and Isolda; a fan of the Beatles and Van Morrison and a connoisseur of jazz. But mainly he was a hardened reader, certainly of Marxist authors, but not only; he read Mayakovsky, he read and reread Lorca's "Poet in New York". Look at all the back issues of Viento Sur and witness the permanent tribute to Lorca. And he devoured novels since, as he told it to me, he encountered "Treasure Island" as a child. Like a so many other revolutionaries, he was very fond of "noir" novels. And the cinema. A regular attendee at the San Sebastian festival, it is possible that he held the record for seeing "Rome Open City" or "Viridiana", an admirer of Billy Wilder and Berlanga, in more than one political article - who knows how - he found the excuse to mention Lauren Bacall. And an open secret: when Barça played, the clock was stopped, and it was better to call him after the broadcast of the game. That, all that and more, formed the multi-faceted world of somebody who many people knew solely for his political commitment.

How many, many things, could be said of you, friend, comrade Moro! I can remember nothing bad. And yes, I will remember always the many difficult political and personal moments at which we were together, comrade. Until the night that you entered into a coma. . A moment before that, you still wanted to know "what's happening", as always, the tasks of the moment.

If Moro had to take stock of his life, nothing would express it better than the words he wrote some decades ago in the article "Punto y aparte" in issue 518 of "Combate", which may explain his constant effort to "connect" with the indignant youth, with the new revolutionary generations and his obsession with renewal:

"The article that I have before me is headlined "Relay". It is not a very original idea, but an important one. We have borne witness. We have travelled the path we took, so different from what we had imagined, with all

our strength. We are not tired. Even with all the obstacles and setbacks, we

enjoyed the race, and now we are content to leave it in hands which are also ours and to carry on. That is what

counts and everything else is secondary”.

Snowden demonized; Obama affirms spying

28 January 2014, by Jeff Mackler

Not to belabor the Orwellian analogy, but Washington, D.C., Federal District Court Judge Richard Leon in his Dec. 16, 68-page opinion demanding an end of blanket government surveillance couldn't resist describing as “almost Orwellian” today's national security state. Said Leon, “I cannot imagine a more indiscriminate and arbitrary invasion than this systematic and high-tech collection and retention of personal data on almost every single citizen for the purpose of querying and analyzing it without prior judicial approval.”

President Barack Obama's Jan. 17 speech before the Justice Department didn't convince anyone that substantive changes are on the agenda regarding the government's now admitted U.S. and worldwide surveillance of virtually every phone, e-mail, and other public and private communication system.

With the exception of a promise that a handful or so of select, still unnamed heads of state who are deemed to represent “friendly and allied nations,” no one, including top government officials around the world, would be exempt from National Security Administration (NSA) spy operations. BIG BROTHER Obama—“who has been mercilessly exposed by the ongoing revelations of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden”—felt compelled to affirm a previously and rigorously denied truth that every ruling-class leader in the world takes as an article of faith: Spying on everyone is fully justified. How else to keep a privileged tiny minority elite in power while exploiting and oppressing the vast majority? Spying on one's allies and enemies

alike is absolutely necessary to defend the “national security” interests of the ruling rich everywhere. The so-called war on terror is nothing but today's overt pretext to do what has always been done to advance the interests of the few against the many as well as the few against their competing elites everywhere.

Following Obama's defense of the NSA's “robust” spy operations, presidential adviser David Phouffe crudely uttered Obama's basic argument, “There are people out there every day who are plotting. The notion that we would put down a tool that would protect people here in America is hard to fathom.”

No data was presented to prove this assertion. Indeed, of the tens if not hundreds of trillions or thousands of trillions (quadrillions) of NSA-intercepted communications, the Obama administration has to date proved incapable of presenting a single example of a successful operation that has prevented an act of terror. Or if I am exaggerating a bit, perhaps it is true that less than a handful of cases have been presented, albeit most refuted by the facts, to justify U.S. spy and surveillance operations against the whole world.

Within hours of President Obama's speech, the heads of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees—Republican Mike Roger and Democrat Dianne Feinstein—met briefly with Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and then issued a joint statement supporting the government's spy program.

A few days later, these same officials and others asserted that Snowden had acted, or might have acted, in

collaboration with Russian and/or Chinese spy agencies in collecting classified government files. A Jan. 20 New York Times article headlined, “Lawmakers Suggest Snowden Link To Russia Before He Leaked Data,” went to considerable length to indicate that no confirmation of these charges has been presented. Two days later, The Times reported, “Officials at both the NSA and the FBI have said their investigations have turned up no evidence that Mr. Snowden was aided by others.”

Yet the notion that Snowden went far beyond exposing the virtually universal nature of U.S. government surveillance operations was no accident, especially when Snowden's alleged crimes now include releasing critical military secrets to the Russians and Chinese.

“Even if he did not intentionally do so,” argued several U.S. spymasters, they remained convinced that Russian and Chinese technology would likely have been employed to retrieve Snowden's files from his five computers. No doubt, upping the ante from Snowden's widely supported opposition to blanket spying on the world to Snowden being a Russian agent is seen by BIG BROTHER as justification for the continuation of all NSA spy programs and the further persecution and prosecution of this courageous whistleblower.

Snowden's response was published in The New Yorker. It's not the smears that mystify me,” he said. “It's that outlets report statements that the speakers themselves admit are sheer speculation.”

One might wonder, however, just what harmful military secrets so worry Snowden's would-be persecutors. He

did, after all, release President Obama's order mandating cyberwar against any target. Perhaps Snowden has new military information on the illegal 10-year U.S.-funded Contra War against Nicaragua, or the U.S.-organized military coups that brought the Shah to power and stole Iran's oil in 1953, or the 1954 U.S.-organized coup that removed President Arbenz in Guatemala, or the U.S.-backed neo-fascist 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile, or the U.S. invasions of Grenada and the Dominican Republic, or the 1.5 million murdered in Iraq based on U.S. intelligence regarding "weapons of mass destruction," or the 4 million murdered in Vietnam based on the manufactured Tonkin Bay incident, or maybe even secret U.S. intelligence regarding who used sarin gas in Syria, or the U.S. deployment of death-squad armies in Afghanistan, or U.S. military actions aimed at the re-colonization of Africa today, or military information on the U.S. drone wars that murdered some 5000 civilians in Pakistan?

But alas, we already know most of these atrocities in some detail. Would Snowden violate any moral principle on earth if he were to expose yet new war crimes committed by the Empire? Obama's speech did promise to solicit congressional input regarding possible changes, but no one considered that any such changes would be substantial. The president also suggested that the massive trove of everyone's communications might be transferred from government computers to "private hands" or to some other unspecified "independent" agency. Perhaps a few more judges might be consulted before tapping into everyone's personal communications, said the president. He neglected to mention that the previous panels of secret FISA Court judges had approved all NSA spying requests.

In each and every instance, however, whatever constraints Obama suggested would, he insisted, be negated in cases of "emergency" or "national security" concerns—the very mantra that every government employs to lie, cheat, and steal with impunity. Even The New York Times (Jan. 19, 2014) felt compelled to note, "The assurances Mr. Obama offered his critics may be made more nebulous, by exceptions written into

any new policies" (emphasis added).

A few weeks earlier, The Times published a lead editorial enumerating the government's blatant violations of elementary civil liberties while urging the Obama administration to put an end to Snowden's seemingly never-ending and shocking revelations that almost daily undermine its credibility. The Times urged Obama to grant Snowden clemency. With an estimated 1.7 million government spy documents in his possession, the newspaper's editors reasoned, in accord with the Negligence Law maxim, "the risk to be perceived defines the duty to be obeyed," a Snowden who was free, perhaps after having received a mild slap on the wrist, is a lesser threat to ruling-class interests than having to endure countless more exposés of government wrongdoing—"crimes would be more accurate.

The deal that The Times envisions would be that Snowden return the government's documents, with a promise that he and others to whom he sent the documents would publish no more, in return for an agreement that he would be free from any government prosecution.

Coming from perhaps the nation's most important newspaper of record, which often expresses the views of important sections of the U.S. ruling class, The Times proposal has stirred considerable controversy. NSA history buffs in these spy matters have countered with the hope or opinion that Snowden, "like all spies before him," would soon tire in his efforts; or perhaps disappear from public view, like other "spies" before him; or become mentally imbalanced due to prolonged isolation and depression; or perhaps, like others before him, become an alcoholic and pass into oblivion with no further damage done.

These are the hopes and dreams of the hard-nosed secret service cloak and dagger elements who daily pursue U.S. capitalism's brutal course with impunity. But few are convinced by this argument, if for no other reason that the magnitude of Snowden's files is unprecedented, his political course is increasingly to the left, and his political development is buttressed by possessing future time bombs can be exploded at will, thus further

alienating the vast majority from any notion that the U.S. government represents them. The latest polls indicate that the credibility of the U.S. Congress has reached historic lows, with less than 9 percent indicating confidence in the government's credibility.

Further, no one fully knows who else might have the secret documents in their possession. In a Jan. 18 television interview with Glenn Greenwald, for example, Bill Maher, host of HBO's popular "Real Time" news/comedy show, stated that Greenwald had physical possession of Snowden's 1.7 million document trove. While Greenwald, a staffwriter for the British Guardian newspaper now living in exile in Brazil, stated that the number 1.7 million was an exaggeration, he did not deny that he had possession and indeed was in collaboration with Snowden.

At least some of these documents similarly appear to be in the possession of The New York Times, the Washington Post, the German news magazine Der Spiegel, and others. If this proves to be the case, the U.S. government would have to secure their agreement along with Snowden's.

What was most telling about the Maher-Greenwald interview, however, was their exchange regarding "national security." Here Greenwald boldly asserted two interrelated propositions. First, he insisted that as a journalist, he was as qualified, if not more so, than the U.S. government to determine what constituted a legitimate "national security" issue. Greenwald went further, asserting that in the event he believed that any of the Snowden revelations did endanger the government's "national security" interests, he would self-censor. How he would do was not clear. Greenwald, like Snowden, at best hails from American liberal traditions wherein a semblance of credibility is given to the government's "national security" concerns.

In the case of The New York Times, its assigned Snowden reporters all agree beforehand to submit whatever they propose to publish to the CIA or NSA directly. These professional guardians of what is good or bad for the U.S.

ruling class are thus accorded the "right" to keep secret at least some government crimes from public view.

No doubt Chelsea's Manning's 2007 leaking of a 39-minute helicopter cockpit video of "go to" U.S. Baghdad soldiers murdering 11 innocent civilians and a Reuters news reporter, was sufficient to qualify as material that required censorship. Manning is serving 30 years on charges of espionage for exposing this truth.

"Too big to fail," the ruling class maxim adopted near unanimously by Congress when it bailed out the nation's thieving banks, insurance companies, and leading corporations to the tune of \$20 trillion, or perhaps \$30 trillion, should also be seen as a necessary "national security" dictum employed to protect the nation's ruling elite.

Similarly, J.P. Morgan Chase's \$2.6 billion slap-on-the-wrist fine for looking the other way when Bernard Madoff and his Ponzi scheme associates fleeced investors of qualitatively more than that sum should be added to the list of items in which "national security" interests trump human decency. J.P. Morgan's fines for violating the law by lying to the government regarding the value of its near worthless mortgage bonds last year totaled a pathetic \$14 billion, with no prison time served. Again, "national security" necessitates that real crimes go virtually unpunished. J.P. Morgan Chase, the names of the merged banking interests of the Morgan and Rockefeller families, literally paid a few pennies or less on the dollar in comparison to their \$4 trillion holdings, not to mention with regard to the money that it is said to have stolen.

Snowden's latest "crime" is the incredible January 2014 revelation, again via the government's own documents, that the NSA and its ilk physically installed microchips in hundreds of thousands of computers before they were delivered to the unwary purchasers. Worse still, Snowden's revelations demonstrated that since 2008 NSA spies installed countless permanent "bugs" in countless computers around the world via a refined radio wave technology that requires no physical contact with the victim's computer. Zap! And your

computer is wired for permanent government perusal!

One couldn't help but recall President Obama's visit to China last year when he sought to inform Chinese leaders that the U.S. makes a fundamental distinction between spying to defend its "national security interests" and spying to steal scientific, industrial, economic, or intellectual property secrets. The latter categories, insisted Obama, were off limits, if not morally repugnant to the "democratic principles" that Obama claims to champion. The Chinese were said to have responded that national security and economic security were one and the same—"inseparable." No doubt, Obama's platitudes aside, no self-respecting American capitalist would disagree.

But that exchange took place in 2013. Snowden's documents released by Der Spiegel and others in early January 2014 reveal that the NSA knows no such self-restraints. Undoubtedly, the well-trained, and surely "morally" instructed secret NSA radio wave implanters will refrain from using their wondrous technology to gain unfair advantage over their capitalist competitors! We are a nation of laws after all! Everyone knows, for example, that in the stock market "insider trading" is banned! Corporate secrets are therefore safe and sound. It's just an accident, of course, that a handful of billionaire investors just happen to guess right at the exact moment when stocks rise or fall.

Bloomberg News told the story in a May 11, 2011, article on the subject. "Raj Rajaratnam, the hedge-fund tycoon and Galleon Group LLC co-founder at the center of a U.S. insider-trading crackdown, was found guilty of all 14 counts against him in the largest illegal stock-tipping case in a generation."

The article reported that billionaire Raj had "engaged in a seven-year conspiracy to trade on inside information from corporate executives, bankers, consultants, traders and directors of public companies including Goldman Sachs Group Inc. (GS)

<<http://www.bloomberg.com/quote/GS:US>> . He gained \$63.8 million,

prosecutors said." One can only wonder if Raj's friends, the "corporate executives, bankers, consultants, traders and directors of public companies, including Goldman Sachs Group" knew that they were giving their billionaire associate, Raj, illegal information!

The federal prosecutor in the case, U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, told the media that illegal trading on Wall Street was "rampant." But again, sending this "rampant" crew of thieves to jail is not in the "national security interests" of the U.S. government. It's sufficient to send a select few to prison for a few years perhaps, only to be quietly pardoned when the departing president exercises his right to "free the rich." Here, I won't bother to research the names of those criminals who received a "Get Out Of Jail Free" card from capitalism's highest elected officials.

I have always been fascinated by those Star Trek episodes that include Captain James Kirk and Spock fighting courageously against one or another of their infamous enemies, whether they are from the Klingon Empire or from other evil galaxies. But just when the Enterprise hero's predicament seems almost irreversible, someone throws the switch and the hologram reality instantly disappears. Spock and Kirk open a door and return safely to the real world.

In truth, we live in a hologram world of sorts, created by an Evil Empire that justifies its looting of the planet by ever invoking its "national security interests." In this name—"today the war on terror, yesterday the war against the "communist menace"—"every conceivable evil is tolerated, if not promoted. Turning off the hologram switch, the false world that the ruling elite creates to justify its minority rule, is a prerequisite to organizing the vast majority to challenge its subordinate status.

Edward Snowden's revelations have gone a long way to lifting the veil of secrecy and foul play that is the norm in capitalist America. He has hastened the time when BIG BROTHER'S rules of engagement—"and all forms of ruling-class oppression"—are brought to an end forever.

Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and all other courageous whistleblowers deserve our full support, along with all other victims of capitalist injustice.

Their contribution to humanity's cause is immense and brings us closer to a time when the "national security" interests of the few give way to the

collective interests of all the earth's peoples, who have everything to gain by ridding the planet of capitalist horrors in all their manifestations.

Twenty Years Since the Chiapas Rebellion: The Zapatistas, Their Politics, and Their Impact

27 January 2014, by **Dan La Botz**

Twenty years ago, on the morning of January 1, 1994, the Chiapas Rebellion began in Mexico's southernmost state led by a then unknown group, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and its mysterious spokesman subcomandante Marcos. Some 3,000 poorly armed, mostly Mayan guerrilla soldiers marched out of the jungles and seized a half dozen towns and briefly took the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The EZLN had chosen January 1 because on that day in that year the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an international treaty between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, took effect. The EZLN rebels called for the cancellation of NAFTA, the overthrow of the government of Mexican government, and the convocation of a constituent assembly to write a new Mexican constitution. Some of the guerrilla troops told reporters they were fighting for socialism.

The Chiapas Rebellion had an enormous impact at the time, not only in Mexico but around the world. The EZLN had led the first leftist, armed rebellion since the fall of Communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union just a few years before, suggesting that contrary to claims about the death of the left and the "end of history," a new left had arisen in the Lacandón Jungle of Chiapas. The rebellion also signaled that all was not well in Mexico, where outgoing president Carlos Salinas had been claiming that by joining the GATT, forerunner of the World Trade

Organization, in 1980 and by joining NAFTA, and through his privatization of hundreds of state companies, Mexico was leaving the Third World and entering the First World of modern capitalism. The Chiapas Rebellion and the EZLN Manifestos pulled back the veil revealing to the world Mexico's world of rural poverty and especially the poverty oppression of the indigenous people.

President Ernesto Zedillo, who had taken office only a month before, responded immediately by sending the Mexican army and air force to suppress the rebellion. Throughout Mexico tens of thousands of people responded by going to the zócalos, the public squares, to protest, demanding that Zedillo stop the military attack on mostly Mayan rebels. Within twelve days Zedillo halted the attack and the EZLN agreed to a truce, the beginning of what has been a twenty-year standoff in Chiapas.

When several months later the Zapatistas held a consulta, a kind of survey or referendum, asking what role they should place in Mexican society, hundreds of thousands responded, the majority voting that the EZLN should lay down its arms and participate in Mexican social and political life. The initial protests against Zedillo's use of the army and the results of the consulta suggest that the Mexican people rejected armed violence on all sides. In the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, one million had died and one million had emigrated in a nation with a total

population then of 13 million. The memory of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence seemed to live on in the public consciousness and apparently few wanted to repeat that experience.

Armed revolution in Mexico it seemed was not on the agenda. The Zapatistas declined to lay down their arms, but on the other hand, for the last twenty years, neither have they used them. The EZLN's continuing struggle took other forms.

Who Were the Zapatistas?

The Zapatistas were founded in November of 1983 by a group of leftist activists in northern Mexico. The Mexican left had inherited a long tradition of armed rebellion, one could say going back to the conquest, though certainly the Mexican Revolution's nationalist legacy was most significant. In addition there was the impact of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and Ernesto "Che" Guevara's foco theory (which has been popularized by the French intellectual Régis Debray) and which had had such disastrous consequences throughout Latin America.

Throughout Mexico in the 1970s and into the 1980s one could find small rural and urban guerrilla groups, some calling themselves Marxist-Leninist and usually combining a left wing version of Mexican nationalism

with Cuban foco theory ideas or sometimes with Maoist ideas of a prolonged people's war. Hundreds of such young men and women were disappeared and murdered during Mexico's secret war in the 1970s. The Zapatistas had their origins in that political milieu. Initially called the National Liberation Forces, a name that became popular on the left in various countries after the Algerian revolution, the group later, after moving to Chiapas, added "Zapatista" to their name after Emiliano Zapata, the leader of the revolutionary peasant movement during the Mexican Revolution.

Later in the 1980s the group decided to move its operations to Chiapas in southern Mexico, a state with a very large indigenous population made up of several different Mayan groups. As in the rest of Mexico at the time, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) controlled government at all levels and controlled the labor and peasant unions and various indigenous organizations. There was, however, a developing social alternative. Since 1959 the Bishop of Chiapas had been Samuel Ruíz, who had participated in Vatican II (1962-1965) and in the Latin American Bishops' Medellín Conference (1968) and who was completely involved and identified with the Theology of Liberation, the idea that the Church should be on the side of the poor.

Under Ruíz's direction the Catholic Church in Chiapas took an interest not only in the salvation of the souls of the indigenous, but also in improving their material conditions and their social and political treatment. The Church's catechists became not only carriers of the Gospel but also organizers of the indigenous people's incipient social movements. It was in this milieu that the Zapatistas now inserted themselves, and with Ruíz's tacit support, often worked closely with the catechists and other indigenous leaders. Ruíz said that while he shared the Zapatistas' goals he did not support their strategy of armed rebellion, yet at the same time he did not prevent the EZLN from organizing. So during almost a decade the Zapatistas established their organization in Chiapas, recruited Mayan and mestizo activists to their

organization, and laid their plans for an armed uprising.

What Did the Zapatistas Believe?

What did the Zapatistas have in mind when they revolted on January 1, 1994? The Zapatistas apparently believed that if they ignited a spark in southern Mexico it would unleash a wildfire across the entire country. Whether or not they were familiar with the concept or the term, this is very like the nineteenth century anarchist notion of the "propaganda of the deed" and also bears a resemblance to the foco idea of the dedicated revolutionaries in the sierra who will ignite a revolution in the plains. The idea is that the people, exploited and oppressed, are simply waiting for a heroic example of revolutionary struggle to show them the way, and that then they will rise up and overthrow capitalism. The Mexican people, as was demonstrated in the early months of 1994, were not prepared to follow the Zapatistas or to rise up, and while millions sympathized with the poverty and indignities suffered by the indigenous, they rejected the idea of armed struggle. Mexico was no different than any other country where social change tends to come not from heroic actions of a few but from years of organization, education and propaganda, and many concerted smaller actions at the base of society before people are prepared for revolutionary change.

In August of 1994 the Zapatistas called a convention in their jungle redoubt to which they invited some 2,000 Mexican intellectuals, writers and artists, academics, and social movement activists, as well as a few official delegates from the United States of whom I was one. Once in San Cristóbal we traveled to the convention on public buses donated by the state government and attended the ceremony where the stage was lit by stadium lights which must also have been provided by the state and the Federal Electricity Commission. Marcos spoke before an enormous

Mexican flag, perhaps 40 by 20 feet, as the Zapatista soldiers (some wearing boots but most in huaraches and a few barefoot) marched before the platform, most carrying wooden rifles, not real firearms. The huge flag and Marco's rhetoric suggested that the EZLN were radical nationalists and advocates of indigenous rights; while there was a call for a constituent assembly to write a new constitution, there was no talk of socialism. Really, this was not a convention, just a few speeches until the event ended in a tropical downpour of Biblical proportions that put out the lights and swept away our tents. The EZLN's politics were still in evolution.

The Zapatistas failure in launching a revolution and the Mexican army's siege of the zone in which they operated forced them to retreat and fall back on the indigenous and other poor people in the canyons where they had their base. The Zapatistas now did more openly what they had been doing clandestinely for years, organizing their indigenous and mestizo supporters into communities that constituted a kind of liberated zone—though interspersed with other indigenous and mestizo communities that did not support them and surrounded by the army which sometimes harassed them.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s the Zapatistas organized remarkable protests by indigenous women who came out in their traje, their indigenous dress, and literally pushed the armed soldiers out of their villages. The EZLN called indigenous meeting in Chiapas and inspired the convocation of national indigenous meetings that led to the creation of the National Indigenous Congress. After months of negotiation, on Feb. 16, 1996, the Zapatistas and the government of President Ernesto Zedillo signed the San Andrés Accords, a treaty granting autonomy, recognition, and rights to the Mayan people in Chiapas. The Mexican Congress, however, didn't adopt the accords, and the Zedillo government soon violated them. The Zapatistas announced they wouldn't therefore hold any further negotiations, withdrawing again into the canyons.

The Zapatistas and their supporters

claimed that they had created new democratic forms of organization in the villages in which women had an equal role. Marcos and other EZLN spokespersons argued that they were reconstituting society from the bottom up a village at a time. Eschewing the state institutions controlled by the PRI, the Zapatistas created their own schools and local governments—though they had few if any economic resources—as an alternative to government institutions. Marcos and the Zapatistas began to develop a new rhetoric and to proclaim a new ideology summed up in the phrase “mandar obedeciendo,” to lead by following. This suggested that the people were deciding and the leaders merely expressing their views and carrying out their desires. Here it was suggested was the socialism from below that many of us believed in and had been working for.

In the late '90s lawyer and sociologist John Holloway popularized and elaborated on the Zapatistas' ideas, and his book *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* became a best seller on the left. He suggested that, in part under the influence of indigenous ideas, the EZLN had rejected the old Marxist paradigm of the proletariat struggling for state power, putting on the agenda a new theory and practice of revolution that seemed to have more in common with anarchism: anyone from any social class could begin to make the revolution by asserting their dignity and forming a liberated community where they were. The Zapatistas seemed to be building such a communitarian alternative to capitalism in the remote communities in Chiapas.

Yet it was very hard for outsiders to see and to understand exactly what was really taking place in villages in the canyons of Chiapas where a group of armed men were working among the native people. The continued existence of the EZLN as an armed guerrilla group alongside and among indigenous people led one to ask: How democratic was the movement? How were decisions really made? Who were the real leaders? The Zapatistas and their supporters offered answers that had to be taken on largely on faith given—at least for most of us—the

impossibility of entering physically, intellectually, and psychologically into the world of indigenous politics in Chiapas.

The Zapatistas, as interpreted by Holloway and others, had an enormous impact on the new Global Justice Movement that began in the 1990s and culminated at the Battle of Seattle, the joint environmental-labor protests against the WTO in 1999. Everywhere young people wore the balaclavas and red bandanas of the Zapatistas over their faces, often identifying themselves with anarchism. Every major city and many colleges in the United States had Zapatista support groups. Mexican American youth of the Southwest were particularly inspired by the Zapatistas. The combination of the romance of masked men and women, of armed struggle, and of the utopian idea of an immediate march to an egalitarian future held sway throughout the decade, inspiring many young people to become activists. Then it was all suddenly extinguished along with the Global Justice Movement by the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by Islamic fundamentalist terrorists, and by the War on Iraq, leading to a sudden rightward shift, new levels of government surveillance and repression, and an instantaneous upsurge in American patriotism. Other armed fighters now held the public attention.

The Zapatistas and the Movement

In Mexico during the first couple of years after the rebellion the Zapatistas had enormous moral authority. Much of Mexican society admired the Zapatistas for their courage and for speaking out with and for the indigenous. Many were charmed by subcomandante Marcos' sardonic wit and great creativity both as a speaker and a writer. Mexican youth from the wealthy neighborhoods of Mexico City to the poorest neighborhoods of the border towns adopted a new Zapatista swagger as they painted radical graffiti on the walls. The Zapatistas attempted to capitalize on their moral authority by projecting themselves as

a force in the broader Mexican society.

Living in Mexico in those years, I attended in Mexico City and in Tijuana meetings of the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN) which held a founding of the national organization in 1997. The Zapatistas, however, seemed to have no interest in a real front, that is, in a coalition of various left organizations and movements. EZLN leaders found difficult the give and take of coalition building in a country where there were scores of social movements, labor unions, and left political parties. The EZLN's insistence on dominating the supposed front that they had created meant that it never grew or became popular and never had an impact in Mexican society at large.

The EZLN also attempted at about the same time, with the aid of leftists in the labor movement, to organize a Zapatista workers' organization. The labor union activists I knew and with whom I spoke told me that the Zapatistas opposed participation in the existing labor unions, not only because they believed they were bureaucratic, but also in part because the unions held elections and the EZLN didn't believe in elections and voting. With an unwillingness to deal with the unions and their existing structures and with longstanding rank-and-file labor organizations, the Zapatista labor organization was stillborn. The Zapatistas' attempt to turn themselves into a political force in Mexican society failed utterly, and they withdrew again to the canyons of Chiapas.

The Zapatistas were more successful in Chiapas and in some other areas in organizing their autonomous municipalities which they called Caracoles y Juntas de Buen Gobierno. While almost all of these communities were in Chiapas, the Zapatistas did inspire some in other states and in the Plan Realidad Tijuana of 2003 proposed to unite the archipelago of liberated communities in Mexico into one emerging free nation within the nation. Though the plan never proved successful nationally, the Zapatistas did continue to organize their own autonomous communities in Chiapas.

The EZLN and the National Elections

When the 2000 elections approached, the EZLN announced that it would not support either of the two rightwing parties—the National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party—nor would they support the leftwing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Cárdenas, who had been a presidential candidate in 1988 and 1994, remained enormously popular on the left. Many hoped that the Zapatistas would support him, though organizations of the revolutionary left were divided over the issue of whether to support Cárdenas or back some independent socialist candidate. The EZLN, however, rejected elections in general and Marcos excoriated Mexico's political parties of all stripes as compromised and corrupt.

Yet the election proved not to be irrelevant to the Zapatistas. When Vicente Fox of the PAN won the election by a large plurality and became president, ending the PRI's more than seven decade hold on government, the Zapatistas decided to take advantage of what was apparently a new political opening. The Zapatistas traveled to Mexico City and its representatives, in an historic act, actually spoke to the Mexican Congress, asking that it fulfill the principles embodied in the San Andrés Accords. While Fox showed some sympathy with the EZLN, nothing new was forthcoming from the Mexican Congress.

"The Other Campaign"

In 2006 when the next presidential elections took place, Marcos and EZLN adopted a different approach. Once again, most of the Mexican left hoped that the EZLN would support the left candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the PRD, who was speaking out strongly against NAFTA, neoliberalism, and the corruption of the PRI and PAN. The EZLN, still rejecting both elections and the

existing parties, had other plans. Marcos announced the organization of la Otra Campaña (the Other Campaign). Unlike other political parties, the EZLN would not put forward its own candidates and would not support the candidates of other parties, but would instead organize a campaign that would travel around the country speaking out against the Mexican government and against capitalism.

The EZLN's Other Campaign was joined by several other left groups, from the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) to the followers of Albanian Enver Hoxa in the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML). The Campaign took place during a period of a number of dramatic social conflicts, most important the civil unrest in Sal Salvador Atenco in the State of Mexico. When police suppressed flower sellers and other street vendors, the Peoples Front for the Defense of the Land called upon the EZLN for support. Marcos and EZLN showed up bringing thousands of supporters. During the Other Campaign, Marcos and other speakers held moderately successful meetings and rallies around the country, sometimes speaking to thousands against the evils of capitalism. Everywhere they went, the CPML's giant portraits of Stalin hung in the background, casting doubt in some minds about the meaning of it all.

Meanwhile the PRD's left candidate López Obrador harangued crowds of up to a million, mostly working class and poor people, with his populist rhetoric. When it became clear that President Fox and the ruling PAN party were violating election law and preparing an enormous fraud, which in fact took place on election day in July, there arose an enormous protest movement in defense of a fair election and citizens' right to have their votes counted. Tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands in Mexico City joined the protests blocking the boulevards and occupying public plazas.

Several of the revolutionary left groups involved in the Other Campaign went off to join the election protests as a matter of principle; even if they hadn't liked the parties and

candidates offered up in the election they felt the citizens had the right to vote and have their vote counted. Marcos and the EZLN, opposed on principle to elections, refused to participate in the defense-of-the-vote protests. So they withdrew and retired to Chiapas. The Zapatistas sectarian attitude toward that movement did enormous damage to their reputation among those in the broad left and those on the far left. They lost much of the moral authority that had clung to them since the 1994 uprising.

Questions Posed for the Left and for the EZLN

During the last twenty years, the Zapatistas have had a huge impact on Mexican society and on the left both in Mexico and internationally. When the left seemed moribund, they revived it. Where the indigenous had been downtrodden, they were inspired to rise up. Their example enthused radicals throughout the Americas and in Europe and at their international meetings in the Chiapas jungle one could find leftists from dozens of countries exchanging experiences and perspectives. In retrospect, it is surprising that no organized international tendency, no "new international" came out of it. Despite all of the vicissitudes of their twenty-year long career, the Zapatistas remain both a local social movement in Chiapas and the standard bearers of a certain radical politics in Mexico associated with local organizing, support for the indigenous, and political abstentionism.

The Zapatistas' experience raises important questions for the left. There is no doubt that in a capitalist system and its liberal democratic state, as it is called, in which political parties operate, elections function primarily to both buttress the system and to regularly place representatives of capitalism in power. It is also true, however, that elections by parties which are genuinely independent provide an opportunity for the left to propagandize for its ideas and to use elected positions to contribute to the organization of social movements.

The Zapatistas are right that the Party of the Democratic Revolution and its candidates Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and López Obrador were representatives of social democratic and populist variants of capitalist politics. The PRI, the PAN, and the PRD have all proven to be quite corrupt, it is true. But what if the Zapatistas had used the enormous moral authority that they had in the first years after the rebellion to help to organize a national social movement and a genuinely independent national political party? How much greater could their impact have been during these last two decades in which, partly under the impact of the NAFTA treaty that they opposed, the power of Mexican capital

has grown so much greater and the forces of working people become so much weaker?

To me, the Zapatistas remain opaque and their politics mysterious. I wonder: Does there still exist at the core of the EZLN a hardened cadre who hold to the classical guerrilla politics of the 1970s and 1980s or did the Zapatistas under the influence of the indigenous and their own experiences really become some sort of anarchists? What is the real nature and significance of the Caracoles y Juntas de Buen Gobierno? Can the Zapatistas ever overcome their sectarianism and project themselves as an ideological and organizing force in Mexican society or will they continue to cut themselves from other

sections of the far left?

After twenty years the Zapatistas have not gone away, remaining a challenge to both the government and to the established political parties and the parties of the revolutionary left. The new and deeper integration of Mexico into the U.S. and global economies which has been achieved by the passage of President Enrique Peña Nieto's structural reforms will raise new challenges and very likely produce new movements. We will see in this new period whether or not the EZLN's experiences and ideas prove relevant to a new generation of radicals.

January 13, 2014

40 years of the Portuguese section of the Fourth International

26 January 2014, by João Carlos Louçã

The first image that comes to mind for me is that of a demonstration in Lisbon. In 1981, political prisoners in the north of Ireland went on hunger strike and died in Thatcher's prisons. With a group of dissidents from the UDP, the PSR called a solidarity demonstration, which was a "to my eyes" gigantic. In a line of people wearing balaclavas, I was the second "S" in the phrase we carried on cardboard placards hung around the neck: "Somos Todos do IRA" (We are all in the IRA). It was João Cabral Fernandes [13] who led the man'suvre.

Some time afterwards, the British miners began their strike. Weeks, and then months on strike. Two leaders of the union toured here at the invitation of the Portuguese section of the Fourth International which was collecting money for the strikers. This second image remained for some years in the window of our office in Porto a that of the trade union tie offered on this occasion. That must be

the only historic tie in the history of these 40 years!

At the same time in Poland workers organised outside of the single party, breaking with the Stalinist bureaucracy. Solidarnosc provided the occasion for us to organize solidarity in Portugal through an information committee. In the demonstrations of the CGTP, scuffles, insults, tumult. The bulletins of the information committee show that here, we were still far from the fall of the Berlin wall.

In 1984, there was the first Fourth International youth camp, in the Black Forest in Germany. Aged 17, I went in the spring to Amsterdam, all alone, to the Youth School in Willemsparksweg, a chic neighbourhood where the FI had its headquarters and where we prepared the project. With Ernest Mandel, Daniel Bensaïd, Miguel Romero and other leaders I sensed that the international organisation I had joined was radically egalitarian and void of paternalism. Despite the

rain, during this first camp the striking memory was that of a thousand people in small groups learning the anthem of the Sandinistas and singing it together when the Nicaraguan delegation succeeding in crossing the border and came to the camp. Those who were there still know those words by heart today and we can still sing them. Isn't that right, Bolche [14]?

During much of the 1980s, the PSR held its congresses in a ground floor room on the rue da Palma. Meetings full of paper and texts to discuss, the international situation, the revolutionary strategy on an everyday basis. What to do? The revolution was not happening tomorrow and the counter revolution had more than set it. We resisted and we resist still the danger of the sect which would have buried itself around our certainties.

Some comrades from the Spanish State taught us, over these years, the urgency of anti-militarist work.

Emblematic of a generation was the rock music form of intervention. The Tropa Nãfo [15] had the Rue de Palma as its centre and the PSR as its motor. Without knowing it, we marked a generation of youth and determined the end of the general consent on compulsory military service. The smile of Zé da Messa is the image I like to retain of those times.

Others are the time when we confronted Le Pen in Portugal. First in Sesimbra, with Chico [16]. We demonstrated outside for a week. Luãs Zuzarte [17], inside the hotel with Carmo, unfurled a banner in the chamber alongside the fascists. Then in Picoas, and then in Madeira, one car, four people, the banners of 3 different parties to spoil the party where Jardim [18] welcomed European Nazism.

With time images get mixed up and are manipulated by our memory, but the certainty that the FI has always been what has united us and allowed us to think about the world where we live, is not a vague image. In a time where Trotsky was more an example than an icon and Trotskyism one reference among others, "The Sexual Combat of Youth" was part of our baggage from the time of joining, in the same way as the "Transitional Programme" or "The Revolution

Betrayed". And I have also been lucky enough to be given "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "Até Amanhã, Camaradas" [19] to read.

During the 1990s, the image is that of Manuel Graça [20], energetically smashing plastic clocks with hammer blows in São Bento [21]. With him hundreds of workers who protested thus against the obsession of the chronometer that capitalism imposes, limiting pauses, attacking the most elementary rights of those who work.

At the same time the student movement against registration fees was very influenced by the militants of the PSR. We did not yet know it, but the struggle we led in those years was a signal of what we experience today: the complete erosion of the state in its social functions. We lost the battle on registration fees but again we were at the centre of a struggle which marked a generation and still marks today the struggles for public education.

As we have also known how to be in all the essential struggles for dignity and emancipation. Without waiting for socialism and without relegating to the second level struggles which do not directly originate from the factories. Always in the campaigns for the right to abortion and

contraception, the PSR was feminist before feminism found its full place inside the left. We have been for the right to happiness without frontiers of sexual orientation and the GTH [Gay Working Group] was precisely the first LGBT organisation to inaugurate a slow time of coming out of the closet and of social conquests, that of the 1990s.

On the occasion of this anniversary we cannot omit remembering those who are no longer with us: Zé da Messa, Luãs Zuzarte, Carlos Prazeres Ferreira, António Gomes. And again those who, without ever having been members of this Portuguese section of the FI, would have certainly been there with pleasure: João Martins Pereira, Sérgio Mestre, João Mesquita, Jãlio Pinto, Carlos Brito Mendes. The black sheep which defied common sense and the official left, which campaigned by proudly affirming "the absolute minority", it was made up of them also.

Today we can have different lives and even find ourselves in different spaces of political intervention. Thus the FI has been and can still be a space for meeting and reflection for revolutionaries in the world. It has been a basic element of this journey of 40 years, in victory and in defeat. It continues here. And us also.

Egypt and Syria: The fire of revolution still burns

24 January 2014, by **Eric Ruder, Gilbert Achcar**

ER: At the beginning of 2011, the Arab uprisings generated enormous hope. But today, the euphoria seems to have transformed into its opposite—deep despair—under the weight of recent events in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and so on. How do you make sense of the Arab uprising three years on?

GA: I think the euphoria that was

aroused by the events of early 2011 was actually unwarranted—as is the very gloomy perception that one now finds. These are rather impressionistic reactions to present developments.

Of course, the initial moment of the uprising, with its huge mass mobilization occurring in several countries, raised a lot of hope, and that's understandable. But it was and it remains important to acknowledge

that what is at stake is more than a change in the form of the political regime—i.e., a so-called democratic transition. Ultimately, these uprisings are coming up against the challenge of how to carry out much more radical changes in the face of the hard core of the state, which is the armed forces.

This is a much tougher nut to crack than just the removal of a Mubarak in Egypt or a Ben Ali in Tunisia in the

first weeks of the uprising. Mass mobilizations managed to topple the ruler in both these countries, but the "deep state"—the backbone of the old regime—is still there, which means that the ancien régime is still very much in place, and there is more continuity than discontinuity between present conditions and previous ones.

In a country like Syria, where the armed forces are organically linked to the ruling family, even this initial step of toppling the regime cannot be realized without defeating the hard core of the state—and thus, we have seen events in Syria evolve inexorably into a civil war after months of bare-handed uprising were met with increasingly bloody repression.

In all three countries, the difficulties are huge, and neither was going to be a short process—and even less a "spring"—that would be completed by the organization of free elections, in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia.

The key point to understand is that what started in 2011 is a long-term revolutionary process, rooted in decades of economic blockage due to the nature of the prevailing social order. We are actually in the early stages of this revolutionary process. It will drag on for many years, if not decades.

So there is definitely still room for hope—as long as the determination of the mass movement persists to achieve the main social goals that initially inspired the majority of the people who took part in the uprisings. But this hope should be a realistic hope, combined with a real understanding of the difficulty of the task.

ER: Can you talk more about the challenges in Egypt?

GA: What happened in Egypt in 2011 was a superficial change. Only the tip of the iceberg was removed: the Mubarak family and their most narrowly linked cronies, and that's it. We shouldn't forget that Mubarak was not overthrown by the mass movement alone, but by a combination of the mass movement and a military coup.

What happened on February 11, 2011,

was actually even more of a coup than what we saw on July 3, 2013—in the sense that the military removed Mubarak from power and took power directly in its hands. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took power as a military junta, so this was a coup in the most classical sense, set against the backdrop of a huge mass mobilization.

Before that coup, even as the euphoria was at its height, I for one was warning about illusions in the army, because the real backbone of the Egyptian state and of the regime that has been in place for several decades is the army. Thus, the idea that the whole state of affairs that the Egyptian population was rising against would be changed by the mere removal of Mubarak was a total illusion—and all the more so in that Mubarak was removed by the very backbone of his regime.

In fact, Mubarak's removal was aimed at preserving the continuity of the state. It was a conservative coup in that sense. Trying to preserve the regime by sacrificing the head of the regime was possible in the case of Egypt because of a relatively high degree of institutionalization of the state—in other words, the institution is more important than the ruler.

The ruler himself was but a product of the institution—that is, the army. This characteristic of the Egyptian state also applied to the Tunisian state. But you don't find it in most states of the region, such as the oil monarchies or the de facto monarchies calling themselves "republics," as you had in Libya or Syria—or for that matter in Saddam Hussein's Iraq before the regime was toppled by the United States.

In Egypt, however, it was clear that the coup wouldn't end the movement. Indeed, what we have seen is that after a relatively short period of euphoria, the people started confronting the harsh reality of the continuity of the regime. They rebelled against that again, and you had a lot of turmoil by the end of 2011.

The situation was very tense again in Egypt, and then you had the election of the Muslim Brotherhood and

Mohamed Morsi as president. Morsi was the victor in the second round of the presidential election because the voters wanted to stop the ancien régime from reasserting itself. Morsi picked up a lot of voters in the second round who didn't vote for him in the first round—he was definitely not their first choice.

For those, as well as for a large part of the people who voted for him in the first round in the hope that the Muslim Brotherhood would solve the key problems of the country, especially in the social and economic dimensions, Morsi turned out to be a huge disappointment.

Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood behaved in such an arrogant manner that everyone became convinced they were trying to seize control of all of the institutions of the state. This raised a lot of fears among other forces—the Muslim Brotherhood even managed to alienate other Islamic fundamentalist currents, such as the Salafists.

Anger at Morsi renewed the mass movement, as well as labor strikes, other struggles and social tensions generally, which culminated in the largest demonstration Egypt has ever seen on June 30, 2013. And again, the same scenario that took place in February 2011 repeated itself. The army intervened to remove the president.

The fact that Morsi was elected in free elections, unlike Mubarak, doesn't change the fact that in both cases, you had a coup. And it also doesn't change the fact that Morsi lost legitimacy, even though he was elected in relatively free and fair elections. He was elected under revolutionary circumstances with a mandate from the people, and he betrayed this mandate—therefore, the people wanted to get rid of him. In this sense, his removal was the product of a mass movement carrying out the profoundly democratic right to recall an elected official.

The problem is that in today's Egypt, there are only two major organized forces. One, of course, is the army, the backbone of the ancien régime, which is at the same time a social and

political force and not just a military institution. Second, and in opposition to the ancien régime, is the Muslim Brotherhood, with its huge organizational machine.

The young people of the Tamarod movement succeeded in initiating a gigantic mobilization, but they didn't have the organized leverage to topple Morsi, who was backed by the considerable political apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood. So, like in 2011, the popular movement relied upon the army to remove the president.

The army, of course, used the mass mobilization against Morsi as an opportunity to get rid of him because it considered the attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood to extend its control over the state as a major threat—in the same way that the Brotherhood's grasp for power was felt as a threat by the liberals and all of the left.

The big problem is that now, even more than in 2011, people have illusions in the army again, as if the army is somehow an institution in the service of the people that intervenes simply to execute the will of the people. This is, of course, completely preposterous. The army is definitely not the tool of the people. The army is the tool of the ancien régime in many ways, but it is also, and primarily, defending its own interests.

As an institution, the army controls a huge chunk of the economy—nearly one-third of the economy, according to estimates. It is very keen on preserving all the prerogatives and privileges it has enjoyed throughout previous decades. We have seen this very clearly in the recent debate about the constitution, where the military has been pushing for guarantees of its privileges and an elevated status that would ensure that no other institutions—whether the president, parliament or whichever—would be able to interfere in what the military considers its business.

To get back to our initial point, the euphoria of 2011 has turned very gloomy, to the extent that many started publishing obituaries for the Egyptian Revolution—or even pretending that it was never a

revolution. But the idea that what started in 2011 has now ended and we're back to square one, if not worse, is deeply wrong.

The key issues in Egypt are social and economic, and they carry an explosive potential. But the military has no conception of how to address these demands, except to repress them. So although there have been a lot of illusions in Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the head of the military, the belief that this will last is very shortsighted.

It's clear that tensions will resume. There has been already some resumption in the social struggle, in industrial actions and workers' struggles, and in increasing conflicts among the vast coalition that opposed the Muslim Brotherhood. Many of those who took to the streets against Morsi on June 30 are now hostile to what the army is trying to impose.

ER: As you mentioned, some Middle East commentators have asserted that no revolution took place in Egypt—or anywhere else in the region, for that matter—because there hasn't been a transfer of political power from one class to another. How would you respond?

GA: Revolution is a term that applies to different forms of transition, but revolutions share common features in that they involve the participation of masses of people in overthrowing the institutionalized political forms of the moment.

A revolution takes the form of an upheaval, which in some cases leads to very deep and radical change, including a change in which social class holds predominant political power. But if we place the bar so high, then the term "revolution" applies to only a very limited number of historical episodes.

If a mass mobilization topples a president, even if this is combined with a coup, the perception of those involved that they are participating in a revolution is correct. You can't deny them the pride that they are engaged in a revolution. The essential point about what is happening in the Arab region is that this is indeed a long-

term revolutionary process.

Most revolutions in history are very long processes—all the more so when a whole geopolitical region is involved in the process. But even if you focus on one country, it's clear that revolutions don't occur in days or weeks.

The French Revolution or the English Revolution took place in the course of several years or decades, depending on when you believe they ended. It is important to grapple with the whole historical process, and even if you can more or less identify a date when it all started, the point is that it becomes a protracted process of change.

If the key problem in Egypt is indeed that development is blocked by a particular sociopolitical structure, it is clear that there is no way to unblock this situation without overthrowing this sociopolitical structure. Replacing this structure with a progressive sociopolitical power may not necessarily culminate in a socialist transformation, though this could serve as a kind of historical horizon. If the overthrow of Egypt's crony capitalism leads to the emergence, for instance, of a political order bearing some resemblance to Chavismo in Venezuela, this would already be a major change in the sociopolitical structure.

For now, what's at stake is the removal of the sociopolitical structure that is currently in power and replacing it with something different. For that to happen, it is essential to be clear about what needs to be changed. The ruling sociopolitical structure, like every social power, is backed by armed force. And in order to remove this obstacle, the mass movement must be able to win over the soldiers in order to prevent their use in defense of the old regime.

But in order to accomplish this, it is necessary to work for the emergence of a mass movement with some degree of organization, coordination and strategic clarity. At present, this kind of organized force is missing, and it won't be built in a matter of weeks or months. That's why revolutions are very long processes.

Historically, the Russian experience of 1917—where there's a revolutionary party like the Bolshevik Party that preexists the revolutionary crisis and is then able to grow very rapidly and seize power—is the exception, rather than the rule. In the Arab countries today, we are not confronted with anything like these conditions.

The organized force for progressive social change has yet to be built. There is maybe only one country in the Arab region where such an organized force already exists to some degree, and that's Tunisia. The Tunisian workers' movement is organized and is very powerful, but what is lacking there is strategic clarity on the left.

ER: The revolutionary challenge to the Syrian regime seems to face even more difficult circumstances. What accounts for this?

GA: Syria is a tragic illustration of one of the shared characteristics of the Arab uprisings generally—namely, the challenge of multiple, overlapping counterrevolutions. Revolutionary movements must, as a rule, confront the counterrevolutionary challenge of the old regime, but in this region, this is just the beginning.

In addition to the counterrevolution organized by the state, there is also the regional counterrevolutionary role played by the oil monarchies of the Arab-Iranian Gulf. On top of this, there is the international counterrevolution, which is represented in the region above all by the United States. But in the case of Syria, there is also Russia and Iran, which are the Syrian regime's chief backers.

And on top of this combination of local, regional and international counterrevolutionary forces, there's something even more pernicious: namely, a segment of the forces that emerged in the course of the uprising and appeared to be participating in the revolution had a reactionary agenda. I'm here speaking of the Islamic fundamentalist forces. Whether they are the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafis or any of a number of jihadist elements, these forces have proliferated in the region since the 1970s and '80s.

They have managed to tap into the major part of the popular resentment, because of the decline of the forces of the left—the left nationalists, the communists and the rest. This vacuum has been filled by Islamic fundamentalist forces, which are actually reactionary, not progressive forces. In those circumstances in which they oppose existing regimes, they oppose them not with a progressive agenda, but with a reactionary agenda based on religion, which translates into a socially reactionary ideology.

From the beginning of the uprisings, the United States was faced with the thorny question of how to respond, especially when the uprisings targeted their allies, such as the Mubarak regime in Egypt. Generally, Washington has tried to renew the kind of relationship that it once had with the Muslim Brotherhood from the 1950s to the 1980s, when these two entities partnered in opposition to any force regarded as left or progressive in the region.

In 2011, the U.S. essentially placed a bet that these conservative forces would be able to act as an ally in the effort to undermine the revolutionary dynamic from within—since the local regimes failed to stop it from without through repression, reform, cooptation or some combination of these.

In the case of Syria, the United States has deployed the same strategy as it has in Egypt and everywhere else, which is to prevent the revolutionary movement from getting too radical—to try to keep it within prescribed limits.

In this regard, they invoke the lessons of Iraq. In Iraq, the option rejected by the Bush administration was the right one, as far as the aims of U.S. imperialism were concerned, or so it is believed in Washington today. That option was Saddamism without Saddam—in other words, the preservation of the Baathist state and the various structures of the old regime but without Saddam Hussein at the top.

Today, this is the U.S. blueprint for Syria—Assadism without Assad. In fact, this is what they contemplate for

every country in the region where the movement reaches a level that makes the continuation of the old order no longer possible.

This is basically what they tried to get in Egypt, and you see all the contradictions that entailed. They, in fact, accomplished this in Yemen, by means of an agreement brokered by the Saudis, which meant aborting the basic aspirations of the young people, the masses and the workers who were part of the Yemeni uprising. That's why the mass mobilization is continuing nevertheless in that country.

In Syria, they see imposing some kind of agreement to preserve the key structures of the regime as their preferred outcome, but with the minimum condition to preserve credibility that, like in Yemen, Bashar al-Assad steps down. And let's be clear—"democracy" has nothing to do with it.

What you have in Syria is a convergence of interests of the regime and of the oil monarchies that together seek to divert or dilute the democratic character of the uprising and subsume it under the dominance of Islamic fundamentalist forces.

For the Gulf monarchies, a democratic and progressive uprising in Syria—or anywhere else, for that matter—is extremely dangerous. So whenever they can oppose such an uprising by supporting the regime itself, they do, as in Egypt—or, of course, in Bahrain where they even intervened militarily to uphold the monarchy.

But in cases where they can't back the regime directly, the next best option is to try to control the movement and defuse its progressive potential, and Islamic fundamentalist forces are well suited for this because they represent absolutely no threat—ideologically at least—to the oil monarchies, especially the Saudis, whose official ideology is the most reactionary fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

The Syrian regime, too, wished for such forces to dominate the uprising because they constitute its preferred enemies: they are the best way to dissuade a sizeable section of the

population as well as Western powers from supporting the uprising. This explains why the Syrian regime released from jail more than 1,000 jihadists a few months after the beginning of the uprising in 2011. The regime's intent was to allow the Islamic fundamentalist currents to become a major force in the uprising in order to discredit it.

Thus, even though the Syrian regime and the Gulf monarchies had different purposes, they converged on the strategy, and the result is the same. Both have an interest in some way in seeing such forces become dominant in the uprising.

And for the Syrian regime, this was a way of dissuading the United States from supporting the uprising. This strategy was efficient in the sense that we can see how little inclination Washington has shown to provide any real support, beyond vague verbal statements and very limited material means, to the uprising.

More than anything, Washington fears further radicalization of the situation and the potential destabilization of the Gulf, where the major interests of the United States lie—due to oil, obviously. For this reason, the U.S. is perfectly happy to see the Syrian regime survive intact.

ER: Can anything change this dynamic in Syria?

GA: The situation in Syria is definitely a very tragic one. The Syrian population is absolutely exhausted. In addition to the 200,000 people killed and the huge number maimed, there are millions of people displaced and

refugees living under appalling conditions. All of this has become a humanitarian tragedy of immense proportions.

The progressives in Syria are rather isolated while the other forces have their various patrons: the regime is heavily backed by Russia and Iran, and the fundamentalist forces receive funding and support from the Gulf. We have seen an evolution in the situation that is definitely worrying, one in which gloomy assessments seem legitimate.

But even in Syria, it is essential to think beyond the present moment. We shouldn't forget that the reversal of the military situation is relatively recent.

Until a few months ago, the Syrian regime was losing ground, and losing ground in such a way that it prompted Iran to intervene massively to rescue it. This included sending thousands of fighters from Hezbollah in Lebanon and from Iraq to fight alongside the regime in order to rescue it. This allowed the regime to reverse the tide militarily and to go on a counteroffensive, which was accompanied by the growing visibility, if not dominance, of Islamic forces within the armed opposition.

There is still a potential for a democratic and progressive movement to manifest itself again, as it did in the first year and beyond of the uprising. This movement is still there. The Syrian population is definitely not seduced by the prescriptions of the fundamentalist forces.

As long as there is an armed conflict,

those who have the means will prevail on the ground. But at some point, the armed struggle will stop, and the socioeconomic crisis will reassert itself, as will the social aspirations of those who made the uprising in the first place. This potential in Syria—the progressive potential, the democratic potential—is fairly strong, as it is throughout the region as a whole.

Ultimately, these are but phases in a long-term revolutionary process, and from that angle, I think the key point is that the whole despotic and reactionary order that has ruled over the region for decades and looked as if it would remain there for eternity has since 2011 been set on fire. The flames of revolutionary change have been unleashed, and it won't be easy to put them out.

Of course, various reactionary forces have also been set loose. There is, alas, no certainty that all this will end with victories and progressive outcomes all over the region. There can also be major defeats and reactionary setbacks, if not historical regressions, but the key point is that the process is ongoing for now, and it's a time for action, for organization, and for political and strategic clarification.

So many observers from afar merely reflect the most recent developments and speak of them as if they represent the final outcome. It is essential to resist this impulse, engage with the process as it unfolds and strive to steer it toward progressive outcomes.

*This interview was made for the US **Socialist Worker** and published on 14 January 2014 .*

Welcome to RS21

23 January 2014, by Socialist Resistance

We welcome the openness of the statement they have posted on their website and the basic principles around which it is framed.

It is never a time for celebration when an important organisation of the revolutionary left goes into crisis and decline because, ultimately, the whole movement suffers. The question it

poses, however, is how to build something new and better out of this experience and how to move on in a positive direction.

It is no secret that, for us in Socialist Resistance (SR), what is posed by the SWP crisis is the issue of revolutionary unity. We are already involved in such discussions with the comrades of the International Socialist Network (ISN) and Anti Capitalist Initiative (ACI). The far left in Britain has long been weakened by a legacy of divisions which neither reflect today's political reality or the needs of the wider movement, in fact they are destructive to the wider movement.

Yet such divisions are difficult to transcend despite the fact that many of the old arguments, like the class nature of the Soviet Union, for example, have been overtaken by history.

Events like the SWP crisis open up the possibility of a breakthrough in this regard. A chance to build something new that would cut across the existing traditions and divisions of the far left. A chance to build something on a different political basis and to give a strong new emphasis, for example, to feminism and self-organisation, and, in our view, the ecological issues as well.

Even before the SWP crisis reached its present stage there were signs of realignments and recomposition opening up - for example with the emergence of the ACI.

The new organisation we would want to see would have a different kind of internal democracy from the current far left model. The old way that democratic centralism has been conceived and used (and not only by the SWP) is way past its sell-by date.

Such an organisation needs to ensure full rights for minorities, including, proportional representation on leadership bodies. It should also give individual members the right to express minority views in public

Joint work

We remain ready to dissolve SR into such an organisation if it is established. We recognise that building a new organisation of this kind is not easy and that it will take time. There is also an urgency, however, since such opportunities when they arise do not hang around for ever.

Meanwhile there are plenty of openings for joint work in the broader movement which should in any case underpin any process of regroupment. For us Left Unity is particularly important given the ongoing crisis of working class representation. It has established 50 groups around the country with over a thousand members and, after its successful founding conference in November last year, is preparing a policy conference in March. As important is the People's Assembly and the struggle against the cuts. The fight against austerity, cuts and privatisation is central to our priorities and the People's Assembly gives an important forum which brings together the trade unions and community campaigns and practical action on the ground. We are also involved in the Campaign Against Climate Change, anti-fracking initiatives and of course in the unions.

In fact we are already working with

RS21 comrades in various ways. Comrades from RS21, as well as from the ISN and ACI, are involved in building the meeting on February 15th in solidarity with the Syrian insurrection. Both Dave Renton and Ian Birchall are speaking at our event on the New Left on Feb 1st. There will be other opportunities as well. For example we have a comrade from Bangladesh doing a speaking tour in Britain in March on super exploitation and the climate crisis in Bangladesh, which the comrades would be very welcome to get involved in.

The RS21 comrades argue in their statement that: 'The working class movement is more powerful when the left finds ways of working on what unites people against our common class enemy' and go on to say that they 'will seek to work with broader working class forces on the basis of agreement where possible'. We strongly agree on this.

They also say: 'The revolutionary left faces a series of difficult questions and important tasks. We hope that together we can begin to address these challenges.' In our opinion, the best way to address such challenges is to work to establish both joint work and a common view as to how to create a new revolutionary organisation in the future which would, we think, be a real pole of attraction not only to those currently members of far left organisation but also to many others who are not.

17.1.14

[Socialist Resistance](#)

Maidan 2013: A Multi-Dimensional Dialectic of Resistance (A View from the Left)

23 January 2014, by **Aleksander Buzgalin**

A tragedy turning

farce as tragedy?

Ukraine is shot through with contradictions. For the second time in ten years Kiev has become the scene of mass protest actions and of clashes with the authorities. But the events of late autumn 2013 are only superficially similar to those of 2004. The situation has grown far more complex.

In 2004 the main force on Maidan (Independence Square) consisted of people who had grown tired of the arbitrary and contemptuous behaviour of the ruling politico-economic elite. The nationalist groups and so forth were perhaps no less strong in 2004 than they are in 2013, but the main thing then was the mass outrage of the population. Further, the choice posed in 2004 was not only geopolitical (whether to join with Europe or to be aligned with Russia), but socio-political as well - between us, the citizens, and them, the parasites.

The situation on Maidan now is different in many ways. The general discontent with the parasitism of the authorities remains, but what is now taking centre stage is the result of carefully thought-out organisation on the part of the pro-Western political and economic elites. While in 2004 the behind-the-scenes operators were still reluctant to show themselves openly, they have now moved unashamedly to the forefront. And there is another, very important aspect: in 2013 nationalist and pro-fascist organisations have taken to Maidan in a capacity approaching that of the main, effectively organised force of the "protest" (just so, in inverted commas).

In essence, the situation has now become multi-dimensional, and analysing it is thus all the more important. The contradictions tearing Ukraine apart have to be understood not just from the now-fashionable geopolitical point of view, but also in terms of their socio-economic, politico-ideological and cultural-historical dimensions.

Hence the main thesis of this text: just as in the past, modern-day Ukraine represents the intersection of profound contradictions, and not just the contradictions of Ukraine itself.

Ukraine consists of steelworkers and "office plankton", of teachers and peasants, of service company proprietors and oligarchs, with the latter divided into various "clans". The country has pro-Western, pro-Russian and "independent" trade unions and public organisations. The latter consist mostly of cynically pragmatic parliamentary parties which view the question of integration with the European Union above all through the prism of the electoral challenges they face. Ukraine is also a primarily Ukrainian-speaking population and a mainly Russian-speaking one. Finally, Ukraine represents centuries of wars with and incorporation into Poland and Lithuania. It is 450 years of unification with Russia and centuries of oppression by the Russian Empire. It is the heroism of antifascist partisans and the crimes of Banderist supporters of fascism.

Hence the profound, fundamental contradictions of Ukrainian society, historically determined and conditioned by social and class factors. The contradictions are multi-dimensional: historico-cultural, politico-ideological, pragmatic-economic, geopolitical, and social and class dimensions are now once again intersecting on Maidan.

There is one more thing that should not be forgotten: Ukraine is also the unity, at once concrete and universal, of its peoples, history and culture. This is the "Ukraine" that is a certain integrity, a wholeness, with a general national interest of peace.

It is through the prism of these issues that we can and should analyse the question of the integration of Ukraine with Europe.

But first, a few words on the international context, on Russia and the European Union.

Russia: traditions of friendship between peoples and increasing chauvinism, goals of social liberation and the rapaciousness of oligarchic

capital...

Let me say at the outset: for me, Kharkov, Kiev and Lvov, the Dnepr, the Carpathians and Crimea, are inseparable parts of my homeland, the Soviet Union. I grew up and lived in this space, in which I had friends everywhere. But I also grew up with an understanding that my homeland, the USSR, was permeated with deep contradictions, which were capable of destroying it and which in the end did so. I can also say the same of contemporary Russia: this is my country, the most important part of my homeland. I love it sincerely, but precisely for this reason I am unwilling to close my eyes to the fact that in modern-day Russia reactionary political and economic forces for the most part prevail.

More precisely, modern-day Russia still retains a vast historical potential in terms of culture, science and education. In this country, numerous sociological surveys indicate, the majority of citizens still embrace the values of social justice and popular power. Until now, and despite profound internal contradictions and growing nationalism, our people in their majority have kept their orientation toward friendship and equal relations with the peoples of other countries. This applies in particular to the peoples of such countries as Ukraine, since our parents and children fought together against fascism, and our peoples joined for centuries in building a unified socio-cultural space in which no-one thought particularly to ask whether someone like, for example, the writer Nikolay Gogol should be considered Ukrainian or Russian.

From this has stemmed the powerful trend toward the integration of the peoples of Ukraine and Russia. I stress - not simply of Ukrainians and Russians; our countries are multinational, and understanding this is of fundamental importance. From this stems the undoubtedly progressive and productive character of our increasingly deep collaboration, our extremely close cultural integration, that has allowed each of our countries to develop and spread its culture more fully and broadly not only on its own territory but also on

that of its neighbour. It is important to note that Russia would live badly and with difficulty without the cultural heritage of Ukraine, including the refined European heritage of western Ukraine. The Ukrainian language, the poems and plays of Lesya Ukrainka, Gogol's Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka, the steep bluffs overlooking the Dnepr, old Lvov and the avenues of Kharkov are all part of our common cultural world.

But modern-day Russia is also the great-power chauvinism nurtured by the country's barbaric capitalism, and also Russia's still-dominant elite. In this respect everything is far more complex and difficult, and indeed, worse. For Russia's oligarchs Ukraine represents above all a new territory on which they can implement the same policies of parasitising natural riches and cheap labour power as in Russia. To the peoples of Ukraine, Russia's "senseless and pitiless" business will bring the same it has brought to our country: a mixture of harsh capitalist exploitation and semi-feudal dictatorship.

The same needs to be said of our dominant "political class". Russia today is ruled by a corrupt bureaucracy that in intertwined with raw materials and financial oligarchs plus the bosses of the military-industrial complex. The real social and civil rights of Russians are remote from anything that corresponds to the norms of a democratic state, and the rights of independent trade unions and social movements are extremely restricted. An important factor in Russian political life is the great-power nationalist sentiments of various figures in the country's ruling circles.

This makes Russia's actual ruling elite an extremely problematic partner for integration, to put things mildly. Economic and political integration with this Russia would do no more than to provide a basis for strengthening pro-Russian oligarchs and pro-Russian political elites in Ukraine. The peoples of Ukraine would on the one hand acquire relatively cheap resources for the country's citizens and for production, plus the retention (and perhaps eventual growth) of heavy industry

and of the industrial proletariat, plus the large markets of the countries of the customs union. Meanwhile, they would also acquire the preservation and strengthening of primitive-capitalist forms of exploitation and of the semi-feudal exploitation of workers, along with paternalist-bureaucratic tendencies in the state apparatus and the danger of geopolitical domination by the Russian bureaucracy. When the balance-sheet of these two sides was drawn up, the ultimate result would be that little would change for most Ukrainian citizens.

What about the European Union?

The European Union: Achievements and Crimes. Or, What could Integration into the EU Give Ukraine?

The first point that needs making is an obvious one: the achievements of the European Union are real and are familiar to everyone. If, that is, we are talking about the "centre" of the EU. Here, despite all the present difficulties, a great many positive aspects remain. If we are considering Northern Europe, the so-called "Scandinavian" model implemented there has real advantages compared to the systems that prevail in Russia and Ukraine. Above all there is the high degree of socialisation of the economy. These countries feature a progressive income tax, generous social welfare provisions, mainly free access to education, health care and culture, and strong, active trade unions. They have low levels of social differentiation (with a gap of 6-7 times between the richest and poorest deciles of the population, that is, less than half the figure in our countries), and genuine rights for the institutions of civil society.

Mixed in with this barrel of social-democratic honey, however, is a spoonful of tar. More than one, in fact.

The impressive social outcomes in these countries were first achieved many decades ago, after which the process...stopped. Meanwhile, a social democratic trend, like a bicycle, cannot stand still; it has to keep moving forward. If an attempt is made to stop at a particular point, if the transformations are frozen halfway, society will finish up in a condition of stagnation, of social and spiritual inertia.

Such are the achievements of the EU. The second point - the crimes of the EU - might seem to be a far-fetched ideological insinuation by the enemies of European integration and democracy.

However.

As in the case of Russia's ruling elite, in our analysis of the EU we have to distinguish between the achievements of the citizens of the European countries on the one hand, and the policies implemented by European transnational corporations and by member governments of NATO on the other. By the achievements of citizens, we have in mind above all the achievements of workers, of their trade unions, of left and left-centrist parties, and of social movements and non-government organisations, whose active struggle over more than a century for social and civil rights has yielded undeniable results. When the question is posed in this way it becomes clear immediately that the NATO governments, as "actors" of the European Union, are responsible for the deaths of thousands of peaceful citizens of the former Yugoslavia. Nor is this all; they are responsible too for the financial crisis that since 2008 has struck virtually all the peoples of the world, for the mass unemployment in the countries of Southern Europe, etc., etc.

Most important is the fact that integration of Ukraine into the European Union does not mean that Ukrainian citizens in the foreseeable future will live in the same way as the citizens of Germany or Austria. Like the world as a whole, the European Union is divided into rich and poor regions. On one side of this division are the "homelands" of the European transnationals, the countries that

concentrate in their hands the major masses of capital and most of the innovative technologies, along with extremely valuable simulacra ranging from product brands to all sorts of mass-cultural and media garbage. On the other side are the countries where cheap labour power (by European standards) is concentrated, along with resource industries, polluting processes, assembly plants, and populations ready to work for 12 to 14 hours at a stretch without days off in order to partake of the "European way of life". The social differentiation within the EU, if we compare the richest decile with the poorest across all the countries of the community, turns out to be approximately the same as in Russia and Ukraine...

In this context, it is important to recognise that if Ukraine follows the route of integration into the European Union, it will fall into the category of the poor periphery. No-one, strictly speaking, disputes this. It is simply that the pro-European circles in Ukraine "forget" about it. Or more precisely, refuse to discuss it.

What, in these circumstances, would lie ahead for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters? An extremely contradictory outcome, just as if they moved in the direction of Russia.

They might be able to expect a certain formal shift in the direction of parliamentarism and rights for various minorities (though hardly of rights for trade unions and the left). The Ukrainian elite could also expect an easier dialogue with the West and inclusion in the EU establishment, along with new opportunities to expand the activity of the small and middling bourgeoisie in the areas of commerce, tourism etc. Plus – and this is of fundamental importance – victory for Ukraine's pro-Western oligarchic factions in the competitive scramble for state resources and markets. Meanwhile, this would also strengthen the already significant migration of Ukrainians to the EU, mainly as a form of "outsourcing" of low-paid workers. Also in the picture would be an intensification of the process of deindustrialisation and a growth of Ukrainian nationalism, along with substantial socio-cultural problems for the Russian-speaking population.

So what should Ukraine do?

What, then, is best for Ukraine? To become another peripheral area of the EU, to integrate itself with Russia, or to be an independent country of the Third World?

Personally, I would formulate my answer along three lines.

In the first place, this question must be decided by Ukrainian citizens themselves. For emissaries of the European Union or of the US to exercise pressure here is just as unacceptable as for Russians.

Secondly, different strata of Ukrainian society have an interest in different solutions. Naturally, I do not claim to be able to pronounce any ultimate truth, but as a scholar and a citizen I am reluctant to take the position of a neutral observer. In my view, the situation can thus be presented (in extremely compressed form) as follows:

For most of the peasants and industrial proletariat of eastern Ukraine, collaboration with Russia (I stress: as a matter of principal, we are not talking about incorporating Ukraine into Russia) would bring greater stability, and would not create new cultural and language problems. This is the case despite the obvious vices of Russian business and Russian bureaucracy. The same would apply to members of the mass intellectual professions such as teachers, health staff and other highly trained workers in state institutions. All these people would receive a relative stability in exchange for paternalist tutelage from the Ukrainian bureaucracy and further restrictions on their civil and social rights. Also gaining from a rapprochement with Russia would be the corresponding circles of big business, along with the political and bureaucratic groups intertwined with them. All these "pluses" are extremely ambivalent. But there is one undoubted plus to be had from our countries drawing closer together: a revival and intensification of our socio-cultural dialogue. This parameter is of fundamental importance, and is

uniformly positive.

For most members of the "free professions"; for the small and middle bourgeoisie of the commercial sector; for those oligarchs whose activities have become interwoven with Western trans-nationals; and also for pro-Western political forces, an orientation to the European Union would be advantageous in the short term.

Further along the track, these groups would most likely find themselves subordinated to the corporations of the EU "centre", just as happened with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Paradoxically, temporary gains from European integration might be possible for independent trade unions and various non-governmental organisations (especially those at a certain distance from present-day socio economic problems, such as campaigners for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual rights). These groups might be freed from some of the restrictions imposed by the present bureaucracy.

These democratic advances, however, would scarcely be important or enduring, even if they were to occur at all. In the countries of the EU periphery, the norms of civil and social rights are violated with striking ease. Meanwhile, the Brussels bureaucracy shows an astonishing blindness in "failing to notice" these breaches, unless they affect the interests of European transnationals or of their Brussels neighbours at NATO headquarters.

Now for the key element in this point. Unlike the case with the events of 2004 (where the author was present in person), nationalists and fascists came close to making up the largest and best-organised force, in practical and active terms, involved in the Maidan actions of 2013. It needs to be said straight out: the growing strength of right-wing nationalist and pro-fascist organisations in Ukraine, just as in the Baltic countries, is the direct fault not only of the authorities in these countries, but also – and I stress this in particular – of the ruling structures of the European Union. The liberal democrats of Europe have tried already on occasion, and with

monstrous results, to achieve their aims by playing the fascist card (we may recall the Munich Agreement of 1938, to cite just one example). The present use of nationalists and fascists as one of the key forces in the Maidan protests is in essence just such a crime (though for the moment on an incomparably lesser scale), committed by the Ukrainian “oppositionists” and the European Union.

Thirdly, even a brief analysis of the situation in Ukraine, carried out from a Marxist perspective, tells us plainly: all of us, especially in Ukraine, need to escape from the closed circle of choosing the supposedly less evil of two equally futile alternatives. We can and must find a perpendicular response. It lies on the plane of first of all solving the socio-economic, political and cultural problems, not on the level of pragmatic geopolitics (of the type, as the saying now has it, of “Who should we sell ourselves to?”), but of genuinely radical economic and political reforms within (at a minimum) Ukraine itself. Here too we can and must make critical use of the experience of struggle of the European democratic left, and of our shared experience – highly contradictory, but of fundamental importance – of the transformations that occurred within the Soviet Union.

Nor should we forget the crucial element: an essentially class-based left politics cannot and must not ignore

the presence as well of a general Ukrainian popular interest, as a concrete-universal (and hence contradictory) unity of the country’s ethnic groups, history, culture and geography. This interest is marked by contradictions that cut across numerous dimensions. Nevertheless, it exists. Only the peoples of Ukraine itself, not Russians or European “policy-makers”, can and should determine a strategy, conditioned by this general interest, for the country’s development.

Accordingly, I cannot and will not attempt to set out such a strategy for the citizens of Ukraine. But as a Marxist scholar and as someone who grew up amid a dialogue of our peoples and cultures (and not of them alone), I cannot and will not remain on the sidelines as an indifferent observer. I would thus like to remind all concerned that the highest criterion of progress for any people, a criterion that exists despite the post-modernist aim of “deconstructing grand narratives”, has been and remains the free, rounded development of the individual. This means not just economic growth, but also the advancing of human qualities and capacities, and the solving of social, environmental and humanitarian problems.

As I have argued repeatedly in the past, such an alternative for the

peoples of Russia, Ukraine and any other country does not lie along the road of transformation into a periphery of any “empire of faith”, whether of the European Union or North America. Nor is it to be found in a union of oligarchs and bureaucrats of semi-peripheral countries. In the broad sense, finding such a solution requires rejecting a choice between “lesser evils”, and searching instead for a “perpendicular” response. This response can only consist of advancing along the road of democracy and socialism. Only this road can yield both integration into a global collaboration (a collaboration of peoples and cultures), and also the progress of national culture, since an authentic culture is always both global and national.

This is not an abstract recommendation. Setting out on this course is already possible, even for countries that are not among the world’s largest or most developed. Present-day examples of such countries include a whole series of Latin American states whose peoples have rejected the tutelage of the US and have started implementing a democratic, socially oriented model of development. These countries have made their first priority not pursuing geopolitical intrigues, but choosing a socio-economic and political-ideological strategy that presents an alternative to the global hegemony of capital.

Manifesto: 10 Theses of the Leftist Opposition

22 January 2014, by **The Left Opposition Collective**

The worldwide economic crisis affected the Ukrainian economy much more drastically than almost any other economy in Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals. Economic growth after the crisis nearly froze, and industry will most likely continue to decline in 2013. Furthermore, Ukraine’s economic system more or less exempts

oligarchs from paying taxes. One can completely legally export tens of billions of dollars worth of minerals, metals, ammonia, wheat, and sunflowers, and report no profit. All earnings are stashed in offshore jurisdictions, where almost all of Ukraine’s functioning enterprises are formally located. Any profits earned by

an enterprise inside the country can be legally and effortlessly transported to offshore locations by reframing them as a fictitious loan, for example.

Is it any surprise that the Ukrainian government systematically has trouble replenishing the budget? At the end of last year, Ukraine was in a pre-default

stage. Withholding wages owed to state employees became common practice, and the budget practically stopped allotting funds to social programs. The situation was exacerbated by a trade war with Russia, when Gazprom forced Ukrainian gas prices to record heights in Eastern Europe. Oligarchs drove the country into a corner; even after endless discussion, they could not formulate a coherent development strategy, avoiding any investment in the state while systematically draining it. Any development strategy must include a curbing of their appetites – it must at least partially ban offshore schemes and enforce minimum tax payments. But that's exactly what oligarchs cannot accept, even though they understand that if they don't change the rules of the game, they will drive the state into socioeconomic catastrophe, chopping off the branch where they themselves sit.

The right-wing opposition, when speaking about economic problems, focuses almost exclusively on the themes of corruption and ineffective rule. And if the conversation does turn to oligarchs looting the state, then it limits itself to the businessmen who are close to the Party of Regions, and most often does not delve further than the business that belongs to Yanukovich's sons. From the right wing's point of view, the other oligarchs are not a problem, because they have national consciousness. By this logic, when Ukraine is plundered by a "?????" (Ukr. for "authentic" – editor's note) Ukrainian, it is still beneficial to the national cause.

A paradoxical situation is unfolding. All conscientious economists (even quite neoliberal ones like, for example, Viktor Pinzenik) agree that the tax and regulatory systems of the country were built to completely exempt oligarchs from paying taxes. Everyone can see that this system won't last much longer, but none of the politicians in the Parliament have dared to offer the obvious and realistic systemic alternative. Almost nobody dares to publicly admit that the most pressing issue facing Ukraine is not the EU or the trade union, but simply that oligarchs should start paying their taxes. The apparatus of the state is perfectly capable of forcing them to

do so since the oligarchs' functioning assets are all located in Ukraine. However, as Andrei Hunko recently pointed out, the oligarchization of Ukrainian politics has reached such proportions that not a single one of the existing parliamentary parties can even mention this matter.

Sadly enough, only radical leftists voice these minimal and obvious demands. I emphasize that these demands must be seen not as the agenda of the Left Opposition, but as first steps toward the formation of policies that could gather together all anti-oligarchic forces, who don't consider an ultra-right fascist dictatorship to be any kind of solution – the kind of dictatorship the All-Ukrainian Union "Svoboda" so insistently pushes us towards, while the official opposition leaders sit by and watch.

The glaring absence of any coherent plan of action to help Ukraine out of its crisis has become so pressing that even quite liberal, almost right-liberal publications have started discussing our "Ten Points" – such as, for example, Lvov's *zaxid.net*.

Zahar Popovich, "Left Opposition"

Plan for Social Change, in ten points.

We submit to your attention a document titled "Plan for Social Change", which outlines ways to increase the well-being of the citizens and ensure social progress. It was created partly because most socioeconomic demands at the Euromaidan demonstrations have been ignored. Our hope is that this document might serve as a platform to unify a wide range of social, leftist, and trade-union initiatives. This document was written by activists belonging to the Left Opposition, a socialist organization that aims to unify all those who belong to the community provisionally called *#leftmaidan*.

It goes without saying that political parties transform the protest movement and direct it toward electoral politics; they try to find new

voices, instead of making significant changes to the system. We do not support the ideas of liberal structures, which propagandize free market economics, nor do we support radical nationalists who push discriminatory policies.

Our hope is that the protest movement, spurred to action by social injustice, might ultimately eradicate the root causes of this injustice. We believe that the cause of most social problems is the oligarchy that formed as a result of unbridled capitalism and corruption. It is important to limit the egotistic interests of our oligarchs, instead of relying on the help of Russia or the IMF, with the consequent national dependence. We believe that it is harmful to add our voices to the demands for Euro-integration; instead, we need to clearly delineate the changes necessary to support the interests of ordinary citizens, especially hired laborers. On several occasions, we cite the progressive experiences of a few European states that have taken similar measures.

The goals we've created are relatively moderate, so that they might appeal to the widest possible range of organizations. We won't conceal the fact that, for us, this plan is less a reaction to current events than a step toward the formulation of a contemporary leftist political force – a force that is capable of influencing those in power and offering an alternative to the existing social order. The Left Opposition considers the proposed plan to be the minimum for building socialism on the principles of self-government: the socialization of industry, the allocation of profit for social needs, and the appointment for citizens to government functions.

We welcome you to subscribe to our Facebook and VKontakte pages to voice your opinions there, or to email us at gaslo.info@gmail.com.

Replacing one set of politicians and oligarchs with another without overall systemic changes will not improve our lives. Instead, our group of social and union activists is proposing ten basic conditions for overcoming the economic crisis and ensuring Ukraine's future growth.

1. GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE, NOT BY THE OLIGARCHS

There must be a transition from a presidential to a parliamentary republic, in which presidential power is limited to representative functions on the international stage. Authority should be transferred from state administrators to elected regional committees (soviets). Authorities should have the right to fire delegates who have not met expectations; judges and police chiefs should be elected, not appointed.

2. NATIONALIZATION OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Metallurgy, mining, and chemical industries, along with infrastructural enterprises (energy, transport, and communications) should contribute to social welfare.

3. WORKERS SHOULD CONTROL ALL FORMS OF OWNERSHIP

Following successful European examples, we should construct a wide network of independent workers' unions, which will control management and guarantee workers' rights. Workers should have the right to strike (refuse to work when payment is not received). Workers should also have the right to take out loans at the employer's expense if wages are delayed (following Portugal's example). Production, accounting, and management data of all enterprises that employ more than 50 people, or have a capital turnover of over \$1 million, should be published online.

4. INTRODUCTION OF A LUXURY TAX

We should institute a 50% tax on luxury items - yachts, elite automobiles, and other items that cost more than 1

million hryvna. A progressive personal income tax should also be introduced. Individuals with an annual income of more than 1 million hryvna should be taxed up to 50%, following Denmark's example (in such a system, Renat Ahmetov alone would have paid 1.2 billion hryvna to the federal budget, as compared to the 400 million he actually paid in 2013 on a 17% tax).

5. PROHIBITION OF OFFSHORE CAPITAL TRANSFERS

The bylaws that exempt Ukrainian enterprises from taxation in a number of offshore countries should be revoked, in order to prevent the transfer of capital offshore. The assets of offshore companies in Ukraine should be frozen, and a temporary administration should be appointed until the legality of the investments can be proven.

6. SEPARATION OF BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT

Citizens with incomes that exceed 1 million hryvni should be banned from government positions and seats in local government. Nationwide reelections should be held in compliance with this rule.

7. REDUCTION OF SPENDING ON THE BUREAUCRATIC APPARATUS

Government spending should be controlled and transparent. Administrative reforms should take place, resulting in a reduction in the number of managerial employees. Today, whole departments could be replaced by computer programs. But instead, in the last eight years the number of bureaucrats in the government has grown by almost 10%, comprising more than 372,000 people (in Ukraine, there are 8 bureaucrats for every 1000 people - in France,

there are only 5 per 1000!).

8. DISSOLUTION OF BERKUT AND OTHER SPECIAL FORCES

Beginning in 2014, there should be subsequent reductions in spending on the security apparatus of the state: the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Security Service, the Office of the Prosecutor General, and special police forces. It is unacceptable that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was allocated more than 16.9 million hryvni in 2013 - 6.9 million more than all public health expenditures!

9. ACCESS TO FREE EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE

Funds for this initiative should come from the nationalization of industries and reduced spending on the security and bureaucratic apparatus. To eliminate corruption in education and medicine, we must raise doctors' and teachers' salaries and restore the prestige of those fields.

10. WITHDRAWAL FROM OPPRESSIVE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS We support the termination of further cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions. We should follow the example of Iceland, which refused to pay debts accrued by bankers and bureaucrats (under government warranty) for the purposes of personal enrichment and "social handouts", rather than for the development of industry.

[LeftEast](#)

Published in Russian on the Open Left platform: <http://openleft.ru/?p=1157>

Translated from the Russian by: Jordan Maze and Helen Tsykynovska

Huge march advances struggle for peace, national rights

21 January 2014, by **Dick Nichols**

However, since ETA's declaration two years ago of a permanent ceasefire, this particular weapon has started to backfire on the Spanish state's ruling conservative party.

The latest Deusto Barometro survey of social attitudes, produced by the University of Deusto, showed just how much. Of those interviewed 16% thought ETA itself "was helping consolidate peace in Euskadi [the Basque Country] a lot or somewhat", as against only 6% for the PP (less than the vote that party gets in Basque Country elections). ETA itself was judged to be doing more for peace and reconciliation than the Association of Victims of Terrorism (AVT), the terrorism victims' group closest to the PP (14%).

The party that was felt to be doing most to heal wounds was the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), presently governing in Euskadi, (at 39%), followed by the left-nationalist coalition EH Bildu (29%) and the Socialist Party of Euskadi (PSE), the Basque affiliate of the once social-democratic Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), at 26%. Only 10% thought the Rajoy administration was making any contribution to the peace process.

Despite this trend the PP government remains locked into its traditional ETA-hunting strategy, with the line that it has nothing to negotiate with the armed organisation. Unlike the peace processes in Ireland and South Africa, the PP is after a "final solution" with victors and vanquished—"there will be no let-up from the Spanish state until ETA is forced to disarm and dissolve.

As for the hundreds of ETA prisoners in Spanish and French jails, they can qualify for early release or transfer to jails in Euskadi only if they individually recant and apologise. And, according to interior minister Jorge Fernández Díaz and Rajoy himself, prison policy will not change until ETA disappears.

In short, the Basque abertzale (patriotic) left may have definitively adopted peaceful methods of political struggle, but the Rajoy government has stepped up its intense legal and

police war against abertzale organisations. Its latest assaults have deepened outrage within the broad nationalist community in Euskadi, a process which reached a new peak on January 11, 2014, when 130,000 people marched for "human rights, understanding and peace", and completely overflowed central Bilbao.

Background to January 11

The march, the biggest in Bilbao in living memory, was jointly convened by the parties forming EH Bildu (led by the abertzale left organisation Sortu), the PNV and the two nationalist trade union confederations—the Patriotic Workers Commissions (LAB), aligned with the abertzale left, and Basque Workers Union (ELA), aligned with the PNV.

The main spur to the turnout was popular anger with the January 8 arrest of the eight members of the Coordinating Group representing the Basque Political Prisoners' Collective (EPPK) and the raid of their offices on the grounds that the group is an "operational arm" of ETA. The arrestees, who have since been jailed, were two lawyers and six former prisoners.

The protest was the first time in 15 years that the two wings of Basque nationalism had jointly called a demonstration, and partly explains why it was twice as large as the last nationalist mobilisation, the October 5, 2013 protest against the banning of the prisoner rights platform Herrera.

Josu Erkoreka, spokesperson for the Basque Country government, said: "The demonstration was so large because the vast majority of Basque society wants to stop frustration of the opportunity for peace."

The arrest of the EPPK eight followed on a December 31 EPPK declaration in support of the peaceful political strategy of the abertzale left and a January 4 press conference of 80 ETA ex-prisoners called to express their backing for it. Many of those present had recently been released after the decision of the European Court of Human Rights last October 21 that Spanish court decisions extending

their sentences were in breach of European human rights law.

The EPPK declaration denounced the cruel treatment of Basque political prisoners and the Rajoy government's intransigence, while recognising "in all sincerity the suffering and damage to all sides generated as a result of the conflict" and envisaging individual solutions for individual ETA prisoners. This was a change from the previous EPPK stance of insistence on negotiations with the prisoners as a whole.

The arrest the EPPK eight came after they had already announced their role as mediators in explaining the prisoner association's new stance to social and political forces in Euskadi.

In a clear exposure of the political motivation behind the arrests, the Spanish interior ministry issued a media release before the operation had even begun. The police also raided the office of senator Iñaki Goioaga, elected on the left-nationalist ticket Amaiur in the 2011 Spanish national elections.

In response, the citizens' platform Tantaz Tanta ("Drop by drop"), initiator of the march against Herrera's banning, announced on January 9 that it was calling a January 11 rally to protest the EPPK arrests and in support of the stalled peace process. The march's slogan would be, "Human rights, resolution, peace—Basque prisoners to the Basque Country".

Initially, judge Pablo Ruz gave permission for the demonstration to take place, but when this ruling was referred to judge Eloy Velasco (responsible for the EPPK arrests) he reversed it, citing an alleged relation between Tantaz Tanta and the banned Herrera. Tantaz Tanta then called off the demonstration.

However, the social media in the Basque Country and Navarra immediately began buzzing with the hashtag, "I'm going". This expression of rising outrage forced the PNV, which had already condemned the arrests, to turn words into deeds. It negotiated a nice generic slogan for the demonstration with Sortu and the

other nationalist forces involved—one which judge Velasco could find no grounds to reject—and the new mobilisation was announced at an emergency joint press conference.

Despite this change, no all-Spanish political forces, neither the PSE or Esker Anitza and Esker Batua, present and past Euskadi affiliates of the United Left (IU), took part in the march, even though the last two organisations had welcomed the EPPK declaration and condemned the arrests of the EPPK eight and the ban on the original Tantz Tanta protest.

Why the ban?

What explains this latest judicial offensive, which actually banned a demonstration of the kind that was allowed while ETA was still carrying out armed attacks? Why was Tantz Tanta's demonstration against the outlawing of Herrira allowed and its march against the EPPK arrests banned?

In a December 18, 2013, interview with the Mexican daily La Jornada, Arnaldo Otegi, imprisoned Sortu national secretary in absentia, explained the main political factor that is always likely to produce such contradictions:

The government of Spain has no interest in peace. It doesn't want it and longs for the previous scenario in which the armed violence of ETA allowed it to brandish the indispensable 'enemy within' so as to conceal its own deeply anti-democratic, anti-social and authoritarian nature. The disappearance of ETA's armed violence creates a serious problem for it, to the extent that there's now no excuse not to tackle the real political debate, which is none other than respect for the Basque people's right of self-determination.

In this new context the PP government has trashed the position of the Popular Alliance (AP), its forerunner, which in 1988 signed the Ajuria Enea agreement with the other main parliamentary parties in Euskadi. This agreement accepted that the end of

ETA's armed struggle would see the release of all prisoners not involved in the deaths of victims of its attacks.

The Rajoy leadership has also become hostage to its tactic of relentless attack on the PSOE government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-2011) for being "soft on terrorism" and of its financial and political boosting of the organisations of victims of terrorism closest to it.

According to Luis R. Aizpeolea, long-time analyst of ETA, the Association of Victims of Terrorism, which the PP built up to bludgeon Zapatero, has escaped its control. The association shops around for the best deal from competing right-wing Spanish-centralist outfits, with Rajoy facing three rivals ready to attack his government for the very same "softness" of which he accused his PSOE predecessor.

There's the PP's own internal "Tea Party", led by former prime minister José María Aznar and former premier of the Madrid region Esperanza Aguirre, who claim that "democracy has lost out to ETA" because "terrorists" have been elected to parliaments in Euskadi, Navarra and Madrid. They also imply that Basque nationalist support for Catalonia's right to decide its political relationship with Madrid represents a further spread of the terrorist virus. (Aznar advocates that Catalan premier Artur Mas be immediately jailed if he carries out an "illegal" referendum.)

There's the "tougher-on-terrorism-than-thou" Union for Progress and Democracy (UPyD) and, since last week, Vox, a new candidate for the anti-Basque and anti-Catalan vote, which includes ex-PPers and advocates defending the threatened unity of Spain by replacing its 17 "autonomous communities" (states) with "a unitary state with a single government and single parliament".

Last week, Rajoy moved to woo Association of Victims of Terrorism support by stating that he had never negotiated with ETA and never would. (A lie, the 1996-2004 Aznar government, in which Rajoy was a minister, moved 200 ETA prisoners to Basque Country jails after talks with ETA.) Rajoy added that he would study ways to ban released ETA prisoners from standing for public office. The PP

will also try to reassert its anti-terrorist credentials by including a ceremony with victims of terrorism in its February national convention.

Reactions

The massive success of the Bilbao march put all parliamentary political forces in Euskadi, with the exception of EH Bildu, on the defensive. A PSE spokesperson said that "the PNV has got into this game [of alliance with Sortu] because its legs have been shaking for fear of losing hegemony within the nationalist electorate". For the PSE, the speaker of the Basque parliament, the PNV's Bakartxo Tejeria, should not have taken part in a march that did not represent an "inclusive political and social consensus".

But the PSE had no proposal of its own to make about advancing the peace process. And in Navarra, abstention by its sister Socialist Party of Navarra (PSN) actually allowed a motion condemning the Bilbao demonstration to pass the regional parliament, against the opposition of Basque and Navarra nationalist forces and United Left.

Yet, given the rising pressure to at least be seen to be doing something for peace, PSE parliamentary spokesperson José Antonio Pastor announced that the party would consider returning to sittings of the PNV government's Peace Table, at present attended solely by the nationalist parties. Veteran PSOE leader Ramón Jauregui was similarly vague—"the Rajoy government should resist pressure from the right and 'manage the issue of Basque prisoners in the most natural and intelligent way". For former premier Patxi López, "a few more than 500 ETA prisoners can't take up more time and attention than the 177,000 unemployed we have in Euskadi".

PNV president Andoni Ortuzar chose to stress that Sortu had been unable to control its own base, many of whom chanted slogans in support of ETA prisoners and the EPPK at what had been agreed would be a silent protest. Ortuzar was also at pains to underline that the demonstration did not represent "a new stage" in relations between the two wings of Basque nationalism, but "an exceptional response, motivated by an exceptional situation".

At the same time, the PNV government called on Madrid for a change in its prison policy. Spokesperson Erkoreka said after January 11 that "the increases in toughness applied in recent years are related to an idea of prison policy conceived as an additional instrument of anti-terrorist policy. [However], from the moment that ETA abandoned its arms, it makes no sense to maintain a prison policy in anti-terrorist mode."

To date, the PNV government has been very cautious in its dealings with the Rajoy administration, wary of repeating the 2005 defeat in the Spanish parliament of the proposal for a referendum on the relation of the Basque Country to Spain, advanced by former PNV premier Juan José Ibarretxe. Thus, while the PNV and premier Iñigo Urkullu support a new status for the Basque Country, this is conceived as coming "from dialogue, negotiation and agreement".

This approach in clear contrast with that of Catalan premier Artur Mas, whose political options are being set by the vast surge of independence sentiment in Catalonia. Urkullu and the PNV are being reinforced in their prudence by the present loss of support for Mas's party, Convergence and Union (CiU). By opting to fight Madrid over Catalonia's right to decide the right-nationalist CiU has actually lost to its left, mainly to the centre-left nationalist Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC). Were Urkullu to choose to repeat the Mas approach in Euskadi, a similar shift in support from the PNV to the abertzale left could be anticipated.

However, this unstable balance may well have to change. If, as seems likely, Rajoy is determined to continue the war against Basque left nationalism, passivity from the PNV also runs the risk of losing support to its left.

Partly to avoid that scenario prominent figures within the PNV universe have taken to appealing to the Rajoy government's sense of own self-interest and of the ridiculous. Last week former premier José Antonio Ardanza described PP intransigence as "rather unintelligent" and commented: "When I hear 'everything is ETA', that means that

a gentleman from ETA entered the Spanish Finance Ministry to the salute of the Civil Guard or whoever was at the door." This was a reference to Martin Garitano, EH Bildu member and head of the Gipuskoa provincial administration, who had recently visited Madrid to sign a tax agreement.

Yet if there's one thing the Rajoy government totally lacks, it's a sense of its own absurdity. All the signs are that it has decided that it has more to lose to its right than to its left—its main challenge is to shore up Spanish-centralist support against the threat from the Union for Progress and Democracy (UPyD), Vox and its internal critics, not appear rational and consistent in its approach to Basque concerns.

This is despite tensions between the Euskadi PP branch and other parts of the organisation. For example, while the PP's "Tea Party" right sees ETA winning everywhere, for Basque PP president Arantza Quiroga, "ETA has been defeated" and the important job is for the Spanish and Basque governments to collaborate in assuring its final disappearance: "We cannot allow the abertzale left to lead the ending of ETA."

Gipuskoa PP president Borja Semper commented sarcastically on January 11: "Is Andoni Ortuzar new to politics? Is the PNV a party of greenhorns? They went to protest in the streets of Bilbao and they didn't guess what would happen? They didn't guess they would be a tool of the abertzale left to give legitimacy to certain demands?"

However, Semper's understanding offer to the PNV, despite its "mistake", was "to return to a scenario of calm, trust and basic shared positions" so that EH Bildu "will be forced to come over to democracy". At the same time, the PP in Euskadi is hoping that Rajoy finds the courage somewhere to stare down Aznar and Co.

In this atmosphere one thing is certain: the Spanish interior ministry will be digging for any dirt it can find for a renewed attempt to have Sortu—already on a kind of good behaviour bond as a condition of its 2011 legalisation by the constitutional court—outlawed. This effort will start

with judge Velasco's "haul" of 30 boxes of documentation from the raids on Herrera and the EPPK.

As for Sortu itself, its valuation of January 11 was direct: "The Spanish state is a cesspit of human rights ... its only offer to the Basque Country is rejection and denial... [But].the 130,000 of us who demonstrated yesterday showed that with forces united this country is unstoppable... "From now on the challenge is to make sure that yesterday wasn't a one-day bloom, but the beginning of the united work that this people needs."

Conclusion — on the Catalan road?

Will January 11 mark the beginning of a new rise in independence sentiment in Euskadi, a Basque version of the million-strong July 2010 Barcelona protest against the Spanish constitutional court's ruling against sections of 2006 Catalan statute?

Sizeable differences between the Basque and Catalan situations counsel a cautious response here. First, because the Basque Country and Navarra still enjoy a special fiscal relationship with the Spanish state. This allows the two regions to collect their own tax income, keep what is judged necessary to fund their spending and then then forward an agreed amount to the national treasury. A 2011 study by the BBVA Foundation claimed that this arrangement meant Navarra and Euskadi were the two autonomous communities most favoured by present Spanish fiscal arrangements. Also, the impact of the economic crisis in the Basque regions, while still sharp, has so far been less disastrous than elsewhere.

Second, while the treatment of ETA prisoners causes concern beyond the nationalist community—the Deusto Barómetro shows only 12.3% in favour of no change in the status of ETA prisoners—it remains to be seen whether the issue can mobilise higher levels of community support than achieved so far.

Third, while two recent polls show

50%-55% want either independence or more autonomy for Euskadi (20%-25% and 30% respectively), it is not yet clear whether this sentiment can be transformed into a mobilised demand for a Basque right to decide (Euskadi's version of the 2012 and 2013 million-plus demonstrations on Catalan National Day).

According to Deusto Barómetro at present only 9% rate the relationship with Spain as Euskadi's most important issue. A planned Via Vasca, along the lines of last September's 1.6 million-strong Via Catalana, will help show how reliable that figure is.

However, even with these cautions stated, the situation in Spain's Basque lands remains volatile. The social and economic crisis, which is now striking at the previously solid pillars of the Euskadi economy, such as the world-famous Mondragon cooperative, must keep flowing over into the national question, intensifying the sentiment that Euskadi is best out of Spain or part of a very different Spain.

In Navarra, the ruling coalition of the corrupt, pseudo-nationalist Union of the People of Navarra and PP is kept in power by Socialist Party of Navarra abstention and seems certain to fall at

the next regional elections, if not before.

Most immediately, the escalating conflict between Catalonia and the Rajoy government will continue to create a deep impression in Basque Country politics. Any advance for a Catalan right to decide can only inspire the Basques who have suffered so much at the hands of the same enemy.

January 19, 2014

[Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal](#)

Alan Turing "Pardoned" by Queen of England

21 January 2014, by **Barry Sheppard**

In 1952 Alan Turing was tried and convicted of engaging in sex with other men. He was then presented with the choice of prison or chemical castration. He chose the latter, estrogen treatments that caused him to grow breasts, made him impotent, and sent him into depression. He was fired from his job with the British government. Washington barred him from entering the United States, which he had often visited to work with mathematicians in Bell Labs.

In 1954 he ate an apple laced with cyanide, which was ruled a suicide. He was 41 years old.

In 1936 Turing developed a model of the "universal computing machine," a concept which lies behind all computers. Other subsequent mathematical models of computers have been found to be equivalent to what has become known as the "Turing machine." Besides this accomplishment, Turing broke the German enigma code in the Second World War, and proved two important mathematical theorems, among other

important work.

The law under which Turing was convicted was repealed in 1967. But in the years since, attempts to have him pardoned were repeatedly rebuffed. The most recent was last year, 50 years after his conviction, when Parliament voted down a motion to pardon him. The reasoning of the majority of this most august body was that since the law was the law in 1952, and Turing had knowingly violated it, he was a lawbreaker and lawbreakers cannot be pardoned. This decision provoked an immediate response, when 10,000 signed a petition that Turing be put on the new 10-pound note.

There was international outrage in addition. All this led to the Queen's pardon this year. The wording of the pardon itself is disgusting: "Now Know Ye: that We, in consideration of circumstances humbly represented unto Us, are Graciously pleased to extend Our Grace and Mercy unto the said Alan Mathison Turing and to grant him Our Free Pardon

posthumously in respect of said convictions."

The "We" and "Us" and "Our" refer to the Queen's double personhood, as both the physical person Elizabeth II and as the embodiment of the "body politic," which is immutable and "utterly void of Infancy and Old Age." It's something like the Pope's "We," which refers to him and God.

But Turing does not need forgiving because he did nothing wrong. If any entity requires being extended Grace and Mercy it is the UK government for its crime against Turing, which arguably directly led to his death.

Turing was pardoned because of his fame and accomplishments. But some 75,000 men were convicted under the same law as Turing, of whom 26,000 are still alive. Turing's pardon should be extended to the 75,000, and would improve the lives of the 26,000 today.

A final thought — those reading this are doing so on a "Turing machine."

January 2, 2014

The enemies of the popular revolution: the dictatorial regime and the counter revolutionary reactionary force

20 January 2014, by **Revolutionary Left Current in Syria**

It is necessary to remind that the popular movement was not – especially since last year – subject only to the violence and the unprecedented brutality of the bourgeois dictatorial regime, but was also subjected to the double repression of armed Islamist groups, whose degree of extremism and violence against militants and activists of the popular movement, and also against the popular movement itself, vary from one group to another through the arrests of activists according to various reasons: social practices considered by these reactionary groups as contrary to the teachings of their vision of Islam, such as smoking cigarettes, dresses. D’ish also shot and arrested demonstrators, or even assassinated numerous activists and some cadres of the FSA known for their commitment to the principles of the popular revolution. The worst of these brutal and reactionary violence actions were committed on a large scale by D’ish. This led to widespread reaction against the groups to the point where they lost all popular support. Terror and oppression were the only means left to them to impose their control over some areas, particularly in Raqqa, Rif-Idlib and Aleppo. Unrest and popular anger against this group affected even what remains of FSA brigades that still uphold the program of the Syrian revolution demanding emancipation, democracy, equality and social justice. D’ish pursued a mad ambition to impose its control over many areas that were freed from the control of the regime. This led it to attack brigades of the FSA and even reactionary Islamist factions with whom it shares the same ideological

references and attempt to impose on the population a very reactionary political, ideological and social model based on the “principle” of “struggle against evil”. It was at this moment that the “Army of Islam” was established and then the “Islamic Front” in late November 2013 with a reactionary political program comparable to Da3ech ideological thoughts. The Islamic Front actually announced their refusal of “democracy, secularism and civil state” while struggling for a state which sovereignty has to be based on the Shariah as the sole reference, and as the government addressing and organizing the behaviors of individual and of the society and of the State.

Then was born the “ Revolutionaries Front in Syria”, composed of some Islamic factions and several brigades of the FSA in order to “ establish a good Islamic governance”. There also has been an attempt to promote Jabhat al Nusra as better than D’ish, despite the fact they are issued from the same reactionary ideology, have the same fascist practices and are both affiliated to al-Qaeda.

The ongoing war between the armed forces is primarily designed to control zones of influence in liberated areas and to try to establish and impose an ideological hegemony on the population through medieval forms of organization, such as “ Shariah committees”. The Islamic Front, for example, the largest in terms of number, follows the jihadist Salafist political thoughts advocated by the reactionary regime in Saudi Arabia. For this, we can safely say that – except for a few brigades of the FSA, which have been weakened and

marginalized in recent months – that the real objective of rival groups in conflict with D’ish is not to restore the objectives of the popular revolution to overthrow the regime and establish a free and democratic Syria. They are reactionary forces, motivated by ideological, military and political rivalries to share, if it is not to reach a monopoly of control, of liberated areas.

This bloody conflict, in which the Syrian masses once again are paying the price, helped to expose the jihadist Salafist, intellectually and politically. It has also demonstrated its ravages and monstrosity especially when it is able to impose its domination and implement, even for a short time, its practices. It is safe to believe that many of those who supported Salafist policies or those who remain in their spheres deviated from it realizing they were wrong, or because they were forced to support it by necessity or coercion.

However, the current conflict, on the one hand, increased the opportunity to weaken the reactionary forces and secondly to refresh the independent revolutionary consciousness of the masses. But also to encourage a new start for the popular movement after a period of decline last year as a result of the dual repression of the regime and reactionary counter revolutionary forces as mentioned earlier. In this aspect, the ongoing conflict does not lack of positive aspects. It has not only succeeded in undermining the rule of D’ish and reduce its repression against the popular movement, but it will most likely lead to the weakening of its sisters factions in other reactionary groups. We are witnessing

a revival of popular initiatives after a bitter experience with these reactionary factions. These latter have revealed themselves as a true enemy of the mass struggle and their sacrifices for emancipation.

This revival of the popular movement is also witnessed through the upsurge in popular protests in "liberated" "liberated" at the beginning of the conflict against D?'ish and against its rivals among Islamic reactionary factions. This is why we do not bet on the winning of one of these reactionary factions, but we rely on the continuation of the revolution and its victory. We bet on the revolutionary popular movement in addition to the brigades of the armed popular resistance in the FSA who continue to identify to the objectives of the popular revolution, for its continuity and for the overthrow of the rule of the ruling junta. In its ongoing process, it became clear that the

revolution is facing multiple enemies. Firstly, the dictatorial regime and its allies, and secondly reactionary forces hostile to the revolution and their fascist regional allies powers.

On this occasion we condemn the false and dangerous political position of certain structures of the soft liberal opposition linked to some countries of the region that consider the elimination of D?'ish, in addition to the Democratic Union of Kurdistan, as the elimination of all counter-revolutionaries forces, in their eyes. A D?'ish can hide another D?'ish. We call for a broad alliance against two fascisms, of the Salafi jihadists and of the bloody dictatorial regime, around the slogans of the Syrian revolution for freedom, equality, democracy and social justice.

We know that the path for achieving the goals of the revolution is long,

difficult and that it will witness victories and setbacks. We are nevertheless absolutely convinced that the flame of the revolution that pushed the masses of workers to rebel will not be turned off until the completion of its demands for emancipation. This requires the revolutionary left in Syria, who hoisted the banner of socialism, of working tirelessly in the context of this complex revolutionary process and is committed for many tasks, the most important are the practical commitment to all the struggles of the masses, anywhere and at any time to defend their demands and their direct and common interests, and at the same time to build the revolutionary socialist workers party.

All power and wealth to the people!

Damascus, January 15 2014

[Arabic version](#)

Under the yoke of old and new superpowers, will Algeria always be an "emerging country"?

19 January 2014, by **Nadir Djermoune**

Especially as at the same time, by coincidence of timing or by devious calculation, the Chinese sent their Foreign Minister Wang Yi to recall "the vibrancy of Algerian-Chinese friendship, 55 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations". The minister took the opportunity to highlight the growing importance of trade between China and Algeria, the balance of which has now reached \$8 billion, compared to only \$200 million 30 years ago! Finally, he noted the existence of significant potential "to be exploited by the two countries, particularly in the areas of trade and investment in public works, a sector that now amounts to \$45 billion."

These three events transformed what was nothing more than a *commedia*

dell'arte into a Greek tragedy for the French side! They reveal, on the Algerian side, the contradictions and the fragility of the Bouteflika system at the end of the latter's reign. Consequently they reposition the debate on the 2014 presidential election, which is mainly centred on "yes" or "no" to a fourth term for the ailing President, towards more strategic questions, in particular economic issues.

2 - We know the official Algerian reaction. It regrets the "diminished value" for Algerian-French relations that was engendered by this joke in bad taste. No more than that! As concerns public opinion, informed opinion, behind the reactions of dignity and national pride in the face

of the misplaced jokes of a "former colonialist", voices emerged which highlighted the "emergence" of the Chinese economy, like that of the other so-called "emerging" economies designated by the acronym "BRICS" (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). These voices are critical of the alignment of Bouteflika's version of capitalism on Western capitalism. They suggest repositioning towards these "emerging" countries, including China and also Putin's Russia. In the opinion of among others the economist Abdelhak Lamiri, Algeria has the financial means to become an emergent economy.

Other analyses in the same vein explain the nationalist, "progressive", even anti-imperialist character of

these emerging countries. These analyses explain to us, correctly, that the wars waged by France, in Central Africa and previously in Mali, are the expression of an offensive of Western capitalism, under American hegemony, with the aim of preventing so-called "emerging " economies, notably China and Russia, from developing, and from developing Africa. They nevertheless forget to specify the capitalist character of these emerging economies!!!

However, in terms of real economy, history teaches us that in the nineteenth century the capitalist powers that dominated the world were the two colonial empires, British and French. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was another emerging economy: Germany. It would be at the origin of two world wars, aiming to reorganize the colonial market that had escaped it. It was the USA that would dominate the global capitalist economy following the Second World War. Meanwhile, there was Lenin's Russia and Mao's China, still underdeveloped, who tried another path to emancipation, the path of the emancipation of the wretched of the earth. In their wake there emerged the struggles of colonized peoples for their independence and their emancipation, those of Messali El Hadj , Boudiaf and Abane Ramadhane, those of Fidel Castro and Mandela. Today, are not these emerging countries, such as Putin's Russia, following the same road as Germany and America, in other words are they not new imperialisms who want to replace the

old ones? That is the question that is before us in Syria. That is what it means to "emerge"!

Seen from this angle, the possibility of the emergence of an economy that is still today underdeveloped and dependent, in the framework of capitalism, remains a questionable theoretical hypothesis. But it is questionable from a strictly scholastic point of view! Because even given the presence or the combination of certain conditions, such as for example the Marshall Plan associated with local capital which saw the emergence of the South Korean and Taiwanese economies, or the presence of an energy source that is essential to technological development under the soil of countries that are candidates to emergence, such as Algeria and Iran, the reality of capitalist development is still that of being the agent of massive destruction of human culture and of its environment. That is why it is absolutely essential to reject this path.

So is there not another road to emancipation, another kind of emergence?

3 - This way of posing the problem puts the sterile discussion about the struggles in high circles concerning the end of Bouteflika and the future of his brother back onto a more strategic field. But the struggles for succession are unfortunately only conducted by individuals. Ali Benflis, former head of the government and Bouteflika's opponent in the last presidential elections, is a candidate. Along with

Sellal, the current Prime Minister, to whom we could add Ouyahia, the unavoidable servant of the state, as he likes to define himself, they remain potential presidential candidates. But for the moment, none of them represents a political, social and economic project that would create any interest in the debate. Which gives free rein to the most fanciful speculations. Candidates are often seen in terms of petty Philistine calculations, of the interests of small groups or of personal settling of accounts. Motivations of this kind certainly exist. But the profound tendencies that combine local, regional and international interests, but that remain mute for the moment, will quickly become dominant. The Algeria of today continues to represent an important regional stake for a capitalism that is in full financial meltdown.

But faced with a versatile political personnel, and with a debate on the presidential election that is confined to conflicts within closed circles, perspectives of emergence may keep us waiting. Neither the "liberal social economy ", which was the campaign slogan of Benflis in 2009, nor the "economic patriotism " of Ouyahia, which is a variant of Bouteflika's programme, and even less the "everything for the private sector" of Sellal will be able to take Algeria towards emerging in a democratic and social fashion, in the service of the majority of Algerians. Only a broad mobilization and a transparent debate on a radical break with the current model can augur brighter tomorrows.

Assad will not be overthrown if ISIS is not overthrown

16 January 2014, by **Joseph Daher**

The Western media claimed that the Syrian Revolution was good in the beginning - but recently it has been hijacked by jihadists who have seemed to be the major force

on the ground. Has the events of last 3 days proven the opposite? How did it all start against ISIS?

The mainstream medias, whether in

the West and in the Middle East, and Western and regional governments have been wanting us to believe that the Syrian revolution is dead and has transformed itself into a sectarian war

between the Sunni Majority and the religious and ethnic minorities on the other side, or in a similar trend resuming the events in Syria in an opposition between jihadists vs the Assad regime. This last perspective actually pushed many to join the camp, composed of conservative right wing to "anti imperialist primaire", arguing that Assad is a lesser evil to the Jihadists, while we should oppose both because they nurture each other and are both seeking to establish an authoritarian system. This following statement is typical of this trend:

"We need to start talking to the Assad regime again" about counterterrorism and other issues of shared concern, said Ryan C. Crocker, a veteran diplomat who has served in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. "It will have to be done very, very quietly. But bad as Assad is, he is not as bad as the Jihadists who would take over in his absence."

In addition to believe that cooperation with the Assad regime is the best way to struggle against jihadists and Islamists [22] extremists groups is to ignore the history of this regime in instrumentalizing and cooperating with them such as with jihadist groups after the Iraqi invasion by the USA in 2003 or Fateh el Islam in Lebanon in 2007, and to forget that the regime is the one to have freed most of the jihadists and Islamists extremists in the various amnesty calls since the beginning of the revolutionary process while democrat activists were kept in prison, assassinated and targeted by the security services.

A similar comment could be made to a section of the left that has abandoned the Syrian revolution because it was allegedly hijacked, or not even supported it since the beginning. For example, Tariq Ali declared that he believed that popular movement has been " overtaken by the Muslim Brotherhood and groups to its Right, backed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Deserters from Assad were taken over by Turkey and France. So the character of the uprising changed by the end of the first twelve months. How can one not register this fact? The relationship of forces today does not favour any secular or progressive groups. To pretend otherwise is to be

blinded by illusions or the requirements of intra-sectarian left politics". The events of the last few days have shown the opposite... His blindness is due in his lack of analysis and perspectives of the possibility of radical change from below shown by the Syrian revolutionary masses since the beginning of the revolution. Another comment to make is the continuous problem of analyzing the Syrian revolutionary process from a geo-political perspective, ignoring completely the socio-economic and political dynamism on the ground in Syria. And many continue to consider Iran, Russia, or Syria to be anti-imperialist states struggling against the USA, which is wrong on every aspect. Our choice should not be to choose between on one side the USA and Saudi Arabia and on the other side Iran and Russia, our choice is revolutionary masses struggling for their emancipation.

As Pierre Frank, French Trotskyist, wrote : "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation"

In addition, both sides have been trying to impose a solution from above that would maintain the regime with a Yemeni solution (change the head of the regime, while maintaining its structure).

The struggle against the Assad regime and the jihadists are necessary in the struggle for democracy, social justice and secularism. Seeking the lesser evil is the road to defeat, while hiding or silencing the counter revolutionary and reactionary nature of jihadists or some islamists groups like the Islamic Front because they are struggling against the Assad regime is mere opportunism and the road to the failure for the Syrian revolution.

And we have seen that the Syrian revolutionary masses know exactly this threat by deepening their revolution in struggling against sections of the counter revolutions represented by ISIS.

The popular anger against ISIS authoritarian practices and reactionary ideology in the liberated areas of the Assad regime has been mounting for months. We should not forget that popular resistance against ISIS has been occurring for a while, for example in the city of Raqqa liberated from the regime in March 2013, youth and popular organizations of the city have been demonstrating and opposing ISIS nearly since its liberation. Numerous campaigns and demonstrations have take place against the authoritarian practices of ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in the city. There were solidarity gatherings demanding the liberation of kidnapped activists held in Islamist-held prisons..

Similar protests contesting the authoritarian and reactionary practices of the Islamists took place in Aleppo, in Mayadin, al-Qusayr and other cities like Kafranbel throughout the year 2013.

We should also remember that some jihadist forces, such as Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS, have concentrated on trying to reach hegemony in some liberated areas attacking activists and FSA battalions, rather to fight against the regime, while many jihadists pouring into Syria from countries like Iraq and Lebanon are not flocking to the front lines. Instead they are concentrating their efforts on consolidating control in the northern, rebel-held areas of the country. Many Jabhat al Nusra fighters left in the middle of ongoing rebel operations in Homs, Hama and Idlib to head for Raqqa province once the provincial capital fell in March 2013. During the battle for Qusayr in late May, Jabhat al Nusra units were noticeably absent. In early June, rebel reinforcements rallied to take the town of Talbiseh, north of Homs city, while Jabhat al Nusra fighters preferred to stay in the liberated areas to fill the vacuum that the Free Syrian Army affiliates had left behind.

We have repeated constantly that these jihadists and islamists reactionary groups are an enemy of the revolution, alongside all groups that encourage sectarianism, kidnapping, torture and murder, as a practice of power must be considered enemies of the revolution to fight.

At the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014, the popular frustrations and anger exploded following new acts of violence from ISIS, especially by the murder by this latter of Dr Abu Rayyan, a doctor member of Ahrar Sham an Islamist group part of the Islamic Front, and of FSA and some Islamists groups members, in addition to the attack on Kafranbel media center on December 28 2013 and the kidnapping of some of their members.

In the eyes of the people ISIS was another face of the Assad regime because of its authoritarianism, like a banner in a demonstration on December 27 2013 in Maraath al-Numan in Idlib was saying "The majority of us have become wanted by two states (the Assad regime and ISIS)".

On January 3 2014, demonstrations occurred in different locations where ISIS was present to demand its departure and overthrow. Chants "Assad and Da3ech are one" or "Da3ech, get out", which have become widely used for a while now in liberated areas of Syria, were heard everywhere. Military members of ISIS were arrested in some villages, while other ISIS battalions were kicked out after popular protest and military fights.

ISIS had to leave many areas, killing often the people, including activists, women and children, that were held in their prisons.

Popular protests and military fights between FSA and Islamic Front battalions against ISIS are still happening as we speak. The pressure of the popular masses has pushed military battalions to act against ISIS, especially the Islamic Front recalcitrant in the beginning to engage military against ISIS. The creation of the Syrian revolutionary Front in December 2013, which is a gathering of FSA battalions, also helped to coordinate actions of local FSA groups to launch this action.

The Syrian revolutionary masses have proven for a while that their revolution is not dead and never have been, but it is the world that did not and don't want to see it

What are the dynamics behind the offensive against ISIS? Is it a plan by the pro-Western opposition to get the West back to their side again? Or a major explosion of anger by the Syrian masses who are fighting to survive their revolution?

The pro western opposition had nothing to do in these mobilizations, they just condemned in these past months some actions of ISIS, but we should remember that the SNC hold nevertheless some responsibility in the spread of these groups or at least by their cover, by defending them groups in the beginning despite their reactionary and sectarian ideology, like Jabhat al Nusra instead of standing firmly on the principles of the Syrian revolution (Freedom, Dignity and no to sectarianism) and doing everything possible to develop the democratic components of the FSA and strengthening them by providing them with material and financial support. These groups just as the Syrian regime want to divide the Syrian people into sectarian and ethnic entities, while the Syrian revolution want to break the sectarian and ethnic division that the regime has tried to enforce on the people.

As explained above, the explosion was the result of the popular anger and the will to continue and deepen the revolutionary process. As a symbol of this, in a neighborhood of Aleppo on Saturday January 4, slogans used until today against the Assad regime were brandished against the jihadists such as "our revolution is against all oppressors " or " the Syrian people will not submit ." Numerous calls have been made to call the next Friday (January 10 2014), the traditional day of demonstrations the Friday against Assad and Al Qaeda.

For those who saw the Islamist influence in the Syrian revolution as completely dominant or explaining the popular mobilizations can review their calculations and analyzes , as we have repeatedly stated. The Syrian uprising is part of the dynamics of the other peoples uprisings and struggles for democracy and social justice. A third force , opposing both the tyranny of the Assad regime and Jihadists and Islamists reactionary groups ,

continues to grow and develop despite the media blackout around these groups, and even by some circles that present themselves as left who prefer stay in simplistic dichotomies of seculars vs. Islamists or by only analyzing Syria through their geopolitical analyzes which prevent them of understanding the revolutionary dynamics and the possibilities of radical change from below.

We the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, which from the very beginning, despite its modest capacities, has not once faltered in its engagement with the revolution, calling for democracy and socialism, and we have not divided groups or individuals between secular and religious, but between those who want to continue the revolution and achieve its objectives and those who oppose it.

A banner crafted by revolutionary city of Kafranbel resumes very well the spirit of the Syrian revolution "enemies are many ... the revolution is one... and continues" Yes the revolution continues, despite the difficulties and multiple dangers, the Syrian people continues its path towards freedom and dignity sweeping all oppressors.

Where do you think will the clashes between ISIS and other rebels lead to? What are the prospects for the Syrian revolution? How will it win?

The recent event will definitely lead to a diminishing influence for ISIS at the benefit of different battalions of the FSA and of the IF. This might lead to renewal and deepening of popular mobilizations and self organizations. All sections of the counter revolutions eliminated is a positive point.

To answer the question of the prospects of the Syria revolution, we need to answer it at different levels.

On the international and regional level, the background has been the announcement of Geneva II "peace" conference and the Iranian USA agreement on the nuclear issue. Through these two international events, we once more see that regional and international actors, despite

differences and rivalries, are ready to agree and share a common position in front of popular revolutions and in our case the Syrian revolution. Geneva II conference has showed once more the will of on one side the USA, the West and the Gulf countries and Russia and Iran on the other side to reach a Yemeni solution to put an end to the Syrian revolution and in order to maintain the structure of the Assad regime, with or without it.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is composed of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, issued a statement on November 28 2013 affirming the importance of strengthening international support for the Syrian opposition represented by the National Coalition, considered as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition by the GCC, for participation in the Geneva 2 conference. It added that the conference should lead to "an agreement to put in place a limited timeframe to form a Syrian transitional government with full executive powers, in accordance with the statement of Geneva 1 on January 30 2012". No clear remarks were said on Assad's future, while the Syrian regime has repeated that Bashar Al Assad would be the president leading the "transition" in case of agreement with the opposition in the Geneva conference of January.

The GCC also declared that they hoped Iran's preliminary deal with world powers would lead to a comprehensive solution to its nuclear crisis. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif has visited Kuwait and Oman beginning of December, while United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, went to Tehran on end of November.

Iran's former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said he wanted better relations with Saudi Arabia in an interview with the Financial Times, while new president Hassan Rouhani declared that Improving relations with regional countries is a central plank of Iran's diplomatic policy.

In the same time, we have witnessed

the common call made by Turkey and Iran on November 27 2013, for a ceasefire in Syria before peace talks in Geneva scheduled for January 22.

The various imperialists and regional powers, despite their rivalry, have a common interest in the defeat of the popular revolutions in the region, including in Syria, and in the maintaining of the status quo. Rivalries and differences between Russia and the USA, or Iran and the USA, have led many to describe Iran and Russia as anti imperialists powers, which is completely wrong on so many levels. Indeed we should not misunderstand imperialist rivalries on a world level between the USA, China and Russia as forms of anti imperialism in the case of China and Russia. They might have different tactical aims or choose to back separate actors, but they are all bourgeois powers that are and will always be strategically enemies of the popular revolution, solely interested in a the statu quo with a political context that enables them to accumulate their economic and political capital. The same can be said on the regional level between the different powers, whether Israel, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, etc... The Syrian revolution is a very good example of this case, where we can see officially international and regional states backing different actors and sides but with all ultimately opposing the objectives of the popular revolution in Syria. The Syrian popular movement has very well understood this by its refusal of Geneva II conference and these drawings portraying all the different international and regional actors of the Syrian revolution sitting on the same table with Bashar Al Assad to decide the future of Syria. In the same vein, they understand well the implications of the deal between the USA and Iran on Syria: to lead to a political transition respecting both interests while the popular movement's demands are ignored.

We have to understand as well that no regional and international power can be the friend of the Syrian revolution, but only the people in struggle in the region and elsewhere.

Regarding the ground level of the Syrian revolution, the self

organization of the masses both in terms of civil and military actions must continue and coordination between the two deepen. The democratic components of the FSA must also be provided arms without political conditions.

The purely military victory has always been difficult, because of the structure of the army of the Syrian regime, built on sectarian, clientelist and tribal alliances and patronage while maintaining a very repressive and totalitarian system within the armed forces, making it difficult for mass defections, and Iranian and Russia material and financial support, in addition to the assistance given by sectarian military groups including Hezbollah. This is why we have always maintained that we need to combine the armed popular resistance and the "peaceful" or civil (strikes and other actions) actions that will allow the overthrow of the regime. This is one way to help bridge the current asymmetry in favor of the regime and destabilize more.

The asymmetry will nevertheless be difficult to overcome militarily as long as the popular and democratic forces in the Free Syria Army are not supported materially and financially.

In conclusion, there is no coming back to the era of Assad regime before the beginning of the revolution and to other forms of oppression. There is no alternative to the continuation of the revolution. One of the main slogans in Syria chanted by the protesters is "Rather death than humiliation". In the same time, we have to be clear that Islamists reactionary groups are a threat to the revolution and for the edification of a democratic, social and non sectarian society in Syria. If they attack revolutionaries they must be condemned and challenged through different ways.

The role of the revolutionary is to be on the side and struggle with these popular organizations struggling for freedom and dignity and to radicalize as much as possible the popular movement towards progressive objectives, while fighting against opportunists and reactionary forces opposing popular class interests.

This is the line of the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, which from the very beginning, despite its modest capacities, has not once faltered in its engagement with the revolution, calling for democracy and socialism. The party has struggled alongside the people and all democratic forces for the victory of this great popular revolution, just as it struggle for the formation of a socialist workers' party. We do not divide groups or individuals between secular and religious, but

between those who want to continue the revolution and achieve its objectives and those who oppose it.

The building of the revolutionary party, alongside and inside the large popular movement, firm on the principles of the revolution, (democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism) is not a utopian dream or hope, it already exists, but it is mostly a political necessity to allow the continuation of the revolution and the achievement of its objectives.

We would like to end also by repeating that no solution can be achieved if the democratic and social issues are not dealt together, in other words social demands cannot be separated to democratic demands, neither subordinated, they go in hand in hand.

[The original interview was published In Turkish on Marksist.org:](#)

[The English translation on syriafreedomforever](#)

Will the Iran deal hold?

15 January 2014, by **David Finkel**

It's an interesting, if dangerous and scary, test of how U.S. politics actually work. The initial results, at least, are in: The unleashed fury of the Israeli government and the "pro-Israel" lobby, the monarchy of Saudi Arabia, the neoconservative warmongers and the much-feared religious right weren't able to block the Obama administration and European partners from reaching a six-month interim agreement with Iran over that country's nuclear enrichment program.

Any socialist, progressive or sane person must welcome this agreement. That's not because it resolves the proliferation of nuclear weapons, or changes the hideous character of the Iranian regime in relation to its own population, or addresses the multiple underlying issues of the Middle East crisis – it does none of these things – but because it pushes back the imminent danger of a really catastrophic war. That's one strike against the widely held theory that the toxic influence of the Israel Lobby can drag the United States into wars that this country's ruling class disapproves.

The political fight, of course, is hardly over. We'll explore the underlying reasons for the Israeli and Saudi sound and fury over the deal with Iran, which in fact have little to do

with the rather distant specter of an Iranian atomic bomb. But we need to note the U.S. political context in which the fight will play out. If anything, this might have been expected to strengthen the hand of the "war party."

A Wounded Presidency

The spectacular disaster of the Affordable Care Act website is a self-inflicted wound from which the Obama administration will not easily, or perhaps ever, fully recover. Certainly all of us who support single-payer health insurance realized that the fantastically tangled system of "Obamacare" would ultimately fail, due to its scheme for subsidizing the parasitical private insurance industry, but no one could have expected such an immediate display of arrogant incompetence in the "rollout."

The Republican Party has regained big chunks of the ground lost during its own government shutdown fiasco. It's true that Congress's approval ratings remain even deeper in the toilet than the President's, but that fact affects both capitalist parties – and now, Congressional Democrats who stood united against repealing "Obamacare," because that would have represented the effective end of the Obama presidency and virtual suicide for the party, are angry,

alienated and afraid to be near him.

Whatever political capital the President had for immigration reform, seriously raising the minimum wage, protecting food stamps from savage cuts, or much of anything else including the climate change crisis, has been dissipated. The Democrats' chances of regaining the House of Representatives in the November 2014 midterm election, marginal to begin with, are now much less than those of losing the Senate as well.

In these circumstances, this might be considered a favorable moment for the power of the Israel Lobby, Saudi Arabia and rightwing militarists to derail the Obama administration's deal with Iran.

In fact, France made a last-minute move to block the first version of the interim agreement – right after Saudi Arabia signed off on a huge purchase of French weapons (a point worth noting in case anyone thought it's only the USA that has a military-industrial complex).

The President's loss of control over his own party is such that many prominent Democratic Senators have taken to the airwaves loudly denouncing his "appeasement" of the Iranians and abandonment of Israel in its hour of existential peril.

Yet the interim agreement “prepared, as we now know, by secret direct discussions between U.S. and Iranian representatives” went through, suspending parts of Iran’s enrichment program and releasing a few billion Iranian dollars held in frozen accounts abroad. That’s actually a small deal in relation to the overall brutal sanctions imposed on Iran’s economy. But as a political breakthrough it’s wildly popular inside Iran, and approved by a strong majority of the U.S. population that’s sick and tired of post-9/11 wars that begin with glowing promises and end in disaster.

What Are the Issues?

In fact, the Iranian nuclear program is no “existential threat” to Israel “not even close. Iran has no nuclear weapon, is not close to one, claims it doesn’t want one, in any case cannot make or test one without detection, and “most important” has no means of delivering such a weapon. All this is commonplace understanding among intelligence services (including Israel’s) and everyone who’s not mesmerized by Netanyahu’s grandstanding. Meanwhile, of course, Israel has its own undeclared arsenal of hundreds of ready-to-launch nuclear bombs.

The real “threat” here is not to the Israeli state’s existence, but to its longstanding status as the overwhelming regional military power and its guaranteed status as the only privileged U.S. ally in the area.

That status allows Israel to terrorize its neighbors at will, especially Lebanon, to run amok in its colonization of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to bomb and invade Gaza on any pretext or none, and to carry out assassinations outside its territory, including notoriously the murder of several Iranian scientists.

When it comes to the destruction of Palestine, nothing of substance will change. The broader strategic scene, however, is shifting. After its debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan, the unplanned consequences of the bombing of Libya and its inability to control the outcome in the Syrian tragedy, U.S. imperialism needs to cut

its reliance on direct boots-on-the-ground and massive bombing campaigns to keep “order.” Drone warfare and Special Forces operations, the symbols of America’s capacity to strike viciously and murderously with legal impunity, can only accomplish so much.

To keep the region safe for investment and oil and to contain if not defeat the Sunni/al-Qaeda jihadist resurgence, U.S. interests require making deals with a number of regional forces “including Turkey, Iran and now, it seems, even the loathsome Syrian regime.

It’s not that there is anything progressive or democratic about this shift, or anything to do with human rights. Those are not Great-Power concerns. It’s just realism: The United States can’t unilaterally hegemonize the Middle East, as the lunatic elements of the neoconservative movement believed, especially when also having to navigate complicated new problems with China in the Pacific, Russia in Eastern Europe, and its own troubled economy and fractured domestic politics.

The U.S. partnership with Israel is definitely a component of the emerging strategy of regional understandings, but not the only one. In fact, above all, if the U.S. extraction from Afghanistan is to be accomplished without a total collapse of the Afghan state, and if Syria isn’t to become a permanent wasteland with jihadist enclaves embedded inside, some kind of U.S.-Iranian détente is going to be essential “with Russia, Turkey and the European Union also on board.

That’s the real backdrop of the next six months of negotiations with Iran, much of which will be occurring in secret back channels. It’s about much more than Iran’s nuclear program “and that’s exactly what’s anathema to Israel’s rightwing government, to the “pro-Israel” Zionist and Christian religious right U.S. lobby, and to the Saudi and other Gulf oil monarchies.

What they fear is Iran’s conventional military power, its political outreach to the region’s Shia populations, and the capacity of its intelligence services

to compete with the rest in the tradecraft of murder, mayhem and malicious mischief.

For these forces, then, it’s essential that any U.S. deal with Iran must fail. As the Roman Senator Cato the Elder famously proclaimed in every speech that “Carthage must be destroyed,” the Netanyahu mantra holds that Iran must be destroyed. Netanyahu, of course, is not the imperial ruler but only a junior partner who cannot attack Iran alone “and even if he may believe that Israel has the capacity to do so, his generals know better.

The Fight to Come

Netanyahu does have, of course, the U.S. Israel Lobby with its considerable power of intimidation and blackmail. Readers will recall the spectacle of the Israeli leader speaking to a joint session of Congress in May 2011, openly ridiculing president Obama’s and official United States policy on Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine, with 500-plus Congresspeople and Senators from both parties jumping up and down like so many trained chimpanzees.

The Lobby is gearing up for the fight to come. At this writing, Eric Cantor, Netanyahu’s front man in Congress, has introduced legislation demanding the complete dismantling of Iran’s uranium enrichment capacity. Senators from the left and right, a united front including some of president Obama’s usual strong Democratic supporters and reactionaries who want to destroy him, are also proposing harsh new sanctions aimed at cutting off all of Iran’s remaining oil exports.

It’s important to understand what this battle entails. The stated demand of the Israeli government is that Iran must not only cease enrichment but ship all its centrifuges outside the country and dismantle its hardened underground Fordo facility, the one place that Israel can’t bomb.

No Iranian government could conceivably accede to these conditions “but that’s the point of the plan. The war party’s strategy depends on the negotiations’ failure, and beyond

that on Iranian president Rouhani's government falling apart.

Their tactic is to impose such extreme measures that the hardliners in Iran take over, and the regime is squeezed to the point where it might make a desperate "dash" for a nuclear weapon. At that point, the seekers of war calculate that Israel could force the United States into a fullscale military operation and that Europe, Russia and China would stand by.

To think about the consequences of this logic is to recognize its potentially suicidal implications, and to realize that it's a rather desperate rearguard action against the logic of the new U.S. imperial project in the Middle East. It would also risk the unity of the various countries supporting the current sanctions program.

While the House of Representatives might adopt Cantor's toxic legislation, it's likely that leading Senators, even many of those now lining up to fill their campaign coffers at the AIPAC trough, will at least delay the course leading to the ultimate confrontation. The alienation of many American Jews from Israel will deepen if they see its government pushing a war that they, like the majority of the U.S. population, absolutely don't want. Israel and its Lobby are a powerful tail, but not strong enough to wag the imperial dog when real global stakes are involved – not a secondary question like the fate of Palestine, but the danger of a major unraveling of U.S. policy.

The dangers, however, remain. It's quite possible that Israel would undertake some major provocations in the coming months. The Obama White House might feel it necessary to do

something to look tough. Iran's rulers might miscalculate if new sanctions legislation looks like passing Congress.

The risk of any particular crisis leading to escalation and unintended catastrophe are small, but over time the cumulative risk of apocalypse most certainly isn't.

Short of a nuclear-free Middle East that can only arise from a profound democratic transformation of the entire region, the danger is ambient. And as satisfying as it is to see the defeat of the Israel Lobby's current war drive, and as much as the Iranian people deserve relief from the cruelty of sanctions and of their own rulers, the issues that produce one crisis after another remain.

[January/February 2014, ATC 168](#)

Ariel Sharon, Rot in Peace

14 January 2014, by **David Finkel**

What makes it a big deal is how the media and governing elites treat it. "The tough warrior for Israel who became a pioneer for peace," "military hero turned statesman," and all the rest of it. Joseph Biden will head up the U.S. delegation appointed by president Obama to Sharon's funeral – on Biden's last visit, the Israeli government deliberately humiliated him and the United States by announcing another settlement expansion.

Give the scum his due. It's not an easy thing for a military-political figure in a rather small country to rise to the level of a full world-class war criminal, but Sharon achieved it. His field of operations could never match the sheer global scale open to Kissinger, Nixon, the Clintons and the Bushes, but he made the most of what he had. Just consider a few high points in a mass killer's career.

In 1953, his "elite" military Unit 101

massacred 170 or so civilians in the Arab village of Qibya. In 1971, he organized the bulldozing of a wide swath of homes in the already overcrowded Gaza strip in the process of crushing the Palestine Liberation Organization there. But his crowning moment was the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. While prime minister Begin proclaimed (and apparently believed) that Israel would occupy only a several-mile zone for border security, Sharon drove all the way to Beirut, laid siege to the city and organized Phalangist militias to massacre an unknown number of Palestinian civilians (somewhere between 800 and several thousand, probably) in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. [23].

Israel's Lebanon debacle drove Begin (a murderous figure in his own right) into a deep depression from which he never recovered. That gave Sharon, after his own political rehabilitation,

the opening to take over Begin's rightwing Likud party. In 2000, just in time to sabotage any possibility of successful peace negotiations brokered by U.S. President Bill Clinton, Sharon marched onto the grounds of the al-Aqsa mosque accompanied by a huge military detachment, touching off the Second Palestinian Intifadah with horrific civilian casualties on all sides.

Sharon was responsible for the massacre of Palestinian civilians in refugee camps.

He is widely credited, though it is unlikely ever to be proven, with masterminding the radiation-poisoning assassination of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. (And while it's been mostly forgotten, the Sabra and Shatila slaughter of 1982 was triggered by Phalangist revenge for the murder of their leader Bashir Gemayel, shortly after a reportedly angry meeting with Israeli officers

over their intention to stay in Lebanon for an extended time...)

Ultimately, Sharon got his peace statesman badge with the "unilateral Israeli withdrawal" from Gaza, with

the purpose freeing the army from the burden of protecting Israeli settlements and turning the place into a free-fire zone. Not long afterward, his own demise came before he could reap the peace prize he may have craved or the war crimes trials he so

richly merited.

The destructive legacy of Ariel Sharon, may he rot in peace, will last for decades. He was truly a living modern Golem.

Return of the military... and then?

8 January 2014, by **Dominique Lerouge**

A broad repressive wave

On August 14 the army launched an offensive of wide scope against the sit-ins organized by the Moslem Brotherhood demanding the restoration to power of former president Morsi. Around 500 people were killed in half a day. In "reprisals" the next day the Islamists were accused of attempting to unleash an inter-communal war with the firing of 36 Coptic churches, followed by a series of aggressions like an attack on a Copt wedding on October 20. This led to four deaths including two girls aged 8 and 12, as well as a dozen wounded. On October 6, 2013 clashes between pro-Morsi and anti-Morsi forces led to 51 deaths and 371 wounded.

On November 4 the trial began of the overthrown president and 14 Muslim Brotherhood leaders for "incitement to murder" of demonstrators. The Brotherhood had predicted a huge response across the country, but it did not materialize. This was due to several factors:

- the unpopularity of the Brotherhood, reflected in street attacks on some of them and the destruction of some of their offices;
- the scale of the police operation put in place on that day, involving around 20,000 men;
- the most significant repressive wave that the Brotherhood had suffered since the 1950s: more than 2,000 members were arrested including the

three main leaders.

It is however probable that all this will not be enough to destroy a movement which has managed to exist underground for decades. All the more so inasmuch as a great part of their economic power and their charity activities are organised in a way which makes them hard to dismantle. There is a real risk that the new regime will engage in a repressive spiral which could strike not only the Islamists but all those opposed to the regime. Some human rights activists have raised concerns on this subject. In the name of the fight against terrorism, a draft law is being drawn up which would lay the bases of a new police state, worse than that of Mubarak.

Al-Sissi future president?

The strong man of the new regime is riding on a wave of popularity acquired through vanquishing the Brotherhood. Former head of intelligence services under Mubarak, General Abdel Fatah al-Sissi nonetheless enjoys support from some of those who played a decisive role in the fall of the dictator in 2011 and the mobilizations of June-July 2013:

- A part at least of the leadership of the Tamarod (Rebellion) movement, which impelled the mobilizations against Morsi;
- * Kamal Abu AÃ¬ta, former president of the first independent trade union and then the EFITU federation, who has become minister of labour;

* Hamdeen Sabahi, the Nasserite candidate who almost equalled the vote of the Brotherhood and military candidates at the presidential elections of June 2012, who has already said he will support Sissi if the latter contests the next presidential elections.

The risk is then real that the army of Mubarak, which has conserved its immense economic empire even under the presidency of Morsi, will recover the essence of political power.

What left alternative?

Contrary to what has happened in the past, a minority on the left has refused to play one camp against the other, courageously declaring itself "neither for the Brotherhood, nor for the army". On this basis "The Front of the Path of Revolution" has been established by militants active in the mobilizations of 2011 and 2013. It is based on a fairly broad political spectrum including notably the Revolutionary Socialists, liberals and activists of the traditional left. The rise in power of such an orientation will depend on its ability to root itself in the essential components of the Egyptian revolution: youth and employees. It is the juncture between these two social movements which made possible the fall of Mubarak. It is on them that the continuation of the revolutionary process rests.

The action of the working class

Certainly many strikes have taken place. But most of them ended in defeat with the risk of tiredness and discouragement that this entails. One of the reasons for this is the great difficulty in developing independent trades unionism. For more than 50 years, the so called "trade union federation", the ETUF, has primarily been an extension of the state regime into the world of labour. It was only in 2008 that the first independent trade union emerged in the wake of a massive, self organised and extended

strike. Two independent federations were founded in the midst of the revolution of 2011. But they remain extremely fragile: the previous legislation not having changed, employers usually have a free hand to dismiss activists seeking to create an independent trade union.

Even if the first independent federation, the EFITU, has around 2 million members, it has derisory resources: most of its members not paying dues because dues are generally automatically deducted by the employer and paid to the old federation. And the latter continues to be responsible for the provision of social services such as health insurance! In becoming minister of

labour, former EFITU president Kamal Abu Aġta notably fixed the objective of reviving the draft law of March 2011 finally establishing trade union freedom in Egypt. We will see if his friends in the government will accede to this wish. The fact that in the "committee of 50" responsible for modifying the Constitution, the two places reserved for trades unionists have been offered to fierce opponents of independent trades unionism, hardly gives grounds for optimism in this area. The two places have in fact gone to a representative of the ETUF and somebody from a phony federation set up by an employer concerned with recruiting staff for work in the Gulf countries.

Revolutionaries back on the streets

8 January 2014, by Jacques Chastaing

The army had tried to prevent this demonstration by calling on supporters of general Sissi to come onto the streets in support of the military regime. They also built a monument to the martyrs which they hoped would absolve them of any responsibility. Finally, they placed giant screens in Tahrir square to broadcast the Ghana-Egypt soccer World Cup qualifying match. But Sissi's supporters were few. They were chased out of Tahrir square by the revolutionaries, the monument built by the army was destroyed by the demonstrators, and the giant screens distracted nobody. This was the first time since the July 3 military takeover that revolutionaries had gone onto the streets and made the political headlines.

Up until then, since the massacres of Moslem Brothers by the army in mid July, Egypt has seen the Brothers going onto the streets every week or several times a week to denounce the illegitimacy of the military regime and the government it has set up. But the army's very violent repression "a thousand or more dead, and several

thousand arrested including all the main leaders, with the Brotherhood currently saying more than 10,000 of its members are imprisoned "and the total absence of support from the Egyptian people for the Islamist cause have led to the demonstrations gradually melting away. To the extent that the Brotherhood has recently proposed a peaceful negotiated solution to the regime. The terrorism of Islamist groups in the Sinai, whether or not it is linked to the Brotherhood, only increases the hatred people feel for them while allowing the army to justify its attacks on civil liberties and its opposition to strike actions.

In late October 2013 the regime introduced legislation limiting the right to demonstrate, go on strike and even put up graffiti. Several journalists were sentenced for having criticized the army, while the famous humorist Bassem Youssef, adored by the people, was subjected to prosecution for having mocked the military. Strikes (which continue despite everything) have been repressed, most recently that of the

textile workers at the Samanoud factory in Gharbiya, on strike for three weeks to claim payment of their wages for September and improvement of working conditions, with dozens of arrests.

This political capitulation by the Brotherhood has probably freed up enough political terrain to allow revolutionaries to go back on the streets without being suspected by the people of being allies of the Islamists. Because if the Egyptian people do not support the army, they above all do not want the Brotherhood or their allies back in power. To attack the army, popular action cannot appear as support for the Brotherhood. At the same time this demonstration shows that the Egyptian people no longer believe in the promises of the government and the military.

For if the regime hits the Brotherhood violently and directly, it maintains a prudent double language with respect to the people. On the one hand, a wide ranging repression against civil liberties in the name of the fight against terrorism, and thus a fight also against strike action, and on the other

a demagogic Bonapartist policy with respect to the poor and in relation to the more high profile strikes. The government claims to represent the objectives of the massive mobilizations of late June and claims to draw its power from this people in struggle, against Morsi certainly, but also for "bread, social justice and freedom".

Thus the regime has given in to the demands of workers on strike at the symbolic Misr Spinning enterprise in Mahalla by using its own funds to grant them increases equivalent to around two months wages. It has promised a near doubling of the minimum wage in the public sector as of January 1, 2014. It has promised to limit the highest wages, an end to military courts for civilians and the end of censorship on state media, the recognition of new trade unions, gender equality and so on.

If these promises have sown momentary illusions and led to a wait and see attitude on the part of the people it is increasingly clear to many that these are only empty promises. Thus the increase in the minimum

wage does not affect the private sector and seems to amount to not very much as the concrete details emerge. The limitation on maximum salaries will be at 35 times higher than the minimum wage, whereas for example in the world's 10 richest countries the ratio is "only" 20 times higher. Gender equality is promised in the context of Sharia, which means nothing will change. The least religious pressure will be reflected by prosecutions of atheists. And everything is subject to amendment.

Thus we have seen the progressive coming apart of the ruling coalition. In early November 2013 a split occurred in Tamarod (Rebellion), which supports the regime, with some of its members saying they would return to the street, while its leadership demanded the resignation of a prime minister incapable of meeting popular expectations. The left wing Tagammu movement took its distances, accusing the constitutional committee [of 50 selected persons] that is drawing up the draft of the new Constitution of favouring the rich and ignoring

women, Christians and Nubians. While Sabahi, the Nasserite candidate at the last presidential elections, has withdrawn from the next ones in favour of Sissi, his supporters have demonstrated recently to demand that he reverse his decision.

On October 26, 2013 there was the first non-Islamist demonstration against the law restricting rights to demonstrate and go on strike. On November 6, 2013 the Ultras football fans surrounded the High Court to denounce the arrest of some of their members. On November 14, 2013 the regime cancelled the curfew which most people did not respect and suppressed the state of emergency. Finally, on November 16, 2013 a revolutionary activist, Ahmed Harara, for the first time in months, dared to attack general Sissi on television, accusing him of being a criminal, responsible for the November 2011 massacres.

The atmosphere is changing. And this could well accelerate given an inflation rate of 11.5% in November while many Egyptians go hungry.

The Current Social Crisis

6 January 2014, by **Franco Turigliatto**

Participating in this movement are sectors of the petite bourgeoisie, which due to the economic crisis have experienced setbacks in their incomes and interests; small-business owners, market stall sellers, artisans, truck drivers, and small agricultural entrepreneurs. But other more or less marginal sectors of society also joined in: groups such as youths from the cities' peripheries, the unemployed, and also a certain number of students. All these aspects were particularly apparent in a town like Turin, for most of the 20th Century a city with one of the strongest working class movements and the industrial powerhouse of the country (as well as the site of FIAT's headquarters). For in contrast to what the centre of the

city may showcase to visitors, its recently restored royal palaces and buildings, life today is one of significant impoverishment for many of its inhabitants.

A subsequent attempt by the forconi to realise in Rome a further big demonstration did not succeed, due to internal divisions (some of their more well-off sectors such as the agricultural entrepreneurs and truck drivers believed that benefits would be gained by negotiating with the central government -and thus disassociated themselves from this attempt); however, this does in no way mean that such protests are not the result of profound and serious causes, and there is every chance they will happen again in the near future.

The economic crisis and the petty bourgeoisie

Significant sectors of the Italian small and medium bourgeoisie have for many years benefitted from relative and tranquil prosperity (for some of them the result of tax avoidance and evasion), but today, after six years of economic crisis, their social and economic pillars have begun to founder and for many of them a rapid decline in living standards and into poverty is beginning to seem a real possibility. These sectors are affected not only by the dynamics of the economic crisis, but also -as is the

overwhelming majority of Europe's population- by the austerity policies of the European fiscal compact put in place by the various governments of the bourgeoisie.

For several years these policies have massacred the living standards of working men and women, both in the private and public sectors, decimating their salaries, their job security, and the welfare state -all in the name of "sacrifices" demanded by neoliberalism and which have the sole purpose of guaranteeing profits and annuities for the captains of industry and grand bourgeoisie, as a class and as individuals. More recently, in order to guarantee this transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top, the ruling class calls for sacrifices from broad sectors of the middle classes, thus impoverishing these intermediate sectors of society, although they remain fundamental for maintaining the political and social status quo.

"To squeeze" is the verb that best describes the contemporary policy of crushing and decimating the rights and living standards of the majority; it is a verb foisted above all on the working classes but now it also impacts sectors of the petite bourgeois and so determines their social disarray. The situation here described is one of the distinctive traits of serious economic crises, which are then transformed into political and social ones as well, resulting in lacerations to the social fabric across society as a whole. This is one of the reasons why we now speak of an epochal change occurring in Europe.

Turin and the social and economic crisis

In many cities such as Turin, the crisis has taken numerous and dramatic turns; once the industrial powerhouse of Italy, it was a city with a strong and militant working class movement, and where although there had always been social inequalities, none quite like the ones present today. In just a few years unemployment has reached staggering proportions; in fact, in the whole region of Piedmont the number of

those out of work or laid off is several hundreds of thousands.

It is now obvious that the petite bourgeoisie -and in particular shopkeepers, already hurt by the general economic crisis- were going to suffer from a reduction in commerce and revenue, due to the simple fact that if such large numbers of working men and women lost or saw seriously diminished their purchasing power, the ripple effect on small business could not be avoided. The economic crisis first hit workers, now its consequences are on small business owners and shopkeepers, who have also had to confront the guillotine of budget cuts applied locally by city councils, called on by the central government to be the general managers of austerity policies. Furthermore, planning regulations previously existed which delineated and controlled the number of new commercial enterprises, but the almost complete liberalization of the market, coupled with the enormous power of large distribution chains, has crippled local shops, beginning with market stall sellers, squeezed out of the marketplace not only by large shopping malls but also by the cutthroat competition between the remaining small shops. The latter now open and close doors continuously, changing hands over and over, due to the owners' discovery that there is little or insufficient revenue in their operation. Within this phenomenon there is a further and new aspect; many among the new shopkeepers come from the working class, many from the ranks of the unemployed; vast numbers of young men and women who in the past were dependent workers may have gathered just enough of their families' last funds in order to set up a small shop in search of income, only to then realize that it is insufficient to make a living.

The lockdown of shops which took place in Turin during its first day was near total, both as a conscious and autonomous choice of the shops' proprietors but also due to the presence of active groups of the organizers that moved around the city forcing store owners to pull down their shutters through a number of means. The closure of the city's

wholesale markets continued into the following days, "guaranteed" by the abovementioned groups.

Perhaps the most significant development that was observable was the participation of large sectors of the young inhabitants of the periphery of the city, who with street blockades and patrols expressed their anger and frustration for the social price they are being asked to pay, and conditions in which they must live their lives. On the streets there were numerous students with many of the same motivations, and whose frustrations have not found more productive avenues for expressing dissent -but this phenomenon was already witnessed in the recent past: the points of reference during these demonstrations are the national flag and anthem, amply demonstrating the weight of the dominant paradigm and ideology of today.

The role of right-wing forces

All these social and economic phenomena just described are then masterfully directed towards the political objectives of the sectoral organizations, which have been very effective in creating an ideology and identity where only the figure of the independent worker and entrepreneur is able to guarantee the prosperity of Italy, while all others are "thieves", be they politicians, public sector workers (often called "parasites"), or even those workers that benefit from a small safety net when made redundant. It is quite easy to create divisions among the popular social classes when all are experiencing great difficulties and there is little solidarity among groups of workers.

Indeed, the very important role that right-wing and extreme right-wing forces played in the organization of the demonstrations was undeniable and a cause for great concern. These forces were visibly present, they guided groups of youths and shaped the dynamics of the protest, which were often unclear and confused. Through the streets of the city groups of right-wing football hooligans marched together with Italian neo-

fascist elements such as Forza Nuova and Casa Pound; reactionary and fascistic slogans and attitudes could be heard throughout; there was also a dangerous confrontation between some sectors of reactionary forces and trade-union workers belonging to FIOM, the largest union representing metalworkers.

Notwithstanding the apparent disorganization, there nevertheless was a clear direction and astute planning behind the unfolding events, a sort of show of strength on the part of right-wing forces, which is then used as a recruitment tool. Lastly, the role played by the police forces needs to be discussed, it was clearly permissive, and entirely different from their behavior during demonstrations carried out by the left. Various signs point to a correlation, not only based on sympathies towards the reasons and frustrations of the forconi, but one which points to an organizational rapport between the police hierarchy and right-wing elements. The most troubling manifestation of this was the blockade of access routes to the township of Pinerolo, on the outskirts of Turin, a blockade planned and managed by fascist forces together with organized crime, well-known tax evaders, and with the complete connivance of the police.

It is in this context that the judiciary in Turin distinguished itself for all the wrong reasons, for at dawn of the same day it ordered police searches against activists of the NO TAV movement protesting the construction of high-speed rail in the Susa Valley; searches which culminated with the arrests of four young activists under "terrorism" charges!

The petty bourgeoisie and right-wing forces

It is all too clear by now that the social classes under discussion (on the streets the demonstrations were largely composed of market stall and small shopkeepers), together with the large number of unemployed, can become the mass-movement base of fascist and ultra-reactionary forces.

When coupled with the potential reactionary radicalization of sectors of the petite bourgeoisie this can bring great dangers to the working classes. The current situation can turn dangerous quite quickly because for many years now there has been no working class mass movement to counter it, and the responsibility of the leadership of the trade union movements in allowing this state of affairs to come about is particularly damning.

What is necessary is the mobilization of workers

Only a strong and militant class-based workers' movement can provide a buffer against reactionary tendencies; in order to respond constructively to the events taking place it is necessary for the trade union movement, beginning with its most militant branches, to construct widespread initiatives based on defending purchasing power, the minimum wage, job security, and proposing an altogether different economic policy; initiatives which must speak not only to the working classes but also parts of the lower middle class and even more importantly to the disaffected and unemployed. Towards this goal the organization of a general strike is an important aspect, for if there had been a true and genuine general strike many young people on the streets would have had a very different occasion to express their disaffection and dissent; moreover, it would be foolish to consider these current demonstrations as a real and constructive struggle against the politics of austerity and the governments that enact it, as some on the left have suggested.

To believe that the petite bourgeoisie and underclasses, at the time of the greatest globalist expansion of capitalism, can configure an alternative to global capital is not only an illusion – as it runs counter to every historical example – but is a dangerous error which can open the door to very real political tragedies. As Trotsky wrote, the petite bourgeoisie, this dust of history (many individuals not

organized in places and chains of productions but still dependent on the social relations that they represent), has neither the role, nor the social or political force to express an alternative project to that of the dominant paradigm. The intermediate classes, in the struggle between the two fundamental classes are in the end polarized towards the one which more effectively shows its strengths; today, just like in the past, the ruling class can use sectors of the unemployed and of the petite bourgeoisie as a battering ram against the working class, in much the same way that Fascism made use of them. The Russian revolutionary, with reference to the Germany of the 1930s, wrote: "With every turn of the historic road, with every social crisis, we must over and over again examine the question of the mutual relations of the three classes in modern society: the big bourgeoisie, led by finance capital; the petty bourgeoisie, vacillating between the basic camps; and finally proletariat. The big bourgeoisie, making up a negligible part of the nation, cannot hold power without the support of the petty bourgeoisie of the city and the village, that is, of the remnants of the old, of the masses of the new, middle classes". And further. "For the social crisis to bring about the proletarian revolution, it is necessary that, besides over conditions, a decisive shift of the petty bourgeoisie classes, occur in the direction of the proletariat: This will give the proletariat a chance to put itself at the head of the nation as its leader. The last election revealed – and this is its principal symptomatic significance – a shift in the opposite direction. Under the impact of the crisis, the petty bourgeoisie swung, not in the direction of the proletarian revolution, but in the direction of the most extreme imperialist reaction, pulling behind it considerable sections of the proletariat". In conclusion he stated: "If the communist party is the party of revolutionary hope, then fascism, as a mass movement, is the party of the counterrevolutionary despair". (Leon Trotsky: "The turn in the Communist International and the situation in Germany", September 26, 1930).

Building the working class struggle

Only with the working class conscious of its role as protagonist, of its strengths, and of its struggle to safeguard the working and living conditions of the popular classes can there be the force with which to polarize sectors of the petite bourgeoisie, or at least neutralize them in the antagonistic struggle with the ruling class. This is the urgent and

important task that lays ahead, and which the return of the class struggle in workplaces can facilitate.

However, we are also faced with a question of time: the workers' and trade unions' movement must stand again on their own two feet; on the one hand they cannot demonize certain social sectors as such, they must not follow the leadership of the Partito Democratico and of the peak trade unions, the very same who subordinate the interests of men and women workers to those of the ruling class. While on the other hand the

workers' movement must be aware of the fact that the forconi are guided by reactionary and right-wing forces (which have gained strength because of these very events), a challenge which has to be faced.

It is for this reason that the working classes –and the movements of the anti-capitalist left must contribute towards this goal with all their strength– have to begin today their own struggle, their own class revolt against the governments of the fiscal compact, which are none other than the ruling classes themselves.

A new wave of mobilizations?

6 January 2014, by **Franco Turigliatto**

The situation is moving. The successful demonstration by the rank-and-file unions and the strike on October 18, although it was limited to a few services sectors, and the demonstrations by social movements on October 19 are revealing. One thing that emerged from them was the reasons for the regional resistance against the policies of territorial dismantling. Also, they were the expression of the rage, the determination and the will of the sections of the working class that are most affected by the crisis and subjected to desperate living conditions, especially because of the crisis of the availability of housing. It is surprising that the study by Coldiretti [24], which reveals that millions of people need food aid, is so little mentioned by the press. Furthermore, the media treat this information as strict sociological data, without giving it the dimension of an indictment against the policies of the ruling class and its servants on the centre-right and centre-left.

Against the

division of the working class

The violence of the employers' attack against jobs and wages is pushing millions of people towards a state of social insecurity. Unemployment and low wages lead immediately to lack of access to basic living conditions: having housing and food in order to live. Migrants and some popular sectors, who are deprived of everything and have nothing to lose but their chains, are the most affected by this brutal impoverishment.

Among the most politicized sectors, those who played an important role in the demonstration on October 19, an old theory has surfaced, which distinguishes between workers who are said to be "secure" and others who are "insecure", between those who have an employment contract of indefinite duration and those in precarious work. Of course, one of the characteristics of the crisis and of bourgeois policies is to increase divisions among the working masses, creating barriers and hierarchies, including opposition between groups of workers. This enables the bourgeoisie to build better defensive

dykes against workers' rage and their determination to react to austerity policies. However, the peculiarity of the crisis determines permanent changes in the social condition of people's lives. Thus, a family living with the "guarantee" of two salaries may be precipitated into poverty when one of them loses their job and becomes unemployed. And if the family also has a mortgage on its house, the abyss of poverty is near. The workers of a once prosperous city like Turin, with a significant number of "guaranteed" jobs, know something about it. This is exactly what is happening throughout society. The structure of the Italian family, which still often plays the role of "reception centre" and means of support, and also household savings, have so far hindered this process of impoverishment. But the room for manoeuvre for families is becoming smaller, and the increasing precariousness and poverty are spreading like wildfire, even for those who are still living in more secure conditions (including sectors of the petty bourgeoisie) and who thought they could get by refusing to take part in mobilizations: "I don't move and I hope I'll manage to get by on my own". But their number will inevitably decrease.

Historical experience shows that rage and radicalization can also work to the advantage of the fascist Right and of xenophobic and racist reaction. The signals that are coming from certain European countries today are examples of this. These examples should motivate us to step up efforts to create a social and political movement against neoliberal policies, with demands that can meet the needs of different strata of the working class and lay the groundwork for a credible anti-capitalist alternative.

The trade-union and political forces - among others, our organization Sinistra Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left) - which were at the origin of or which supported the day of action on October 18 and who participated in the demonstration on October 19, worked and continue to work in a conscious manner to unify the participants in the two days, to deepen and develop these forms of resistance and social mobilization by building synergies and contributing for them to adopt a perspective of common struggle.

Many people have posed the following question: "And what about the workers who mobilized on October 12 to defend the Constitution?" On this question we have already insisted that the demonstration on October 12 and those on October 18 and 19 were characterized by different kinds of political radicalism. The first was based on the positions of SEL (Left-Ecology-Freedom), positions that are subordinated to the Democratic Party (PD). SEL (whose leader is Nichi Vendola) proposes once again the old idea of using the position of force that has been conquered (by SEL) to exert "left" pressure on the PD, as though recent political history had not demonstrated the inconsistency of this project. The confirmation of this judgment came immediately: the polite request addressed to PD parliamentarians not to swallow the "undemocratic monster", namely the amendment to Article 138 of the Constitution, [25] received a clearly negative response from the vast majority of PD senators. This "undemocratic monster" is supposed to have been demolished (paradox of paradoxes!) only by the vote against of the People of Liberty (PDL) which

wanted to save its leader, Silvio Berlusconi, and perhaps bring down the government.

We are waiting for explanations from SEL, from Stefano Rodotà and from the FIOM (the Metalworkers' Federation of the CGIL) of Maurizio Landini about their strategic course ... But we already know where they are and where they are going.

What really interests us is to have a dialogue with the workers who were present on October 12 and who can free themselves from the relative hegemony of these leading groups and thereby escape from the impasse they are in.

Unite those whom the employers divide

The tasks of an anti-capitalist and revolutionary force - and this is true for all working class activists - are extremely simple and at the same time terribly difficult: to try to unify the forces that the bourgeoisie is trying to divide, in other words to work for a united mobilization of the proletariat. I am using this classic term on purpose to emphasize that we are talking about all the social sectors of the working class, including the unemployed and migrants. The dynamic set in motion by the mobilizations of October 18 and 19 offer a positive potential.

We must use the driving force of these days to target other "moments" of struggle. The demonstration on 16 November in the Val de Susa against the high speed train line (TGV) is a first occasion, which concerns us all. It is necessary to define objectives and contents - including in relation to specific conflicts - in order to maintain the continuity of the struggle, with the stages that help to develop the consciousness of the need for a comprehensive movement against the employers and the government. Organizing also means encouraging the broadest and most massive level of participation and democracy among those who are involved, in order to decide together the content, the forms

of struggle and the direction of our common work. In a word, promoting the democratic self-organization of social movements and of the working class.

In order to change the relationship of forces and to put the bourgeois political and economic forces in difficulty it is necessary for broader and broader sectors of metalworkers, of employees in the retail sector, in the service sector, in banks, of those in precarious jobs (temporary work, etc.) to take once again the path of direct action, to take strike action, breaking free from a certain "passivity" and to rediscover the taste for and the value of collective action. If the migrant workers of the logistics industry were in the forefront, as was the case during the struggles and demonstrations in Milan on October 18, other sectors can also understand that it is the only way to defend themselves.

It is for this reason that we must use all available space to expand the mobilization, including the strikes of a few hours that the leaderships of the main trade unions have just announced. We must use these days so that workers go beyond the limits set by the union apparatus. The rank-and-file unions must know how to speak to all workers and therefore also to members of the CGIL. It is necessary to denounce the leadership of the CGIL as well as to make constant proposals for unity of action addressed to its militants, in order to break down the walls built by the union apparatus.

A particular task awaits the comrades of the CGIL who are engaged in a battle of the left ([26]) which can exist and grow only through the renewal of the project of building a united front in action against neoliberal policies. A strong group of class-struggle militants in the CGIL, capable of addressing themselves to the workers and to the rank-and-file unions is not a secondary or marginal question. It is a decisive element in building a class-struggle trade unionism.

The political

dimension

Along with this, there is the political dimension. What purpose and what political outcome can we indicate for the fighting movement that is developing in the present phase? Some of the forces that took part in the mobilization on October 19 do not pose this kind of question. The "reformist" participants do, but with a perspective that does not correspond to the needs of the workers. We must be capable of posing this kind of problem in the context of an overall project for the rejection of neoliberal policies and in the framework of an anti-capitalist battle that is conducted in a coherent fashion.

The perspective that is really needed - an alternative government of the "real Left", based on the mobilization of the masses - is not possible at the moment. But it remains indispensable

to establish the preconditions for it, to illustrate the political and organizational perspectives that it entails. The growth of the mass movement needs this alternative political perspective.

Today it would be a grave mistake not to propose the building of a broad revolutionary organization. We cannot hold our ground in the face of the global offensive (including in ideological terms) of the bourgeoisie without a constant effort to create a group of men and women capable of discussing, working and in terms of training our own activists. And to do this without any arrogance, but taking into account the urgency of encouraging elements of reconquest and reconstruction of a global class consciousness. Without creating this solid background, we do will not help real mass movements to be successful.

To put this question to one side, as has

often been the case in history, could prove fatal. Today, this type of construction can only be open, public, democratic, verified by everyone; a political organization that defends and puts forward its political perspectives, even partial, for discussion with those who mobilize and struggle. An organization that knows how to put forward a certain number of demands at the appropriate time and in a form that makes them accessible.

The Anticapitalist Left (Sinistra Anticapitalista) is working on these fundamental axes. That is why it shares and participates in attempts to regroup together in a front and in a unitary movement those who pursue an anti-capitalist project, plural and libertarian. In this regard, we are part of the Ross@ project [27], which will be faced with critical challenges in the coming years.

Turin, 28 October 2013

Oppose the austerity government

6 January 2014

The crisis and twenty years of neoliberal policies, concretized by austerity and rooted in the European of finance and big capital, have considerably worsened the working and living conditions of the working class. During these years of crisis, using mass unemployment as a weapon of blackmail, successive governments have destroyed workers' rights, reduced wages and the level of pensions and undermined the "social state". This has often been done with the complicity of the CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions) and the UIL (Italian Union of Labour) and also of the leadership of the CGIL (General Italian Confederation of Labour), which, with an obvious loss of autonomy confronted by governments supported by the Democratic Party (PD), has been and remains unable to stop the drift.

For this reason, today we need another CGIL. A CGIL that offers an

alternative model to that of the European Union (EU), of the Troika (IMF, ECB, EU) and of policies of budget cuts, a model that opposes restructuring and plant closures and that has the courage to propose policies of nationalization!

The pension system has been massacred under the effect of numerous counter-reforms. The last one, introduced by Elsa Fornero [28] has, in fact, abolished old-age pensions. The three trade union confederations, with a strike of just three hours, did not even try to oppose it.

The different social benefits have been reduced to the status of charity. And all relations between these rights and those associated with work and a decent income have been destroyed.

The "social state" is now reduced to

the strict minimum: education, the health system and public services are suffering under increasingly heavy cuts.

Wages no longer meet normal needs; poverty is spreading also among those who have a job; inequality in the distribution between profits and wages is growing. With the abolition of the sliding scale of wages, the wages decided in national collective bargaining agreements have lost their substance in the face of inflation; negotiations at company level [29] have not in any way made possible a redistribution of profits. The pay freeze in the public sector, for a period of five years, is the most eloquent expression of this system.

Insecurity has spread throughout the entire working class and rights are no more than a memory of the past. The brutal violation of Article 18 [30] by the government of Mario Monti [