



## IV472 - May 2014

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## Between a rock and a hard place is there a way out? -

26 May 2014, by [Joanne Landy](#)

The governments of the United States and Russia are attempting to shape events in Ukraine in their own interests, not for the benefit of the Ukrainian people. Ukrainians have long suffered from domination by Moscow, under the Russian czars and later in the Soviet Union, most horrifically under Stalin. With the end of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, millions hoped for freedom and a new beginning. However, the United States and Western Europe exploited the collapse of the Soviet system to expand their own military and economic power, extending NATO into a dozen formerly Communist nations (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Albania and Croatia), and, they hoped, into Ukraine and Georgia as well. Equally destructive, the West attempted to use its economic heft, "shock therapy," and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to push a brutal capitalism on the people of the former Communist countries.

In late 2013 mass protests erupted in

Ukraine against the government of Viktor Yanukovich, culminating in huge demonstrations of hundreds of thousands. Despite having been elected, Yanukovich was a repressive and grotesquely corrupt ruler who lavished upon himself obscene privileges, including a vast personal compound furnished with a spa, a zoo, a large boat, a massive car collection, and a golden toilet (!), while defending the interests of the wealthy oligarchs who supported his government.

In January 2014, Yanukovich signed a series of anti-democratic laws similar to those already imposed on Russians under Vladimir Putin, which sharply limited freedom of speech and assembly. As mass protests mounted, the government sent riot police on February 18 to brutally repress the people in the streets. Two days later, riot police again fought against protesters, and the battle culminated in snipers who had taken positions on rooftops shooting at demonstrators. Some Maidan detractors have argued that the snipers were actually deployed by the opposition to create an incident that would discredit the government. The evidence for this

theory is dubious; in any event, the corruption, repressiveness, and undemocratic record of the Yanukovich government is indisputable, and gave more than adequate cause for the uprising. The Maidan was an expression of mass discontent that had been building for years, and cannot be explained away as simply the result of a false flag operation or a plot by Washington—though we know that the United States and other Western countries have worked to take advantage of popular dissatisfaction for their own purposes and will do everything they can to see that the radical democratic potential of the Maidan doesn't come to fruition. They will be helped in their efforts by the fact that the Ukrainian left and labor movements are very weak, leaving a vacuum to be filled by leaders who embrace the neoliberal austerity measures promoted by the United States and the European Union. These measures will cause bitter suffering for the masses of Maidan protesters, many of whom have been under the illusion that joining the European Union will bring them prosperity and a decent standard of living (an illusion

held as well by millions in Greece and other Southern European countries until bitter experience has begun to show them otherwise). In addition, though the far right forces of Svoboda and the Right Sector were only a small portion of the protesters, they played a key role in the physical defense of the Maidan against violent government attack. Today there are a number of far right figures in the interim coalition government that was hastily constituted by parliament after Yanukovich left Kiev; it remains to be seen whether the Ukrainian people will permit these dangerous elements to remain in leading government positions.

## After Yanukovich

Once in power, the new post-Yanukovich government took steps that were certain to make the country vulnerable to Russian attempts to undermine Ukraine's independence. First, parliament passed a law revoking the status of Russian as the native tongue of thirty to forty percent of Ukrainians as an official language in areas where Russian speakers constituted ten percent or more of the population. This reactionary law was quickly canceled by the new acting Ukrainian president, Aleksandr Turchinov, who must have come to realize that it would set off an explosive reaction. But the damage had been done, fostering suspicion and hostility toward the new government among many Russian speakers, particularly in the eastern and southern regions of the country. Compounding this disastrous signal about language rights, the new government declared from the outset that it would adopt the crippling economic measures demanded by the European Union and Western financial institutions. Conscious of how hugely unpopular the social cuts and privatizations the West was demanding would be, when the new prime minister, Arseny Yatseniuk (famously known familiarly as "Yats" to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland), announced his determination to carry out harsh austerity measures, he conceded, eerily, that doing so would mean that

Ukraine would be led by a "suicide" government.

## The Rights of Less Powerful Countries

NATO was an imperial military alliance from its inception, and with the end of the Soviet empire it lost even its retrograde Cold War rationale for existence. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy, of which I am Co-Director, and anti-war movements around the world called for NATO to dissolve after 1989 (better late than never). Instead, NATO aggressively extended its reach into the former Soviet orbit. This fact, however, does not justify Russia's interference in the domestic affairs of Ukraine: supporting a lightning referendum in Crimea under the shadow of Russian troops and operatives or declaring, as Putin has, that eastern and southern Ukraine are "Novorossiia" (or "New Russia"), signaling that Moscow would be justified in intervening, by force if necessary, to defend Russian speakers in that region. Powerful countries have no right to turn neighboring nations into "buffer states" by invoking security as a justification. When real or concocted security threats are used to justify imperialism, prospects for peace and democracy suffer a terrible blow. Ukrainians face complex and pressing problems in establishing just and democratic structures in their country, but they need to work through those problems without imperial interference from either the West or Russia. The negotiating partners should be eastern and western Ukrainians, not the United States, the European Union, or Moscow.

The Russian annexation of Crimea is to be condemned because of the intimidating way in which it was achieved (and the precedent that was thus set for future intimidation), and because of the fact that short shrift was given to considering the rights of Tatars and Ukrainian speakers, who together make up a third of Crimea's population. But there is good reason to believe that the majority of Crimeans would have freely voted to rejoin Russia in a fair referendum, and it seems doubtful that Crimea will ever

return to Ukraine.

However, according to recent opinion polls conducted by the U.S.-headquartered Pew Research Center and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the situation in eastern and southern Ukraine seems quite different: the great majority of the population in these regions say that they are suspicious of the Kiev government and want a measure of autonomy to protect their regional interests, but wish to remain part of Ukraine. Arguably people in the east and south should have the right to secede and become independent or integrated into Russia if they so desire, but their views should be expressed in legitimate votes that will either confirm or disconfirm the opinion polls, not in hasty "referendums" conducted under pressure from unaccountable armed groups and Russian military intimidation. (To those who say that Russia hasn't intervened militarily in Ukraine, my reply is twofold: 1) there are more than likely secret Russian operatives playing a role in eastern Ukraine and, in any case 2) even if the Russian troops massed on the border with Ukraine haven't fired a shot, they are being used as a weapon to intimidate the population. Daniel Ellsberg uses a metaphor to make this point in another context: he has often said that when the U.S. threatens to use nuclear weapons, it is in fact using them, just as someone who points a gun at someone's head in the midst of a confrontation is using that gun whether or not he actually fires it.)

A peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian crisis will doubtless need to involve some kind of significantly decentralized structure for the country, though the extent of regional autonomy remains to be negotiated in hard bargaining by the representatives of both sides. However, a huge obstacle to democratic bargaining is the presence of ultranationalist and far right elements on both sides.

## Ultra-Nationalists

## and the Far Right

The far right presence in the new Kiev government has barely been mentioned in the mainstream press in the United States, but it is significant, and very troubling. The neofascist Svoboda Party holds important positions: Svoboda's Oleksandr Sych is deputy prime minister, the party's Ihor Shvaik is agriculture minister, and Andriy Mokhnyk is ecology minister, while former Svoboda MP Oleg Mokhnytsky runs the general prosecutor's office. (For Svoboda's stated principles, see the All-Ukrainian Union "Svoboda" program - "Program for the Protection of Ukrainians.") [1] This doesn't mean that Ukraine is a fascist state; non-fascist neoliberal parties and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk are more powerful than Svoboda at the moment, and fascist measures have not been carried out. But it is an ominous sign that Svoboda has been legitimized with government posts. In the absence of a successful left alternative, neoliberal austerity measures are likely to strengthen neofascist and far right forces—a dynamic we have seen in other parts of Europe, for example with the rise of Golden Dawn in Greece and the Front National in France.

Ultra-nationalist and far right elements also play a significant role on the pro-Russian side. For example, as Tash Shifrin notes on her *Dream Deferred* website [2], "The Donbass People's Militia is led by Pavel Gubarev—a former member of fascist paramilitary organisation, Russian National Unity and of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, which despite its name is allied with the Eurasian Youth Union linked to influential Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin." In his article on the anarchist-leaning website *tahriric* "Excuse Me Mister: How Far Is It From Simferopol To Grozny?," [3] Laurent Moeri reports that "there is very disturbing information about Chetniks having been invited to join Russians fighting together with the Cossack 'Wolves' (the 'Wolves' are a paramilitary organization known for their ruthlessness and have engaged in combat in Chechnya as well as in Georgia)." And in April 2014,

Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevsky [4], leader of the Russian neo-Nazi Peoples National Party, addressed the pro-Russian forces in South-Eastern Ukraine giving them their full support (cited, with a photo of Sukharevsky speaking; this site shows many other examples of far right elements among the pro-Russian forces).

Within Russia, Vladimir Putin has used the Ukrainian conflict to foster ultra-nationalist sentiments that buttress the increasing authoritarianism of his government, which is marked by hyper-patriotism, harsh anti-protest laws, repression of journalists, vicious discrimination against gays, and an unholy alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church that we saw on display in the cruel persecution of Pussy Riot. It's no surprise, then, that Putin and the Russian government are praised by far right forces throughout Europe, including Hungary's neo-Nazi Jobbik party, the British National Party, Golden Dawn in Greece, the Italian Fronte Nazionale, and Marine Le Pen's French Front National. (Ironically, Svoboda had observer status with the ultranationalist Alliance of European National Movements until March of this year, leaving only after leaders of the Alliance endorsed the annexation of Crimea by Russia.) Inside Crimea, the repressive consequences of being brought into Moscow's orbit are illustrated by the (failed) attempt to ban this month's Tatar commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the day the mass deportation of their families began under the orders of Josef Stalin, and the cancellation of the Gay Pride parade scheduled for April 22-23 in light of the Russian law banning "gay propaganda". [5]

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Much has to be done to realize the democratic promise of the Maidan uprising. For starters, the Ukrainian people need to insist that Svoboda be removed from the governing coalition, and that the Kiev government repudiate its deadly deal with the EU and the IMF. But beyond these first necessary steps, ordinary Ukrainians across the country desperately need to create a democratic left movement, with member-controlled unions and

political parties that can represent them. [6] They need new radical and socialist parties that can take major enterprises out of the hands of the oligarchs who dominate western, eastern and southern Ukraine, nationalize them, and place them under the democratic control of workers and the larger society. They need parties that can build an independent Ukraine unaligned with either NATO or Russia, outside of the German-dominated European Union and the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union, and free to develop unrestricted trade relationships with all countries.

Ukrainians need an international environment that nourishes rather than thwarts democracy in their country, and that's where we can help. We can express our solidarity with the Ukrainian people by demanding that Russia withdraw its troops from the Ukrainian border and cease making interventionist threats, and that the West cease its escalating military presence in Europe, move to dismantle NATO, and withdraw its demands for privatization and austerity. We can call for aid without imperial strings to Ukraine and other countries in economic crisis. In supporting the Ukrainians, we are helping ourselves. After all, we all need a way out of the cruel world our masters have made.

May 20, 2014

\* Readers may also be interested in seeing the Campaign for Peace and Democracy's March 10, 2014 [statement](#). The author wishes to thank Thomas Harrison, Stephen Shalom, and Jesse Lemisch for their assistance in writing this article. The views expressed are her own.

First published on the website of [The Campaign for Peace and Democracy](#).

## Footnotes

[1] This is available [here](#).

[2] [Dream Deferred website](#).

[3] Article [here](#).

[4] [Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevsky](#).

[5] [See Daniel Reynolds, "Russia's 'Gay Propaganda' Law Takes Effect in Crimea," in *Advocate*, May 1, 2014, cited by Kevin Anderson in his forthcoming *New*

*Politics* article "Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Interimperialist Rivalry".

[6] Such unions are missing in Ukraine today. As Sean Larson notes in "Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine," to be published in the forthcoming issue of *New Politics*, "The opinion

[among the public] predominates that trade unions are relics of the communist era for the purpose of organizing vacations or children's summer camps (functions largely responsible for sustaining union membership) rather than fighting organizations pushing for the interests of workers on the job and in politics."

## Asian organizations: No to another coup in Thailand!

26 May 2014

We, the undersigned organisations, strongly condemn the latest coup d'état staged by Thai military under the leadership of Prayuth Chan-ocha.

The current coup, which took place almost eight years after 2006 coup, will do nothing to enhance democracy and social justice in Thailand, instead it will only tighten the grip of dictatorial rule and attempt to crush any democratic institution that exist. The army has already started its crackdown on media and the internet, and has arrested people who oppose the coup.

The coup is set to protect the interests of the section of Thai ruling class who want to reduce the democratic space in order to consolidate its power. The military junta in Thailand has no interest in bringing about free and fair elections to solve the political crisis, and certainly will not protect freedom of expression, which it sees as a threat to its rule.

The Thai military has been notorious for ruthless crackdowns on democratic movements, for instance, the bloody massacre of Red Shirt pro-democracy protests in 2010.

Hence, we demand:

• Immediate repeal of martial law in Thailand.

• Restoration of the election process to let the people of Thailand choose their future government democratically.

• Stop the crackdown and arrest of political dissidents in Thailand and free all the political prisoners.

• The governments of ASEAN to get together to condemn and assert pressure to end the coup in Thailand.

• All governments to withdraw their ambassadors from Thailand as a demonstration that they do not

recognise the military junta.

• **Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM), Malaysia**

• Turn Left, Thailand

• Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM), Philippines

• Socialist Alliance, Australia

• Social Action for Change (SAC), Cambodia.

• Awami Workers Party (Pakistan)

• Thai Alliance for Human Rights - Australia

• Radical Socialist, India

\* CPB-ML, Bangladesh

To add your group's name to this statement please email: [int.psm@gmail.com](mailto:int.psm@gmail.com), cc [international@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:international@socialist-alliance.org)

## Three years of indignation

21 May 2014, by [Jaime Pastor](#)

Slogans like "we are not the commodities of politicians and bankers", "it's not a crisis, it's a swindle", "they do not represent us", "real democracy now", are only a few examples of the new emergent discourse that arose from opposition

to the political culture of the "Transition", of the regime of 78 and the "corrupt political class". A denunciation that was accompanied by actions, by the demonstration that "another politics and another form of doing it are possible", although it was

the latter that gave greater legitimacy to the movement: the practice of an inclusive assembly based democracy without leaderships, as well as of a repertory of forms of action which was diverse, innovating, nonviolent and simultaneously disruptive. All this

from a vindication of its autonomy against old and new political, trade union and social organizations, with a controversial “innovatory” aspect but with a healthy will to “reinitiate” the construction of new collective subjects.

Since then, an intense cycle of mobilizations has started, with times of ebb tide, but with an increasing confidence that “yes, it is possible” to fight against the financial coup d’état implemented under the pretext of “the crisis”. As has already been written and recognized from many angles, its perhaps the confluence of 15M activists with the PAH movement of those affected by mortgages which has been until now the best example of shared success, non-substantial at the legal level but excellent at the level of the de-legitimizing of the policy of evictions as well as in the legitimating of less common forms of disturbance of “order”, like protests.

The Coordinadora 25S (with its initial ascent and later relative decline), the Mareas - la Verde, la Blanca (without a doubt the most relevant and successful in the case of the Community of Madrid), but also, most recently, the Granate of exiled youth; la Marea Ciudadana, the confluence of different waves and movements (with 23F in 2013 “against cuts and for a true democracy” as a new mobilizing landmark), or the “Fuera Mafia” of October 5, 2013. Along with a multitude of activities of all type, including new laboratories of a “pre-figurative politics” of another possible world, with a sector of social economy, shared in common, of redistribution of cares and increased ecological concern.

Already in the last year, if the organized structure of the Assemblies of 15M has been debilitated in many areas, many of its assemblies, networks, commissions, work groups and mass media (like the newspaper of the 15M assemblies of Madrid [www.madrid15m.org](http://www.madrid15m.org)) have worked, coordinated themselves and engaged in a cooperative dialogue throughout this time. Yet, it is possible to recognize that the convergence of this movement with the Mareas has not managed to break the institutional blockade of a regime that, with its

express counter-reform of article 135 of the Constitution of 78 in August 2011 and, then, the absolute parliamentary majority of the PP in November 2011, has been armouring its shock treatment in the service of the dictatorship of debt. A policy that has gone accompanied by a neo-conservative (anti-abortion law, Wert law and so on), neo-centralist and authoritarian reaffirmation that tries, with old and new forms, to sow fear of protest. In summary, a project of refoundation of the regime within the framework of an EU which is ever more undemocratic and austerity based, thus removing any illusion in its “internal regeneration”.

Faced with this “turn” the efforts to give an answer common to the “Troika” (the IMF, EC, ECB) in alliance with compatible networks of Portugal, Greece and Italy, reflected mainly in the action of June 1, 2013 (“Peoples united against the Troika”), did not yield encouraging results. The difficulty of acting on a scale superior to the state one, in spite of the increasing perception that the respective governments, with their “rescues” of the speculators, were at the service of the dictates of the Troika and, therefore, the latter is the “enemy” at whom it would also be necessary to aim, were noted.

**“Yes, we can... but they do not want it, it is necessary to throw them out”.**

In the middle of the reflections on the weaknesses and strengths of that broad space created by 15M, it is not surprising that the debate over the social power that has been created by the new actors, individual and collective, should be accompanied by new political tools that, without trying to “represent” 15M, serve to defy to the government and the bipartisan regime at the institutional and, therefore, electoral, level, has come to the fore. The question is whether intervention in the electoral battles can help progress a process of

decomposition of this regime “without being disappointed and becoming denaturalized”, as Manuel Sacristán puts it. We are, with the consequent division of opinions, and with initiatives such as Partido X and Podemos, in the European elections facing a first test in responding to that concern to destabilize the present bipartisan system and to give a new breath to the fight for a “real democracy”.

Simultaneously, the “contagion effect” continues and 2014 also arrived with the public eruption of the protest from the neighbourhood movement of Gamonal against the city-planning project of the Burgos city council and its final defeat. A result that would not have been possible without the immediate solidarity of many social networks arising from 15M, thus demonstrating they could recover from their apparent lethargy whenever it was necessary. It is possible to hope that this example spreads and there are already clear symptoms of renaissance of a local movement in very different localities, like Alcazar de San Juan - and its referendum against the privatization of water - as a more recent experience. A very hopeful development inasmuch as the protest - and the proposal - has won great social anchorage so that the municipal elections can be contested in more favourable conditions not only to win the city but also to give credibility to the horizon of a constituent rupture.

Meanwhile, from mid 2013 the convocation of the Marches of Dignity undertook intense and extensive work, with the involvement of the Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores (SAT) and the Campamentos Dignidad de Extremadura Union, but with the increasing involvement of many organizations and social networks across the state, including the Assemblies of 15M as well as ongoing workers’ struggles. Its confluence in Madrid on March 22, 2014 was an undoubted success of participation, unfortunately darkened by the repressive operation triggered by the government that same day. Faced with this police and media boycott, it is necessary to remember that these Marches, with their objectives of “No to the payment of the debt; Not one

cut more; Down with the governments of the Troika; Bread, work and a roof for all", have marked a new landmark in the mobilization and in the fixing of common demands that, we hope, have continuity in future initiatives, if possible more unitary, like that called for June 21, 2014.

Another positive aspect of these Marches has been, in contrast to the general experience of 15M, the multinational dimension that they have had by means of the participation of Catalan, Galician and, to a lesser extent, Basque organizations -

something not seen since the time of the anti-NATO movement - and the use in their convocation of the different languages of the state. This multinational multi-linguistic aspect from below is made more necessary in the light of the challenge to the state from Catalonia with the announcement of the consultation on November 9, 2014 on its future, including the option of independence. Being able to see this democratic demand as an opportunity and not as a "threat" - to strike together and so weaken the regime, extending the right to decide and the claim of

popular sovereignty to other areas such as refusal to pay debt, should also be the task of the indignant "movement of movements".

We are entering a new phase in which we hope to accumulate greater collective strength and demonstrate that, faced with the exhaustion of the dual narrative that has until now supported the dominant power bloc - that of the untouchable regime of the Transition and the so-called "social model" of the EU - it is possible to generate other alternatives here and in Europe.

## Fear clouds the Indian elections

19 May 2014, by [Nagesh Rao](#)

In the lead-up to India's parliamentary elections—which began in early April and continue through mid-May—progressive intellectuals, activists and organizations sounded the alarm over the prospect of a victory for the candidate of the Hindu right, Narendra Modi.

A statement by well-known left intellectuals published in *The Hindu* [1] began, "Never before in post-independence India have political forces, which are a front for an organization committed to creating a Hindu Rashtra [Nation], made as strong a bid for power as in the coming elections." Similarly, Salman Rushdie, Deepa Mehta and others warned that Modi's election "would bode ill for India's future as a country that cherishes the ideals of inclusion. [2]"

Journalist and rights activist Praful Bidwai issued an even more forceful warning [3]:

If Modi wins, his regime is likely to be even worse [than Indira Gandhi's imposition of emergency rule in 1975-76], with systematic attacks on civil and political rights, railroading of all legitimate opposition, despotic imposition of corporate-driven economic agendas, and further militarization and communalization of society, which will lead to harassment of conscientious citizens, and

outlawing and repression of dissent.

This sense of alarm is justified. Narendra Modi is a former pracharak (literally, propagandist) for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, or National Voluntary Association), which functions as the ideological and organizational backbone of the fascist Sangh Parivar, the "family" of Hindu fundamentalist groups that includes militant cadre organizations such as the Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or Indian People's Party) is the parliamentary wing of the Sangh Parivar. Through the 1990s and 2000s, the BJP rose to become the largest challenger to the Congress Party, the dominant force in Indian politics from independence in 1947. Currently, the BJP leads the opposition in a parliamentary coalition called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), while Congress leads the ruling coalition of parties called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Modi's nomination as the BJP candidate for prime minister is seen by many as evidence of an RSS coup within the party, which marginalized the old guard. That old guard was made up of rabid chauvinists and authoritarians themselves, but they are now spoken of as "moderate" next to the intolerant and authoritarian Modi.

As chief minister of the state of Gujarat in Western India, Modi presided over one of the worst anti-Muslim pogroms in recent memory, when more than 1,000 Muslims were killed and more than 100,000 were forced to flee their homes in the spring of 2002.

The BJP's relationship with the RSS hasn't always been a smooth one, as the contingencies of electoral coalition politics have sometimes driven a wedge between their respective strategies for furthering the goals of Hindutva. But these are family quarrels, so to speak.

## The Candidate of Choice for Capital

Modi is the choice of the RSS, certainly, but the source of his power lies in his links to big capital. He has been embraced by large sections of the Indian bourgeoisie looking to further consolidate their wealth and power in the face of an economic slowdown and increasing resistance from the working classes.

An article in the Financial Times [4] captured the giddy enthusiasm among the business classes. "There's something thrilling about the rise of Narendra Modi," the article begins, under the headline "India Needs a

Jolt—and Modi Is Risk Worth Taking."

Modi likewise appeals to a growing urban middle class whose hedonistic pursuit of consumer capitalism and starry-eyed idolization of the super-rich is matched only by its disdain for the plight (and the struggles) of the plebeian masses. As Shiv Visvanathan wrote at the RadicalSocialist.in site [5], "The middle class sees in Modi a decisive, security-oriented, and development-centered, urban-fixated politician who has voiced all their fears about Muslims, anarchy, security and transformed it into a huge vote bank."

The backdrop to this is the neoliberal economic reforms that began to take effect in India in the early 1990s. The goal was to restructure the economy by dismantling the bureaucratically clogged regulatory regime of previous decades—the so-called "License Raj."

Large public-sector enterprises were privatized or shut down. Special Economic Zones were set up as tax- and regulation-free havens for foreign investors. Foreign and domestic investment increased, and growth rates of 7-9 percent over nearly two decades resulted in a massive accumulation of wealth at the very top of Indian society.

According to Forbes, India's 56 billionaires have a collective net worth of nearly \$200 billion, while a report in The Hindu [6] pegs the wealth of the country's 7,850 "ultra-high net worth" individuals at \$950 billion, equivalent to nearly half the country's annual GDP.

But the years of high growth rates are over. Since the onset of the global economic crisis of 2008, the Indian economy has been slowing down, and investment has plummeted from an average of about 12 percent over the last decade to nearly zero in the last two years, as economist Michael Roberts reports [7]. Meanwhile, urban inequality is at an all-time high, and rural inequality has also gone up.

To boost its populist credentials, the Congress-led UPA government enacted a few piecemeal reforms, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which

promised to provide 100 days of wage labor for every rural household; a modest increase in food subsidies to the poor; and benign modifications to the notorious colonial-era Land Acquisitions Act.

But this watery populism has had little effect, especially after years of strong economic growth failed to close the gap between rich and poor—and a string of sensational multibillion-dollar corruption scandals involving industrialists and high-ranking government officials.

With its nepotism, ties to big business and opportunistic appeals to "vote-banks" among oppressed castes and minorities, Congress stands discredited. Modi's rise owes much to the failures of the UPA government.

As journalist Siddharth Varadarajan puts it [ ] ], "Modi is where he is today—on the cusp of power—not because the country is becoming more communal, but because the Indian corporate sector is becoming more impatient." For Indian capital, the answer to a slowing economy is to trim the welfare state—by eliminating food and fuel subsidies to the poor, increasing regressive taxation and further loosening restrictions on access to land and forests for mining and resource extraction.

The way that big business turned away from Congress—now seen as "indecisive" and unreliable—and toward Modi, writes Vardharajan, is "a cautionary tale about the deep crisis that rent-seeking and cronyism have engendered in the Indian economy, now that the immediate gains made possible from liberalization have reached their natural limit."

Modi's campaign rhetoric has thus centered around themes of "development" and "good governance," with the "Gujarat model" put forward of as evidence.

But there is more shine than substance to this model. While Gujarat has the second-highest per capita income in the country, it has also seen nearly 5,000 farmer suicides in the period from 2003 to 2012 [8]. Gujarat registered the seventh-highest GDP growth among states in 2013, but it

ranked 13th in terms of rural consumption growth. According to economists C.P. Chandrashekhar and Jayati Ghosh [9], wages in Gujarat are lower than the national average—and that of "male casual labor in Gujarat are at the bottom of the scale across India in terms of the real incomes they generate."

## The Dangers Ahead

While emphasizing the "Gujarat model," Modi hasn't stayed away from explicitly Hindu nationalist themes. His speeches in the northeast of the country are telling in this respect. Here, the issue of "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh has long been used by politicians to whip up national and ethnic chauvinism.

In a campaign speech earlier this year, Modi made the absurd allegation that the state government in Assam was killing rhinos to clear land for Bangladeshi migrants [10]. Later, in the city of Serampore in West Bengal, Modi called for the deportation of immigrants [11], saying that after May 16—the day the election results are to be announced—Bangladeshis will be expected to "pack up their bags." Not all Bangladeshi immigrants, however: Hindu migrants, he says, must be welcomed and accommodated; proving that Modi's anti-Bangladeshi stance is, in fact, anti-Muslim [12].

The months leading up to the elections have been marked by several episodes of violence, including the Muzaffarnagar riots in August and September 2013 [13], in which at least 62 people were killed and tens of thousands of Muslims fled their homes.

The fears of those on the left about Modi are therefore not surprising. But not everyone is sounding the alarm. Ramachandra Guha, a well-known liberal intellectual, recently wrote: "Those who fear that...Narendra Modi would inaugurate a period of 'fascist' or even Emergency-like rule in India underestimate the strength of our democratic institutions, and the robustness of our federal system. [14]"

Guha may be right that a revocation or suspension of the Constitution and the establishment of a Hindu theocracy may not be imminent. Socialist activist and scholar Kunal Chattopadhyay [15], however, warns against the complacency that Guha's attitude encourages—for if Guha belittles the warnings of the left as so much fear-mongering, other liberals, such as the sociologist Andre Beteille, have gone further and announced their support for Modi [16].

Besides, there is ample repressive capacity built into the Constitution. The continued military occupation of Kashmir, with its rampant abuse of power and subversion of the people's will, required no suspension of the Constitution in New Delhi—nor did the continued repression of adivasis and the dispossessed in Chhattisgarh and Bihar. The notorious Armed Forces Special Powers Act and numerous other repressive mechanisms allow the state plenty of latitude in dealing out repression, short of imposing martial law.

A report by Human Rights Watch [17] points out that India is yet to ratify the Convention Against Torture and the Convention Against Enforced Disappearance: "Human Rights Watch has long documented a pattern of impunity, often permitted under Indian law." The "democratic institutions" and "robust federalism" of the Indian state coexist easily with the armed force it uses to maintain its rule in large parts of the subcontinent, not least in Kashmir.

A Modi government would embolden the already-resurgent Hindutva brigade: it would legitimize the moral policing vigilantes who physically assault women at parties and in bars [18], the thugs who seek to silence progressive journalists [19], the Khap Panchayats (village councils) that want to ban women from wearing jeans and using cell phones [20], the many upper-caste goons who terrorize Dalit villages and neighborhoods [21].

Although the economy has slowed down, Indian capital does not face insurmountable challenges to its rule from the left or the working classes at this time. It isn't about to ditch democratic constitutionality and hand

over the reigns of state power to the Praveen Togadias and Baba Ramdevs just yet.

Still, while the imposition of a fascist regime from above may not be imminent, the cadres of the Sangh Parivar will be strengthened by a Modi victory. Confronting and resisting these forces is an ongoing challenge for the left.

## Is There an Alternative?

It needs to be said that the so-called "Modi wave" is largely media-driven and a reflection of the deep pockets of Modi's campaign—as well as the steady dance of journalists to the tune of their corporate sponsors and owners.

At the time of this writing, reports from activists in Varanasi [22], where Modi is running for election to parliament, suggest that among workers and oppressed castes, Modi's support is quite thin. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, two states where the BJP must win big, the wave might not have actually materialized.

While the sense of consternation, even panic, at the prospect of a Modi win among progressives in India is palpable, most of the election reports have understated the significance of resistance to neoliberalism and its effects. The spectacular accumulation of wealth at the very top of Indian society—what Arundhati Roy refers to as the "gush-up" economy—was enabled by the policies of both Congress-led and BJP-led national governments, so there has been a remarkable continuity of economic policies throughout this period.

On the other side, there has been pushback against the priorities of neoliberalism: from the rebellions against land acquisition in Nandigram and Singur, to the growing industrial struggles in the auto plants of the Delhi/NCR region [23], to the general strikes in 2010, 2012 and 2013; to anti-nuclear power protests in Mithi Virdi and Kudankulam [24].

But these struggles have not as yet

been able to turn the tide. Workers in the auto plants faced terrible repression, and many militant trade unionists have been languishing in jail for nearly two years (though despite this, the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union scored a major victory recently by pushing back the bosses' attempt to set up a puppet union [25]).

The general strikes, announced and led largely from above, have not done enough to bolster union density or workers' self-organization on the ground. The heroic struggle against the Kudankulam nuclear plant failed to halt its construction, and its most prominent leader, S. P. Udayakumar, was forced to go into hiding after he was charged with sedition for leading the protests.

While these struggles point to the potential for a working-class alternative, they have so far not been able to pose a serious challenge to bourgeois politics.

The emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) shows how alienated people are from the BJP and the Congress.

AAP is a party rife with contradictions (like any other bourgeois reformist party)—a big tent that might not be able to retain its internal cohesion. But its mass support speaks to the hunger for change. Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of urban youth have become politicized, broken with long-standing allegiances to dynastic politics and are learning the ins and outs of activism and organization.

If the AAP's anti-corruption platform has garnered support among progressive activists, it is because the organized left remains weak and fragmented. The parliamentary left, led by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), is in disarray, its forces licking their wounds after a humiliating defeat in West Bengal in the last elections.

While in power in the West Bengal state government, the CPI-M projected itself as a more "reliable" ally for Western multinationals, evicting nearly 100,000 slum-dwellers

from the streets of Kolkata (Calcutta), increasing restrictions on trade unions to prevent strikes and job actions, and hiring the American public relations firm McKinsey & Company to boost its image abroad. The CPI-M proved itself a willing accomplice in the neoliberal racket—and was punished for it at the polls in 2011 [26].

Moreover, far from posing an alternative to bourgeois politics, the CPs have actively encouraged Great Indian nationalism and the "Idea of India" that approves of the neo-colonial Indian occupations of Kashmir and Manipur. In the anti-caste struggle, the CPs have been weak allies at best, having actively adopted, or turned a blind eye towards, caste within their own ranks.

Outside the CPs, there is a small but growing and vibrant left, with an increasingly visible presence on picket lines of striking workers, in rural mobilizations against nuclear power, on campuses supporting Dalit students' rights, and in street protests for women's rights and against rape.

The non-Stalinist left faces a formidable task if Modi wins. Building revolutionary organizations that can offer an alternative to capitalism, communalism and the caste system will become more difficult under a Modi regime. But this emerging left, and the diverse struggles it is involved in, offers hope amid one of the most disturbing elections in Indian history.

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*earlier drafts of this article.*

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## Lean & Mean Health Care

13 May 2014, by [Greg Chern](#)

Their reporting is thorough, but limited to how the law looks from the perspective of consumers. From this angle, the ACA appears as yet one more way for monopolies to charge their customers more, with inflated costs and inferior quality.

I hope to offer a more synoptic view of three parts of the healthcare system

—healthcare production, healthcare “commerce” and healthcare finance — to situate the Affordable Care Act within the context of recent and potential changes in the industry as a whole.

Looking first at reforms aimed at “providers” — the collective name for hospitals, clinics and independent

practices — we can see a longer-term trend of state regulation, standardization and consolidation of the production of U.S. health care.

Providers are developing new forms of metropolitan networks and responsive information technology to coordinate health care delivery in a way that resembles just-in-time, lean

production in the manufacturing industries. But these new initiatives “and health production as a whole” will stop dead if the cash flow for the industry isn’t standardized and consolidated, too.

For this reason, ACA attempts to reform some of the industry’s largest “payers” (private insurance companies and Medicaid). Like leveling the grade in order to lay down train tracks, the Affordable Care Act grades patients and their contracts in order to smooth out the distribution of health care throughout the just-in-time healthcare system. Even though this is done to avert a potential blockage in the healthcare industry’s cash flow, it could lead to even larger financial instabilities down the road.

## “Reforming” Healthcare Production

In a puff piece for The New York Times Magazine (November 3, 2013), Adam Davidson (from NPR’s Planet Money) reports on the capitalist entrepreneurism at the heart of the ACA, with the critical depth of a cotton swab “but for all its blindspots, his piece is looking in the right direction.

One source, Elizabeth Fowler, who helped design the ACA as a cost-saving and competition-increasing policy while working in Senator Max Baucus’ office, says, “Everybody is focused on the coverage angle, but the changes in the law designed to address cost could be a bigger and longer-lasting change.” (Davidson neglects to report that Fowler is also, according to Truth Out, “an insurance company executive from Wellpoint ... hired by Obama’s HHS [Department of Health and Human Services] to implement the law and now works for a pharmaceutical giant.”)

One such federal initiative is the Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH), a cozy euphemism for the large-scale vertical integration of the health care industry. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality is pushing it as a method for

“transforming how primary care is organized and delivered.” The initiative intends that the disparate medical offices through which a patient receives care become “centered” around the patient, requiring the cooperation and collusion of these formerly separate providers on a metropolitan level.

The federal government will even directly fund health care companies if they join together under regulated cartels called Accountable Care Organizations. Many large corporations, moved by the state-backed spirit of cooperation, have been inspired into what Forbes calls a “mergers and acquisitions frenzy” in the wake of ACA’s passage.

## “Coordinated Care”

Initiatives like this, often called “coordinated care,” aim to redefine the flow of patients through the healthcare delivery system in much the same way that lean, just-in-time production has redefined the flow of commodities through the global supply chain. In Charlie Post and Jane Slaughter’s words, manufacturers speed up work and cut down inventories by making sure “each phase of the production process is tightly synchronized with the next.”

Healthcare CEOs are exhorting each other to apply manufacturers’ lean methods to streamline use of medical equipment and supplies. The lean lessons of the Toyota Production System have been carefully studied by health informatics researchers and the National Institutes of Health, and applied in hospitals around the country.

Like lean production, coordinated care moves the patient through the health care system with much higher efficiencies. Patients may notice this more efficient care, but what appears as coordination or integration from the perspective of capital looks more like a disintegration from the perspective of patients and workers.

Industrial healthcare delivery requires a series of workers who can provide

direct care for the patient or regulate the flow of patients through the clinic or hospital. PCMH will multiply this division of labor, creating new steps in the patient flow.

For example, after a doctor tells a Medicaid patient that they need an X-ray, a referral coordinator might be on hand to coordinate between the workers at the Medicaid office and the workers at the radiology department.

Under this multiplied division of labor, the patients may know nothing about this work happening behind the scenes, and the workers themselves may only know their own particular part in the chain. Nobody except the referral coordinator can determine which hospital the patient will be referred to, and the referral coordinator may know little else about the patient’s care.

This de-skilling of healthcare work “another component of lean production” may happen at every point in the patient flow, from the front desk to the operating room. The just-in-time vertical integration of healthcare requires a disintegration of the patient experience too. As care becomes more coordinated, the workers might move the patient along virtually, their chart and paperwork sent between workers at, say, the clinic, Medicaid office, and hospital. The patient herself also has less of an active role in her own health, and even less understanding of the whole process.

The patient and her virtual health can move independently of each other, the latter spirited away while the former follows in its wake. Along the way, glimpses of the patient’s health will appear to her through the intermediary and inscrutable products that her chart leaves behind: a Medicaid card, a referral, a diagnosis, a prescription, a drug. If she asks the workers to help decipher these hieroglyphs, the workers might be just as clueless about the process beyond the limited horizon of their position.

This suggests a limit to how lean production can be applied to the healthcare system. If lean healthcare hinges its profit margins on the ability to coordinate patients, what happens when patients want a say in that

coordination, or make their own decisions? When patients decide to skip appointments or not to be “compliant,” it can threaten the provider’s bottom line.

Lean production relies upon directing passive goods at the speed of information, while healthcare struggles with patient self-management and “compliance,” pulling a lean healthcare system in two, contradictory directions. As I’ll argue below, the Affordable Care Act attempts to resolve this contradiction in capital’s favor.

## Clinics as Pit Crews

Despite all the above, tangible material benefits do result from a health care industry developed by capital. Even if patients are only presented with their health as a final product, they may still notice that the product is more efficiently produced and of higher quality than they would have received in a less developed system. As an ideal, the patient’s medical chart would move seamlessly from doctor’s office to doctor’s office, and mistakes would decrease.

Healthcare reformers are quick to emphasize that more than just lives will be saved, money and time will be saved too. (Neo)liberal darling Atul Gawande, when receiving an award from the main PCMH-accreditation body, the National Committee for Quality Assurance, compared it and similar NCQA approaches to turning clinics into pit crews. Writing for the *New Yorker*, he turns a pleasant family trip to the Cheesecake Factory into an epiphany for “large-scale, production-line medicine.”

Here we can see the danger of a half-critical, consumer-side approach to the ACA. The liberal demands for an efficient healthcare system and for controlling costs “if they do not include demands for increased worker and patient control over the system” could become the justification for treating patient flow as an assembly line, turning health workers into mechanics, and patients into lug nuts.

Meanwhile, efficiency as a whole may increase, but even a healthcare system that efficiently adapts to its own anarchic, market forces will be less efficient than one where patients and workers are developed to be conscious participants.

In a video explaining the role of NCQA, Gawande said, “We need to be able to have ways that you can see whether your local system is succeeding or failing.” Of course, we’d all like a transparent system, but transparent for whom?

Gawande would limit this need to transparency for technocrats and investors who can correctly allocate resources, even if this transparency leads to further opacity for workers and patients themselves.

Meanwhile those teachers, students and parents fighting for public education will recognize the coded language of “school failure” determined by outside, privatized accreditation bodies. And healthcare workers and patients in the coming fight against “healthcare reform” will have a lot to learn from the students and teachers fighting against “education reform.”

To achieve its goals for coordinated care, the healthcare system requires seamless coordination of formerly disconnected information systems. If standardized testing is the bureaucratic linchpin of education reform, the linchpin for healthcare reform will be electronic health records.

AHRQ argues, “Health IT can support the PCMH model by collecting, storing, and managing personal health information, as well as aggregate data that can be used to improve processes and outcomes. Health IT can also support communication, clinical decisionmaking, and patient self-management.”

To encourage the expansion of EHR, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) introduced Meaningful Use, a method to track the clinical experience. Aside from being a source of frustration to clinical workers when the record system crashes with a packed waiting room,

Meaningful Use has far more exploitative effects on healthcare delivery and coordination.

Patient care is reduced to ticking off checklists, helping to replace all healthcare workers with less skilled, less expensive staff. In addition, electric health records provide a full range of surveillance tools for Taylorizing the clinic floor. Post and Slaughter note the role that technology and computerization plays in creating a “lean workplace,” replacing expert workers with “expert programs.” Add some employer subsidies and incentives for rolling out these programs, and the meaning of Meaningful Use is clear: profit.

## Potential and Reality

To be sure, PCMH and Meaningful Use can be real advancements. We all want to be healthy as quickly and completely as possible, and quality health care would seem to be the best way to achieve that, for as many people as possible. The automation of public health through electric records can be the basis for developing radical advancements in social health. The potential of the coordination and information technology mentioned above would be immense, if it were under the control of patients and workers.

The public health practitioners who are implementing these systems, however, regardless of their personal politics or ideals, are largely employed by private companies most concerned with maximizing profits, or governments most concerned with cutting costs. As long as capital hires the workers, owns their tools and regulates their usage, the public health outcomes will always be secondary to capital accumulation.

In our current system, what “healthy” means is determined by what clinics, hospitals and insurance companies agree is normal for you and your body. This has the potential to undercut, for example, the struggles of feminists and trans activists for control of their own bodies, in favor of distant and technocratic financial considerations.

Monthly insurance premiums only promise you the right to live at a certain level of health, and to live in your body in a certain way, on a month-to-month basis. These levels and ways of living are determined by deductibles, not democracy.

PCMH may put patients at the center, if only because those patients bear a peculiarly profitable commodity, health, in their bodies. Writing about similar industrialization processes in the Socialist Register (2010) volume "Morbid Symptoms," Rodney Loepky explains how the health industry is unique in the sort of basis it hopes to provide for a "new economy" and national wealth:

"Health represents a domain in which the maximization of returns appears limitless. There is neither a ceiling for how healthy societies should be, nor a shortage of medical conditions "real or contrived" that require diagnosis and (preferably prolonged) treatment... The various components of the health industry enjoy the luxury of self-identifying as social actors who are first and foremost in the business of meeting human needs, obscuring the reality of their enormous returns on investment and being able to represent these, when they are noticed, as being of secondary importance. Who, after all, can be against the pursuit of health?"

Often quality health care is seen as the solution to social problems. Unfortunately, the focus on quality healthcare can give a pass to what that healthcare is healing: often the slow violence of overwork or unemployment, or of living in the runoff stream of a capitalist ecological system. An injury to all cannot be solved by bandaids for each. Even the focus on prevention built into the PCMH model will never take the political step of actually preventing the real, economic causes of the majority of the world's sickness and injury.

## Reforming Healthcare

## Commerce

Instead of taking us a political step forward, the Affordable Care Act will take a deeper step into just-in-time healthcare by standardizing and consolidating its cash flow.

For the work that happens in hospitals or clinics to continue, those services need to be bought and paid for. In America's multiple-payer system, private insurance companies and the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services form the multi-chambered heart of the healthcare industry, pumping a steady flow of payments through the entire social organism.

Payers oversee the commercial exchange of cash and claims, paying for the healthcare services and regulating their distribution, functionally analogous to the wholesalers and retailers that handle commerce and distribution of consumer goods.

But sometimes the money flow between the payers' commercial exchange and the providers' production gets out of whack. Obstructions to a steady flow can cause a crisis, and sometimes become too big for any one payer to handle. As one example, Adam Davidson parrots Republicans who have blamed the government for its Medicare fee-for-service model. The ACA will attempt to address fee-for-service as one of the market forces that has allowed exchange value to go too far astray from what is socially necessary in the healthcare system.

While designing the ACA, Obama sat down with other payers and healthcare providers to figure out how to handle another of the big obstructions to the industry's capital flow: uninsured patients.

From the perspective of a commodified health system, uninsured who can't pay for the healthcare they receive are seen as an economic blockage. They're talked about as clogs that jam up the ER waiting rooms, even though they result from the same anarchic, market forces that produced those ER departments and

fills them with medical emergencies.

They're described as unable to get preventive services, which creates problems that "pile up" and become more expensive. What starts as sediment from the healthy capital flow of the health industry calcifies into a foreign mass that needs to be "ectomied or integrated for the organism to survive. From the perspective of capital flows, the uninsured are kidney stones, blood clots.

ObamaCare will address the issue of uninsured people "but what sort of issue is this, a medical or a social one?"

Some show sympathy for the uninsured by describing them as simply unfortunate, like the victims of a rare degenerative disease, when they are in fact the direct result of the capitalist insurance system. They result from socially produced inequalities, not random afflictions. A post-capitalist healthcare system will need to address the latter and their higher medical costs, but until then we should try our best to differentiate the pathologies of our social structure from those of our biology.

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' own estimates show that 48% of uninsured adults are healthy and young, and 54% of those individuals say that premium costs are a main reason that they don't buy health insurance. (Of those healthy and young uninsured, 9.3% have now been officially identified by federal agencies as "Hipsters," a much-blogged about target for ACA.) In fact, other segments of the uninsured are even more emphatic that the cost of health insurance is what keeps them from enrolling.

Regardless of these facts, CMS provides official marketing resources that suggest the uninsured are simply unwilling to buy insurance, needing either to be convinced or, for those who won't listen to reason, penalized come tax time. To make them listen, the ACA has provided federal and state grants to providers and other nonprofits to hire navigators and steer people towards private insurance contracts offered on the Marketplace website.

Navigators, though they are essentially insurance brokers, don't receive a commission; their bosses are compensated for meeting the enrollment quotas in their grant requirements. The navigator's role, however, is limited and transitional; at bottom, they are training patients on managing their own user account on the Health Insurance Marketplace, how to buy their own contracts, how to manage their own health information. They are even asked to train mothers to broker insurance to their uninsured adult children.

## Patient, Manage Thyself

Lean production often includes workers in the "speeding up of their own jobs, through task forces and teams," write Post and Slaughter. That is definitely true in healthcare, as seen in PCMH and the related ideal of "team-based care." In addition, however, patients are included as part of the team, joining the team and managing their own health.

Ultimately, that's how the ACA plans to integrate those stubborn uninsured patients. When insurance companies underwrite a contract, they collect personal information about the uninsured, calculate the risks and then set their costs accordingly. With the Marketplace, the underwriting of health insurance is internalized into a website and calculated according to pre-set costs in real time "if you log on during off-peak hours like one in the morning.

This automated underwriting prevents discrimination through internalized regulations, and standardizes output through different tiers of contracts: Catastrophic, Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum. Aside from possibly a navigator who may help the uninsured patient complete and submit their application, no humans intervene between the patient and the insurance company "or in the case of the ACA's Medicaid expansion, the government.

By replacing the insurance brokers and public aid office workers "many of whom may be unionized

women of color " with websites, the ACA also removes the element of human discretion, cutting out any supplicating power that the applicant may have. Inhospitable Medicaid enrollment websites prevent any sort of Cloward-Piven strategy of demanding public aid office workers to enroll mothers and address their needs. Instead, patients must be their own advocates as they face massive corporations and anonymous government departments, given only the options to apply for or appeal their eligibility. In checkboxes, no one can hear you scream.

What's more, by discounting insurance patients who manage their own health, ACA is also encouraging patients to become their own health workers. In essence, patients in wellness programs and facing penalties for tobacco use are being paid to manage their own health. This resolves somewhat the contradiction between a just-in-time healthcare system that must coordinate the mobility of patients as passive containers while subject to the automobility of the autonomous patient " but it resolves the contradiction by internalizing it in the patient.

Making patients look after their own health as a commodity puts them in an alienated relationship to this expensive thing contained within their body. Further disintegrating the patient's experience, insurance capital opens up a rift between me-as-health manager and me-as-body, and inserts a contract in the middle of the two. In *Limits to Capital*, David Harvey describes financial capital as the central nervous system of capitalist society, but what does it mean when financial capital fuses with the central nervous system of my body?

I will then be examining every part of myself that needs care " my teeth, my feet, my mental state " through the eyes of the insurance company, what I think they would deem medically necessary, and what the contract has decided I should pay for that body part. I relate to each part of my body not as a metaphysical relation to myself, but as a financial relation between my bank account and my organs, as a relation between

money and commodities, a relation between things and things, reified innards vertically integrated into reified healthcare bureaucracies.

The ACA, together with online wellness programs and Meaningful Use, creates the framework for a lean, just-in-time healthcare bureaucracy " responsive not only to patients' vitals but also to the sudden crises and fissures that regularly appear between exchange and production. De-skilled office workers, who previously mitigated those fissures and moved the cash flow along, are replaced with patients processing their own paperwork.

It may seem like this grants patients more autonomy over their own health. But the information I provide is placed into computer systems " such as Healthcare.gov and new Medicaid electronic eligibility systems " for centralized decisions, and the health professionals who could once advocate for me are weakened and deprofessionalized. Insurance companies can depend on us self-help patients to mitigate crises and ruptures because our health is entwined with the health of the industry as a whole.

## How "Efficient" Is It?

Adam Davidson lauds the ACA as the culmination of fifty years of healthcare policy intended "to make health care mimic other efficient markets." Letting slide the dubious fiction of "efficient" markets, what will be the likely outcome of this financialization of healthcare?

Fifty years ago, government policies also stepped in to make the mortgage market efficient enough for expansion, creating Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, standardizing, rating and consolidating mortgage contracts, all of which led to the pooling, securitization and over-extension of these contracts.

After 50 years of accelerating credit flow, that market suddenly froze and contorted in a financial crisis. Is it too much of a leap to imagine that the

standardized contracts that we're buying on the Marketplace today are tranching into "metal" classes like the rating system that buttressed the secondary mortgage market will be bundled and sold, and then cut and re-bundled and re-sold?

Risk-taking investors may even squeeze every drop of profit out of subprime catastrophic plans, the way investors bought shares of weird derivatives (CDOs and MBS's) in the subprime mortgage market. Insurance premiums, like payments on housing debt and other "fictitious" capital, are an income stream that doesn't actually grow the GDP or add to the fundamentals of the economy, very easily lending itself to speculation and over-leveraging.

Securitization hasn't hit the health insurance industry yet, but there's been peer pressure from industries on both the "health" and the "insurance" flanks. On the health care side, providers are securitizing their receivables, bundling claims on money that they get for their services. Finance lawyer and Duke University professor Steven Schwarcz wrote during the housing securitization boom of the 1990s that hospitals are among "the most promising candidates for securitization."

On the insurance side, there has been an uptick in the securitization of life, catastrophe and property-casualty insurance since 2008, prompting handwringing from the mainstream media still unable to understand why the last financial crisis happened.

Even more worrying, the descriptions of legal and economic obstacles to these trends reads like a description of recent health reforms written in reverse.

Schwarcz notes that originators of securities need to be adequately rated before investors will get in on bundling up those "most promising" promises to pay. Other lawyers writing for "Securitization Conduit" in 2000 estimated that "as health care providers consolidate and fully integrate their management information systems (including on-line, real time, accounts receivables systems) and more health care

payments are made based on preset and nationally standardized reimbursement rates, more providers are likely to consider securitizing their health care receivables."

Federal laws prevent securitizing Medicare and Medicaid payments to health care providers, or laws like HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) aim to prevent the sharing of private health information, but law firms are researching how to accommodate both the letter of the law and the wallet of the investor.

More recently, a Goldman Sachs investment analyst, who views insurance securitization "as an accelerating convergence of finance and insurance," wrote up a wish list so that insurance securitization can "flourish to the extent that the [recently crashed] asset-backed markets have," in particular "increased transparency, better standardization of modeling techniques, and an improved secondary market."

These wishes for increased rating, integration and standardization have been acted on in recent years, perhaps in order to satisfy finance capital's prerequisites. With the standardized, bronze-to-platinum contract rating system built into the ACA so closely resembling Freddie and Fannie's ratings of home loans, it is easy to imagine the securitization of health insurance contracts, moving from the health production to the commercial exchange part of the industry.

Eventually this capital accumulation could throw exchange and production out of whack once more. What happens when all of a sudden, people realize they can't pay their premiums or out-of-pocket costs anymore, and break their contracts? Or what happens to all that capital investment when the Baby Boom generation passes away, and that surge in patient flow peters out?

If financial analysts couldn't manage the systemic risk generated by algorithms and computer models anchored in the housing market, a human-made and human-unmade phenomenon, could we expect those

models to do any better predicting a market where the underlying fundamentals are the stochastic (probabilistic) biochemical and epidemiological processes that shape public health are riddled with innumerable mysteries, unexplainable by human knowledge?

Given that some financial corporations, such as Blackstone Group, have profited from both the ACA mergers and acquisition frenzy and post-crisis land grabs, it is likely that health insurance securitization would be built upon the same base of information technologies and institutions as the last crisis, with equally unforeseen consequences.

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Against the Current

# Only the workers' movement can stop flaring up of war in Ukraine

12 May 2014, by [Zakhar Popovych](#)

We can speak only about our first impressions now. It looks as if the so-called pro-Russian activists provoked violence by blocking the route of the rally for "unified Ukraine". This blocking of the route was definitely the aggressive step, because before 2 May neither side made attempts to prevent opponents from holding demonstrations in Odessa. Never previously were routes of pro-Russian demonstrations blocked. When two demonstrations approached each other hard cobblestones and paving blocks were thrown from both sides.

The witnesses we have at the moment indicate that first shooting was from the side of "pro-Russians". Even the "Borotba" organization which is at the moment the integral part of this pro-Russian movement in Odessa did not affirm that shooting did not begin from their side. It looks like the most of guns were automatic rifles but there were also some shot guns.

For the moment we have no firm witnesses of shooting from the "unified Ukraine" demonstrators on Sobornaya square in downtown Odessa during the blocking of their route by "pro-Russians". But we have evidence of machine gun fire, first killings and severe injuries there. Witnesses say the shooting came from the "pro-Russians", behind the police and under their protection. It is important to stress that most witnesses were involved in clashes and have a very emotional perception of events. Some impartial and unprejudiced investigation of events is absolutely needed.

On the other hand after the shooting, the "pro-Russians" were subject to brutal beating from the "pro-Ukrainian" opponents. Many of them were severely injured and some possibly killed. Moreover the "pro-Ukrainian" crowd ran wild smashing the camp of "pro-Russians" on the Kulikovo Pole square near Odessa's main railway station. The tents were

burned down in minutes. At that moment we also have the first firm witnesses that the "pro-Ukrainians" also used guns. Then "pro-Russians" holed up in the "House of Trade Unions". The building was burned by "Molotov cocktails" thrown from outside of the building (the theory that the fire began inside the building is very questionable). But of course we cannot exclude the possible role of provocateurs whoever they could be.

Many people died in the fire from suffocation and burns. Some jumped from windows and died on the ground. Some escaped using fire ladders and ropes. There are witnesses who indicated that "pro-Ukrainians" come to their senses and tried to save people from the fire. They put ladders to some windows, tried to put tires in front of some windows to make a softer landing.

But there is also evidence of clashes between the people saved from fire with ladders and those who put these ladders. It seems that "pro-Russians" saved from fire did not want to surrender and tried to fight for escape. Some witnesses also claim that some "pro-Russians" who did not resist were also beaten. Testimonies are contradictory and it is hard to be sure what happened without an unprejudiced investigation of events.

Nevertheless, what we can state for sure is that the radical left activists who participated in joint actions a year before, were now involved in events on both the sides killing each other. Andrej Brajevsky, a 27 year old programmer, a member of "Borotba" organization was killed in the "House of Unions". He was in a pro-Russian "Odesskaya druzhina" para-military unit. Another young man from the "anti-fa" football fans movement was shot on Sobornaya square.

It appears that left activists became the infantry, the cannon fodder in the war which clearly has nothing to do

with the class interests of Ukrainian workers of all nationalities and ethnic origins. Leftists were killed in Kiev fighting for Maidan against the Police (remember the 33 year old anarchist Sergii Kens'kyj shot dead on 20 February on Instytuts'ka street). Now leftists fighting on the anti-Maidan side were also killed.

The fact is that workers do not participate in either antagonistic movement, and because of that both movements are progressively turning away from an agenda of social and class struggle to a ethno-cultural, nationalistic and finally chauvinistic one. The question of the justification of the existence of the Ukrainian state turns to much more important for both sides than all the issues of social security and labour rights.

Where workers participate they allow no violence. And it happens in all parts of Ukraine, no matter whether it in the East or West.

When anti-Maidan forces in Kryvyii Rig (Dnepropetrovsk oblast) tried to use paid militants to attack and beat the Maidan activists in this industrial city, miners' self-defense units easily found the way to pacify provocateurs and nobody was killed.

Nobody was killed when the workers of Krasnodon (Lugansk oblast) went on strike and effectively took the city under their control during the uprising. Workers did not allow either anti-Maidan or pro-Maidan forces to use them. They did not join the "pro-Russian" movement. But they also did not allow themselves to be used in support of Timoshenko or any other bourgeois candidate in the Presidential elections.

But the workers are in Kryvyii Rig and Krasnodon, and there are no organized workers in the streets of Odessa, Donetsk, Lugansk and or of Slov'jansk and Kramatorsk. Workers are, as a rule, not involved in the

movement. And while we saw some signs of involvement of independent unions in central Ukraine we have seen no signs of involvement of workers' unions in the movement in the East. And this is the key to the tragedy of civil war that is now flaring up in Ukraine.

The Ukraine is much more homogenous than one might think. There are many ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians in all parts of Ukraine. And setting them at loggerheads will mean ethnic conflict in all parts of the country. There is no point in speculation about the social composition of Maidan and anti-Maidan, or as some call it "pro-Ukrainian" and "pro-Russian" movements. It looks like it is mostly the same. And working people were present in both of course, as well as lumpen and petty bourgeois elements.

In the cities where more workers live more workers individually participate in both Maidan and anti-Maidan.

And there are also many right-wingers and a very weak workers' movement. Soviet Stalinism destroyed the tradition of workers' self-organization in our country and an independent workers' movement is only now making first steps. But these steps are significant and have already shown that a general strike can change the agenda of protests.

And the only force that can stop this war is the workers' movement of solidarity around the demands of social justice and removing of oligarchy from power. This is the only chance for Ukraine to survive.

As we see that the police demonstrate in Odessa a lack of the capacity and even will to protect anybody, we call on workers to form their own independent self-defence units under the control of strike committees (like in Lugansk) or independent trade-unions like "Miners" hundred of Kryvyi Rig.

## Difference

## between Maidan and the Government of Ukraine

We have never supported this government.

We can put up with it temporarily but not support it. It is another question that we cannot consider it a military junta. Not yet. Unfortunately, the junta is not in Kiev, but in Slov'jansk. In Kiev you can easily have demonstrations with red flags and distribute leaflets of any kind. The May Day demonstrations showed this explicitly. All liberal freedoms are available in Kiev, but not in the Donetsk Peoples Republic. You probably heard about regular kidnappings of journalists and ordinary people. At Easter people armed with machine guns searched and undressed me in Slov'jansk because I had Kiev registration. I was saved by local residents who bailed me out. Some my friends are still somewhere in the basement of Slov'jansk SBU building. It looks like they use administrative buildings just to make prisons of them.

But as for the central government in Kiev, it not only represents nobody in Eastern Ukraine, it is not in fact trusted much in Western and even central Ukraine. Maidan was a mass movement inspired by the idea of justice, social justice as the first necessity. When we had public discussions on Maidan in January and February people were sure that as soon as Janukovich was removed we would stop corruption and increase social standards.

People were angry with the idea that the new government could impose austerity measures and social cuts, just as Janukovich did. Nobody believed it, but it is exactly what government is trying to do now to receive IMF loans.

The government is now switching its attention to national security. But this nationalist hysteria has nothing to do with the Maidan movement as a whole.

This government was at one moment accepted by Maidan and it was definitely the worst thing Maidan could ever accept. But it is no more pro-Maidan. Unfortunately the Maidan movement as we know it in the winter of 2013/2014 no longer exists.

The government is now trying to move away from Maidan's agenda of social justice but I think that the only force capable of drawing it back to the real essence of Maidan - will be the new Maidan, the workers' one. And in this case it would be another government.

I don't think that at the moment the "Pravyi sector" controls the National Guard units or even plays a significant role there .

Some individual members of right parties can participate in the National Guard but they are in a small minority in these units up to now. The "Pravyi sector" is a very small party that exists mostly on Russian TV channels. But it is also true that moving to the nationalist agenda of "defending ethnic Ukrainians from invasion of Russians" will make radical right-wingers more and more significant, and among the military as well.

## The Movement on the East

It is definitely less massive and less loud than Maidan in Kiev. For example, during the last months they have failed to organize a single mass rally that is more than 1.5 thousand people strong in Donetsk. There are very few leaflets and newspapers, virtually no discussions. You could hardly find a place for public discussion in Sloviansk and Kramatorsk even during the mass demos a month ago, now under the military regime of DPR there are definitely no such places. Instead of discussions they organized public places for watching Russian TV by satellite.

Russian citizens and even organized armed groups are definitely present. But most active participants are of course locals. For example, in Kramatorsk two major local criminal gangs are playing the leading role in

“self-defence” militia. In the “green man” unit in Sloviansk many are Russian citizens, some are veterans of Russian security forces. Are there any actual Russian officers in service? Of course we don’t know exactly but we see for sure the coordination with the Russian authorities.

On the other hand it is clear that the main organizing force from the beginning was not the Russian government but local oligarchs. It is hard to say to what extent it is coordinated by Janukovich, Mogilev, Pshonka and others, but it was definitely begun with the knowledge and agreement of Akhmetov who is the major Ukrainian oligarch, and they say the “Master of Donbass”.

And of course the leadership of DPR and especially of the military coup in Sloviansk are right-wing chauvinists. The military commander of DPR is Mr. Strelkov (former Russian FSB officer Girkin) who is a conscious monarchist and big fan of Denikin. All these people think that independent Ukraine is just a mistake of history to be corrected. Which as you understand is not acceptable for most Ukrainians, even in Donbass.

Unfortunately we cannot call this movement anti-fascist at all. It is not less fascist as the Maidan movement. And it seems to me that at the moment it looks much more fascist in the way it acts. Let’s remember the violent attack of this “anti-fascist” demonstration on the “pro-Ukrainian” demonstration in Donetsk a week ago. Three hundred people well-armed with metal sticks attacked the pro-Maidan demo which was approximately 800 strong but not armed at all. Twelve people were badly injured and are still in hospital, more than a hundred and

fifty were beaten, all on the pro-Maidan side. When these “anti-fascists” disperse “maiduns” as they call them and finish beating, they just go back to the DNR headquarters, they do not even try to hide themselves.

The leftist sthat join this movement back up this chauvinist agenda and fail to push any internationalism. At the moment they justify themselves with the argument that Russian imperialism is less evil then American, and because of that “we should support Russian imperialism” - a shameful logic.

## The balance sheet of the Conference “Left and Maidan”

The so-called “Euromaidan” movement in Ukraine was complicated. What is going on now is even more complicated. To sort things out about Maidan we even organized the conference in Kiev on 12 April. [1] Of course we did not reach a final decision on all points. But I can try to summarize the main things in two words:

- “Maidan” was definitely not Left but very sensitive to the ideas of social justice and social change, essentially left ideas. Many people on Maidan supported very radical left slogans not only progressive taxation of oligarchs, open accountancy and direct democracy, but also of workers’ control and even the limitation of electoral rights of bourgeoisie (to be more precise we proposed banning wealthy people from being elected or appointed to government positions).

- The main problem of the Left seems to be its inability to present its ideas adequately. The Leftists have been dispersed. Some radically distance themselves from the mass movement, others mostly dissolve into it.

The main failures were because of lack of coordination. For example, t the same time as Borotba activist Denis Levin was beaten by neo-Nazis on Maidan there were two other Leftist events there - 300 meters away from the point in the very center of Maidan 30 students from the union “Direct action” - were making the presentation about students’ self-organization. Five hundred metres away other leftists and anti-fascists had a demo of 200 activists against police violence. No surprise that neo-Nazis attacked Denis Levin who was virtually alone with his trade-union leaflets. His Borotba organization did not support him. And when we joined him it was too late.

*Kiev, 8 May 2014*

## Footnotes

[1] This conference for “left wing organizations and initiatives that condemn national chauvinism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and that equally condemn the Russian intervention and any violent action against leftist or trade-union activists or unarmed protesters” brought together 80 activists, from different including some miners from Krivyyi Rih and Dnepropetrovsk, belonging to the confederation of Free Trade Unions. Catherine Samary, IVP collaborator, was also present.

# The situation in Europe today

11 May 2014, by [François Sabado](#)

1) Our positions on Europe are part of a historical continuity, the history of currents that have sought to give an internationalist response to European developments, beginning with the First World War;

We counterpose to war, to reactionary regimes and monarchies, to free trade, to the different customs unions and institutions of the single market, solidarity and cooperation among peoples and the political perspective

of the United States of Europe or the United Socialist States of Europe. It is a question, in our view of things, of considering Europe as a historical, political, economic and cultural reality - open to the South and the East - and

of infusing the struggle in Europe with an anti-capitalist and socialist content.

2) Since the 1960s, we have been confronted with a project of European construction of the ruling classes, directed against the USSR and the Eastern bloc but competing with the USA. Nearly 60 years after the Treaty of Rome, there has been, for the European bourgeoisies, undeniable progress in the establishment of political, economic and legal institutions, the single market and the creation of the Euro. Since the productive forces were cramped in a national framework, this has led the ruling classes to build the broader spaces that are indispensable for the processes of development of the concentration of capital. It is this process that was crystallized with the Single European Act in 1986, the Maastricht Treaty after German reunification and the other treaties. But with a series of specificities:

\* There is a European market, but without the creation of a European capitalism as such: there are European capitalisms, but no large-scale industry or strong European economic entities, with the exception of EADS. European integration has been carried out through capitalist globalization and the financialisation of capital, with interlinking capitals and North American and Asian pension funds. In this framework, each capitalism and each bourgeoisie plays its own particular role.

\* There is a Euro and a central bank, but they exist along with inter-capitalist competition, the corset of neoliberalism and the absence of democratic sovereignty for the peoples; there is a common currency for economies with different levels of development, which could only exacerbate inequalities.

\* There is a para-state construction, but it is an entire institutional architecture that escapes, once again, not only popular sovereignty but even the forms of the parliamentary type of democracy. This is what explains the authoritarian policy of the "Troika" - the EU, the ECB and the IMF - in the South of Europe and increasingly, restrictions on democracy throughout Europe. The citizens have been

excluded from this project. It is a question of having institutions for the single market. As a consequence there is no political, economic, social and fiscal policy, but there is also a structural weakness on the political, diplomatic and military levels. The EU does not have the decision-making capacity of the USA or China.

Europe has therefore been, from the start, consubstantially neoliberal and undemocratic. This has been the choice of the governments and ruling classes of each country.

So we do not agree, faced with austerity policies, with putting the responsibility on Europe on every occasion! No, the EU is the dispositive that has been chosen by each bourgeoisie to reinforce its economy and its position in the world economy, by increasing the pressure in order to maintain and increase its rate of profit.

3) And it is these contradictions that the crisis will make explode. There is no European capitalism as such, but the EU is the vector of the integration of the European economies into capitalist globalization. This has two consequences:

\* The first of these consequences is that in order to complement the frenetic march of international competition with a global market for labour, it is necessary to break the European social model, in short to liquidate what remains of social, and in some cases democratic, gains in Europe in order to maintain and conquer new positions in the global economy. That is what has led to a lowering of purchasing power and wages - between 20 and 30 per cent in Southern Europe, and a casualization of the labour force in Germany and Eastern Europe - and to deregulation in order to ensure the famous "free and undistorted competition", the progressive dismantling of social security and the privatization of public services.

\* The second consequence is an internal competition within the EU, with what specialists call the asymmetrical trajectory of the economies of the EU, with new relationships of forces, expressed in

the 160 billion euro trade surplus of Germany and the 70 billion euro deficit of France, and then by the differences between the satellite countries of Germany and the South and East of Europe, with France and Italy occupying an intermediate position. With the result that in order to respect the golden rule of the struggle against fiscal deficits and the imperatives of debt repayment, there are austerity policies that lead to a long period of recession or sluggish growth, between zero and one per cent. This creates an infernal dynamic: the contraction of the economy causes the loss of tax revenue, which deepens the deficits and the debt, putting countries under the constant threat of financial markets which are pushing for new austerity policies. It is not the umpteenth programme of austerity: it is permanent structural austerity. Which precludes any "Keynesian" economic relaunching in Europe. The crisis has been contained, unemployment can be stabilized, the banking union can control a part of the banking sector.

But we are in a period of recession or sluggish growth. There is no perspective of a way out of the crisis and the possibility of new crises of debt or the banking sector is not excluded.

It is this situation of a long recessive period that is now leading to a feeling of rejection, a justified rejection of Europe as the vector of austerity policies. A survey shows that 44 per cent of people see Europe as a source of fear and 28 per cent as a source of hope. We are not in the situation of the late 1970s for countries of Southern Europe or the 1990s for the Eastern European countries, when structural funds and European aid were synonymous with the development and improvement of people's living conditions. Today, Europe is rather associated with austerity policies. The pro-European demonstrations in Kiev are more the expression of democratic aspirations and rejection of Russia than attachment to European policies.

And even though the ruling classes and elites have chosen capitalist globalization and Europe, the "austerity crisis" is leading to a

political crisis that reinforces the Right and the far Right and that can lead to authoritarian regimes.

The leads us to the conclusion, of course, that we must combat permanent austerity policies and governments of both the Right and the social-liberal Left, at national and European level, and that this requires a break with the present kind of construction of Europe and with all the European treaties - Maastricht Amsterdam, Lisbon - and the European institutions, because the EU is not reformable. There is no possibility of a political reorientation of Europe, which has been neoliberal and anti-democratic from the start. We must break with the present kind of European integration, but not with Europe.

4) But what do we put in its place? "A return to the national framework", to national currencies, customs barriers and laws? That would be a step backwards, and would especially create new tensions, confrontations and even conflicts in Europe.

Take the example of leaving the Euro: in the first place it would be the equivalent of a massive devaluation, of at least 25 to 30 per cent; this would be followed by a generalized outbreak of protectionism, by new trade wars that would impose new austerity policies against workers. To exit the Euro in the framework of capitalist relations would be to aggravate the crisis. That is politically dangerous because it would create the conditions for a nationalist inter-class union to defend the new national currency. This is especially to confuse the fundamental question - what economic policy do we need - with its instruments, such as the currency. To make, in France for example, "leaving the Euro" a central question is to fall into the trap of the National Front, which makes this political dividing line into a major political differentiation. There may be situations, such as in Greece, where faced with blackmail from the EU saying: "you must choose, either the Euro or austerity" or "you refuse austerity, but in that case you will no longer have the Euro." Although it is difficult, the Greek comrades are right to say: "We reject this blackmail, we will not make

sacrifices for the Euro and we will not accept the austerity plans, even if you expel us from the European Union." But this is a response in a crisis situation. The "programmatic" response, in the face of developments on a world scale, of the crisis and of the needs of the people, is a response on the scale of broader spaces, a scale that makes possible a better distribution of wealth and new divisions of labour corresponding to human needs.

5) So! We counterpose to the present Europe, another Europe, a Europe that serves the people and the workers.

This implies taking up again certain points of national programmes and projecting them in order to formulate a European international programme. We can take up the idea of a social shield in Europe, an upward social and fiscal harmonization:

- a European minimum wage - they ask us how we would reconcile the French minimum wage of 1500 and the Portuguese minimum wage of 450 Euros or the proposed German minimum wage of 850 euros - this implies organizing an upward convergence of minimum wage levels on the basis of purchasing power parity. This is the only long-term solution to the problems of posted workers. We have of course to oblige the employers to pay the same social security contributions for all employees, but in the medium and long term we need to have comparable levels of wages.

- the defence and extension of European public services; we must move towards equivalent systems of health and social security;

- the prohibition of sackings and the implementation of massive job creation programmes and a sliding scale policy of reducing working hours and working time, moving towards the 30-hour week;

- the end of the central bank and the establishment of a European public banking service under the control of citizens and workers;

- the implementation of a policy of

environmental planning and energy transition, with major projects of non-polluting transportation systems, and protection of the environment;

- a common agricultural policy that defends peasant agriculture against the agribusiness multinationals.

We can see that such a European policy involves incursions into the system of private ownership of the key sectors of the economy.

6) The implementation of this programme implies popular mobilization and democratic debate;

- Popular mobilization - it is true that on this point, we encounter difficulties. There are social mobilizations, indeed social explosions, particularly in Southern Europe. These mobilizations have not been able to block the austerity policies. But there is a whole process of exchange of experience, coordination, meetings by sector and by industry. The ETUC, which is integrated into the plans of the EU, is not much help. We need to strengthen cooperation and solidarity between the struggles in each country. We have meetings by sector - health, the car industry - but there are limitations in these activities. In all cases we must demonstrate international solidarity, both in terms of struggles and in our political activities, particularly as concerns European anti-capitalist relations.

- Democratic debate is also very important. First of all we must defend all democratic rights, especially the rights of immigrants and undocumented workers, against Fortress Europe. We want a Europe of women's rights, including the right to abortion, which has still not been won or is being challenged in a number of countries. We also advocate a Europe of peace, without military intervention abroad, particularly in Africa, and we want a Europe that respects self-determination; I am thinking of the question of Catalonia and Spain, which will be in the coming months a central issue. But more generally, if we propose breaking with the existing treaties, we need another Europe, a democratic Europe that serves peoples and workers. Democratic: we

must move towards a constitutional process, where the peoples decide, through a broad discussion and the election of delegates who will establish a new democratic organization of Europe.

Socialist, because in this democratic debate, we have a proposal, around anticapitalist, socialist responses: a Europe at the service of the peoples, in the framework of the United Socialist States of Europe. We need a form of union that respects national

and popular sovereignty.

To conclude, we can see that, unlike currents or intellectuals who tend to evacuate Europe from our strategic horizon, we believe that we cannot have anti-capitalist politics without internationalist and European perspectives. As Trotsky noted, "revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena and ends at the global level." There is a link between the national and international terrains. It is possible that there will be a

synchronization in the development of revolutions, but in general there is a desynchronization of stages, of moments of the class struggle. Each nation must not wait for the others. If there are progressive experiences in one country, we must defend the conquests that have been made and protect what has been won. But we must at the same time have a policy of extension, of international projection and especially of a call for popular mobilization in order to extend these progressive processes.

## For an independent social movement! For a free Ukraine!

11 May 2014, by **Socialist Union "Left Opposition"**

The mass killing of people in Odessa on 2 May cannot be justified in any way. The socialist union Left Opposition is convinced that "Whoever the deceased people on both sides are, the force used against the majority of them clearly exceeded any needed exercise of it in self defence. It is necessary to undertake an all-sided investigation of these events and to personally expose the provocateurs and the killers, who more than likely appeared there from all sides of the confrontation".

We are unable at the present time to name the people responsible for these murders, their organisations or groups. However, we can see the political consequences of the Odessa massacre and we cannot but see that left wing political organisations are among those that carry political responsibility for it.

Without a doubt the violence was directed and organised in the first instance by ultranationalist and chauvinist groups who quite consciously kill people and try to exploit the blood of the deceased to whip up bestial nationalist hysteria in society, which to their way of thinking should "mobilise the nation" against its "its enemies". Really, that is perhaps the only way to achieve their dreamed-of nazi dictatorship, which

can be established only through bloodletting and the intimidation of people. This will become possible only if in Ukraine Russians will see a Banderite murderer in every Ukrainian, while Ukrainians will see in every Russian a potential "saboteur from Russian Military Intelligence". Unfortunately, we have come far too close to the boundary beyond which this can really happen.

However, there appeared in Odessa on 2 May on opposing sides of the barricades people, including activists of left wing organisations, who only a year ago were making part in common protests against restrictions on the freedom to assemble peacefully and against the introduction of an enslaving Labour Code. Activists of the "Borot'ba" (Struggle) union appeared on the side led by the right wing chauvinists of the "Odesa druzhina" (Odessa Guard). On the other side anarchists and anti-fascists took part in actions that were actually directed by their opponents, in particular the right wing football ultras. The latter group distinguished themselves by their particular brutality against opponents.

The left organisations were unable to put forward an independent, distinct working class programme. To say nothing of not being unable to take

the lead of a mass movement, they did not distance themselves, nor even manage to retrain the masses of people from fratricidal violence under nationalist slogans. These leftists ended up in the snare of uncritical support for a relatively large movement which in recent times has almost completely departed from the socio-economic order of the day and changed it into a nationalist one. At that moment for the protesters in Odessa the ability or inability, in the last instance the right, of the Ukrainian state to exist unfortunately carries more weight than the labour rights of the Ukrainian working class of all nationalities. Instead of a strategy to remove the capitalist oligarchies from power in Ukraine and Russia there is a discussion under way as to whether the creation of a Ukrainian state was a "misunderstanding" or "a historical mistake".

Its no surprise that by and large the workers of the big factories in Eastern and Central Ukraine are not taking part in mass protest actions. Anti-Maidan and pro-Maidan actions are on the whole poorly attended and in no way can they be compared to the one-hundred-thousand strong mobilisations of Kievans during the Euro-Maidan in January and February this year. Armed radicals remain a

small group of adventurers even in Sloviansk, where they have seized power and clearly are holding on only by intimidating the local population who quite logically don't want to become the victims of the Anti-Terrorist Operation of the Government.

It is very doubtful whether a majority of the residents of Sloviansk support the monarchist idea of resurrecting "the one and indivisible" (Russia -translator), which is openly proclaimed by the Russian officer Strelkov-Hirkin, "commander-in-chief" of the Donetsk People's Republic. At the same time it is clear that neither do they want to see in Sloviansk the "little green men" of Strelkov nor any other soldiers. After all, they understand only too well that with the continuation of the Anti-Terrorist Operation fighting will start sooner or later in the inhabited homes of the town and they will be the first to suffer - the peaceful local inhabitants.

The workers of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk by and large are not taking part in the stand-off, but continue each day to drive through the checkpoints to work. The question of a general strike has not even been raised here. Local lumpen-criminal gangs and old people who dimwittedly pine with nostalgia for the USSR are the main supporters of the "Sloviansk junta".

At the same time a mass organised workers movement is present without a doubt in Ukraine. It has appeared in Kryviy Rih when the miners' self defence brigade prevented the escalation of violence in that city during the attempts by "titushky" (thugs hired by the authorities and employers - translator) to attack the local Maidan. The workers showed themselves also in Chervonohrad, Lviv

oblast, where they intervened in the political process and then de-facto nationalised the local electricity power station, which belongs to Rinat Akhmetov, the oligarch.

The workers movement has shown itself even more powerfully in Krasnodon, Luhansk oblast. During a general strike here the miners took the city under their control. It is significant that they did not want to ally themselves with the Luhansk separatist "anti-Maidan", nor did they declare support for the bourgeois oligarchic leaders of the Kyiv Maidan. They had their own Maidan, of the workers, armed with slogans for social justice and seriously intent on realising these slogans, unlike the Kyiv Maidan. The workers were demanding not only an increase in their wages, but also an end to outsourcing for supplementary workers in the mines. Thus it was not a narrowly economic strike, but a movement that raised the need for solidarity between workers of different skills, a movement sufficiently powerful to take the whole city under its control. And in doing that there was no violence, there were no casualties or victims! The city was taken not only without a single shot fired, but without anyone offering even half hearted resistance.

Understandably, a workers' movement organised on a national scale is still very weak. Truly active, class conscious workers' unions are concentrated in a few centres of the mining industry. However, it is also the case that only where the workers really intervene in a confrontation that it becomes possible to avoid mass casualties and to calm down chauvinistic hysteria.

Indeed, the emergence into the political arena of an independent,

class workers' movement remains perhaps the last chance for the survival of today's Ukrainian state and the prevention of a civil war which is unfolding before our very eyes. If the scenarios of dismemberment of Ukraine come to pass we will not be able to avert an explosion of violence and massive casualties. Alongside that the confrontation will assume more and more an international and interethnic character, not at all a class one. When the war in Yugoslavia was only just beginning the ultra-right forces were also very weak and marginalised. They had no more support in society than Yarosh and Tiahnybok, with their microscopic ratings, have today. However, less than a year into the war Serb and Croat nazis started to dominate in the Yugoslav political arena and turned themselves into big mass organisations.

If the miners of Luhansk, Donetsk, Lviv and Dnipropetrovsk regions cannot by their joint efforts stop this war we will all be dragged into its meat grinder. In that event a left movement in Ukraine will truly be destroyed for many years to come. It is doubtful whether it will survive in Russia either.

Workers of Krasnodon and Kryviy Rih urgently need your solidarity and support! The Krasnodon strike has not ended, but only been suspended during negotiations. In Kryviy Rih the miners are also preparing to strike in the event their demands are not met.

**No support to chauvinists regardless of the flags under which they stand!**

For an independent and united workers' Ukraine!

For an independent workers and social movement!

## After Odessa, "remaining human" as a political programme.

10 May 2014, by Ilya Budraitskis

Most of these versions - from those of official Kyiv to those of Russian propagandists - point to the local

police, who in a conscious and organised manner held back from any attempt whatsoever to prevent the mounting violence.

These versions of events as a rule then offer an explanatory “scenario”, that works in favour of one or other side: Yulia Timoshenko [former Ukrainian prime minister] will sabotage the 25 May [presidential] elections [in Ukraine] in order to ensure her own victory in future; the Kyiv government will intimidate the “separatists” and pin responsibility for a bloodbath on their supporters; the Russian government will get more than convincing arguments to discredit supporters of the [Kyiv] “junta”; the [former Ukrainian president] Yanukovich clan will push Russia into open [military] intervention.

In a way, each of these versions sound convincing to us - Russian and Ukrainian people - because we know that none of the forces mentioned would stop at carrying out any crime in order to achieve their ends. This readiness to make victims out of one’s own citizens was always a necessary condition for selecting members of the post-Soviet elite. In that elite, there’s no-one, no-one at all, who is not morally capable of mass murder.

But whatever might have been the initial intention of whoever organised the Odessa tragedy, there will be - or, more likely, already is - another result: the logic of civil war has been let loose, and it is now almost impossible to stop it. For the last month - with its expectation of military operations, occupation of buildings, hostage taking, local skirmishes in Donbass - many people nonetheless retained the timid hope that the whole process was being managed somehow by somebody, and that that meant that it could be stopped. The principal basis for such expectations was not only the will of Putin, the western powers or the Kiev government - but the fact that the majority of Ukrainians were simply not prepared to kill each other.

But we need to remember from the not-so-distant history of the 1990s that feeling of that awful crossing-over of a border: friendly neighbours, “soviet people”, who over decades had forgotten how to divide each other into “enemies” and “friends”, suddenly, within a few days, lose any human characteristics and become absolute beasts, the possible existence of which was known only from patriotic films about the fascist

invasion.

That was how, after the question of the “state language” was raised, the war in Transdnestr started. That was how Serbs and Croats reached a point of no return, at that notorious football match in Split. All this is too well known not to understand that the losers in these wars are all the participants, without exception. Revenge for the first victims just produces new ones - and provides the basis for new and just acts of retaliation. This is the most frightful result of the Odessa events: for both sides, they have made any vengeance, even the most brutal, justified and inevitable.

In the flames that erupted at the House of Trade Unions it was not hard to see the depths of barbarism into which Ukraine could easily sink. Depths, the extent of which seem not to be fully understood by a single one of the bastards who choreographed the clashes on the 2nd of May.

Not so long ago, the demand to “remain human” would have sounded like a completely abstract desire. Now, after the Odessa slaughter, it has turned into a political programme.

[People and Nature](#)

## Ukraine’s Spiraling Crisis

8 May 2014, by [David Finkel](#)

The following is intended as a brief followup to the editorial in the new issue of *Against the Current* (issue 170), [[Notes on the Current Crisis](#)] where we predicted that the Ukraine crisis and the international tension surrounding it “will not rupture the web of economic connections and mutual interests – especially Europe’s dependence on Russian natural gas, and Russia’s reliance on western investment and technology and the global financial system – that make today’s situation so different from the political-military conflicts of the Cold War.”

Speaking for myself here, I still believe this assessment is valid, but

the conflict - especially with the horrific events in Odessa and now an impending full-scale battle for Slovyansk - has spiraled beyond the editors’ anticipation when we were mainly looking at the Russian annexation of Crimea. External and internal forces are pushing the envelope in what’s become a deadly game we might call “Ukrainian roulette.”

From the vantage point of outside observers, we can’t pretend to judge the competing narratives of what happened in Odessa (for one gripping account, see [Darkness in May. A socialist eye-witness in Odessa](#) and a further commentary [Workers of](#)

[Donbass divided by Kremlin-backed violence](#) but we don’t know the full story by any means).

A few points, however, do seem clear regarding the context and background of this explosion. First, we may safely assume that the accusations Moscow and Washington are lobbing at each other - that the CIA and U.S. military operatives are involved in Ukraine’s military campaign in the east, and that Russian agents have assisted local “self-defense militia” seizures of town centers and police stations - are largely accurate, while each is lying about its own role.

Second, we must be clear that the

expansion of NATO to Russia's borders - mainly during the 1990s, when Russia was too weak to do anything about it - was a dangerous provocation that would inevitably produce a counter-reaction. By humiliating and threatening a vanquished former superpower rival, NATO pretty much ensured it would reap a whirlwind sooner or later - and if anything ensured this outcome, it was the notion of eventually incorporating Ukraine into NATO as well.

Third and perhaps most important immediately, events on the ground appear driven by fear all around. As Ukraine's economy verges on collapse, in the east the popular fear is that the European Union's "reforms" will turn their industrial base, what's left of it, into a rusted-out wasteland. In western Ukraine, the great fear is that "federalization" (fragmentation) of the country by Russian proxies will perpetuate the misery of poverty, corruption and rule by oligarchs.

Both sets of fears, which seem entirely well-founded, are now overlaid by toxic appeals to nationalism and linguistic identities. That would explain why extreme rightwing nationalist forces, on both sides, attract popular support which they would never receive otherwise. But none of these elements offer any solution to Ukraine's crisis or to maintaining its fragile integrity as a unified state. They point to the danger of Ukraine becoming the next Yugoslavia.

Ukraine cannot survive either as a NATO protectorate under the European Union's savage economic dictates, or as a weak confederation of regional fiefs pulled apart and picked off by Russia and its proxies. Its future depends on the emergence of internal forces with a positive social program that can overcome the spreading waves of fear and hatred. If the international left can contribute anything to making such a development possible, it must be by calling for an end to all external intervention and an immediate cease-

fire by all military and militia forces.

At this moment, despite the mounting death toll in Odessa, Slovyansk and elsewhere, it doesn't appear that Russia intends to invade, or that U.S.-European sanctions are intended to bite into the heart of Russia's energy export sector. Russia's appetites on Ukraine must be constrained by the cautionary maxim "you break it, you own it" as the United States so disastrously learned in Iraq, while western powers know too well the costs of hitting Russian corporations - not merely the personal accounts of oligarchs who own them - that supply everything from Europe's natural gas to the United States' rocket launchers.

Nonetheless, the crisis is closer to the point where one explosion or tactical miscalculation might overtake the rational calculations of imperial state interests, on which the analysis in the ATC editorial statement was premised. We don't know what the consequences of that would be, and we don't want to find out.

## Podemos contests European elections

7 May 2014

### Can you introduce yourselves?

**Teresa Rodriguez** I am an activist in Izquierda Anticapitalista, a trades unionist in the education field and an activist in the movement in defence of public education "Marea Verde". I am number 2 on the Podemos list for the European elections.



**Jesus Jurado** I am 27 years old, and I am a political scientist, currently unemployed like more than half of Andalusian young people. I am active in the "Plataforma de Auditoria Ciudadana de la Deuda" and in neighbourhood movements in Seville. I am a candidate on the Podemos list.



### Can you introduce the Podemos movement to us?

**J.J.** It is a political project in construction, resulting from the coming together of social movements, anti-capitalist political organisations and intellectuals. We are united to build a new political framework to stop the current process of destruction of our rights and liberties. This emerges in a phase of exhaustion of the political model inherited from the Transition. [1] A model deconstructed from above at the social level and placed in question by its democratic limits.

In this context, Podemos presents itself as a broad movement, not free from ambiguities, but clearly

identified as breaking with the established order, while stressing the incapacity of the current regime to respond to the urgent social needs of the people.

**T.R.** It is an electoral project created 4 months ago with the intention of responding to the accumulated violence of attacks against social rights, the crisis of alternatives and the absence of perspectives. It is necessary then to respond to a situation of crisis of the bipartisan system which opens a space as well as opportunities allowing us to break the vicious circle: a PSOE which systematically disgusts its social base... and which opens the road to the PP... against those who vote again for the PSOE, still more on the defensive... and then it starts again, and so on. Above all, our role is to serve as a factor of political unfreezing as well as corresponding

politically to the movement of the indignant.

### **What are the main demands?**

**T.R.** It is about recovering sovereignty. Nobody doubts any longer that those who decide our future are not elected or under anybody's control. No international power or privileged minority class should rule our lives. It is not possible that the only thing which is today sovereign is this illegitimate debt which asphyxiates us! It is also about recovering social, democratic and ecological rights sacrificed on the altar of the markets. Housing, employment, health, education, social services, care for people and the planet.

Currently to demand these rights it necessary to uproot the acquired privileges of this privileged minority which puts our backs against the wall. Those who do not guarantee these rights are of no use.

Finally we need to practice politics in another way, and build a new political ethic: without professionals, without privilege, guaranteeing the collective control of those who represent us publicly. We need to build a new popular power of the majority and denounce corruption as a mode of government.

**J.J.** Our programme has been built in two stages, with the open

participation of all: one virtual and another physical. The result of this process has been the adoption of a programme influenced by both the ideas of the movement of the indignant, the end of neoliberal policies and democratic radicalism. In this sense, I believe the two main demands of our programme are the public audit of the debt and the opening of a constituent process.

### **How is Podemos structured?**

**T.R.** We have more than 300 "circles": these are open spaces which allow the exercise of a collective political power, where nobody asks for sharply defined political identities, where people are not asked to abandon their social or political choices or engagements, and where we participate equally with those who have no political affiliation.

**J.J.** Since January, these circles have spread across the territory, including in rural areas traditionally distanced from political initiatives of this type. However this organization, self managed in assemblies, is weakened by the lack of political experience of most of those who participate. It is in this context that we have constituted a "sponsor" group as "provisional directorate" until the end of the elections. In June, we will hold the first general assembly where we can define the statutes of our new organisation. It is important that this allows us to strengthen internal democracy, by creating a coordination of the circles which are the main

bodies of decision and control.

### **How can the NPA help you?**

**T.R.** We have many common programmatic demands and political objectives with the NPA. We should have supple and fluid relations. This can also establish Podemos "circles" among Spanish immigrants living in France. We should be able to organize sites of unitary debate which help us build another future for the peoples of Europe, to exchange and advance on strategies which allow unity of the social majority which is today suffering the crisis.

**J.J.** One of the most important social groups for Podemos is that of young immigrants obliged to leave the country to find work, funds for study and research and so on. The support of allied organizations is decisive to inform the mobilizations of Spanish immigrants as well as to coordinate our struggles on a broader scale. To dismantle the Europe of the markets, we must strengthen solidarity between our peoples.

## **Footnotes**

[1] The transition to parliamentary rule after the death of General Francisco Franco, who ruled the Spanish state in a dictatorship from 1939 to 1976.

# **Volodymyr Ishchenko: "For Ukrainians, as for any other people in the world, the main threat is capitalism."**

1 May 2014

**Chuck Mertz: On the line with us right now is Volodymyr Ishchenko. He is a sociologist studying social protests in Ukraine. Good evening, Volodymyr.**

Volodymyr Ishchenko: Good evening.

**CM: Volodymyr's most recent**

**writing includes Tuesday's Guardian post Maidan or Anti-Maidan: the Ukraine situation requires more nuance.**

This week, Volodymyr, here's the story from the BBC: Russia and Ukraine agree on steps to end crisis. "Russia and Ukraine struck a deal on Thursday

to end unrest in Eastern Ukraine stoked by pro-Russian militants." Has that agreement solved all of Ukraine's problems? Do you think that this will provide safety and security for Ukrainian citizens?

One of the stories that's been going around in the U.S. media is the idea in

Crimea, and also in the East of Ukraine, that Kiev has become lawless, it has become run by gangs, that there has been criminal activity, that it is not safe, and they fear that the same kind of chaos is coming to Crimea or the Eastern Ukraine.

VI: That's a very exaggerated picture. Life in Kiev is totally safe. It's definitely much safer now than in the Eastern Ukraine; in Donbas there are armed gangs which have attacked state buildings. Some of them seem to be local protesters, but some of them seem to be too well-equipped and too well-trained to be just some militia. If they aren't Russians or Russianists, they could also be former riot police officers who left Kiev to escape punishment by the new government.

Kiev is definitely much safer than in February, when there really was chaos and street clashes in the center; the major problem is in the Eastern Ukraine.

**CM: Let me ask you a couple of really general questions about this protest. Whenever there is any coverage of any protest—it could be Ukraine, it could be Egypt, it could be Venezuela, it doesn't matter where it is—the media often points out that this is about the economy, and if it weren't for a downturn in the economy, these protests would never happen. It's almost as if the media is saying, protests do not happen when people are upset about an infringement on their rights or freedoms; the only thing that drives people out into the streets is the economy.**

To what degree did the economy play a role in this Ukrainian uprising? Is this at all about freedoms and rights, or is this just about the bottom line and Ukrainians' wallets?

VI: There were actually two uprisings. You have the Maidan uprising—that started in December and became more violent in January—and now you have the Eastern Ukrainian uprising. They have many similar traits, but the socio-economic component is somewhat deeper in the Eastern Ukraine now, where the economic situation is really deteriorating.

The national currency lost something like 40% of its value during the last two or three months, prices are rising, and people in Eastern Ukraine are mainly workers, pensioners. They are speaking about wages, they are speaking about prices, about the collapse of industry. Some of them demand nationalization, some of them demand decent pay for their work. That protest has more to do with the economy; it's not just about their identity.

But they also speak, of course, about their dignity, about their language, about their history, about their heroes, and about this federalization question—which also animates the question of recognition of their self-determination, the question of concrete freedoms and rights.

The Maidan protest started more as an ideological protest that was, to some extent, an attempt to break through to the European Dream, seeing it as a kind of utopia which would solve many Ukrainian problems. And for other people, it was a protest against Russia. It was generally believed that if Yanukovich would not sign the European Association Agreement, he will join the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. These countries were described in quite negative tones as authoritarian, poor countries that Ukraine doesn't need to orient itself to.

But later during the Maidan uprising, there came the questions of police repression and violence, of the authoritarian laws which were passed in January—they were pulled to the forefront. They became more important than the European Association.

**CM: This is the other general question I wanted to ask you: how much are these protests caused by outside forces? Since the Wikileaks revelation from last week about USAID and the work that they have done in trying to destabilize or help overthrow governments that are not friendly to the United States—there has been some talk in critical sectors of the media, here in the States, about the role that USAID and**

**NED play.**

And then if you take the Russian factor—according to the U.S. media, the protesters in Eastern Ukraine are being manipulated by Russia.

So is this really a Ukrainian uprising? Or are these just superpowers playing with a pawn?

VI: Yeah, that's a big problem now in the discourse. Those who don't like the Anti-Maidan uprising in the Eastern Ukraine see it mainly as Russian manipulation: just irrational, stupid people who want a more authoritarian regime, who want a Russian dictatorship, who do not understand their real interests.

And the symmetrical picture—by the Russian media or by those who didn't like Maidan protesters—is of manipulation by Western governments or by Ukrainian oligarchs; the claim, again, is that the people do not understand what they are fighting for.

Obviously you cannot deny that both the U.S. and Russia—and the EU—try to influence Ukrainian politics. They would be stupid if they didn't. They are great powers, they have their imperialist interests, and that's what we can expect from them.

But then you deny the grassroots nature of this protest. People are talking about real problems. People are self-organizing, both in Maidan in the Western Ukraine and in the Eastern Ukraine now. And you cannot just reduce it to this great power play.

It also matters when it comes to actual outcomes. What will be the outcome of these protests? In the case of Maidan: we see IMF-required austerity, increasing prices, a new neoliberal government, an increase in the strength of the far Right. And in the case of the Eastern Ukrainian protests—if they do not stop, it will become a real danger to Ukrainian political stability...which in turn would be used by Russia to promote their own interests.

But we need to see this complex combination of various factors. The Ukrainian people hope to solve their problems; they hope to fight for a more just and free society. But they

also are influenced by actors from abroad, and unfortunately Ukraine is now seen as the playground of the great powers.

**CM: One of the stupid things that the U.S. media is reporting right now is that the entire reason that Vladimir Putin sent the Russian military forces into Crimea—the entire reason that he's able to flex his muscles on Ukraine—is because he believes that Barack Obama is weak. Do you think that has any basis in reality?**

VI: No! That sounds really funny, if it's true that this is a major narrative. I think the main factor behind the Crimea annexation was internal politics. Putin needed to show the Russian people that any attempt to repeat Ukraine in Russia would not work. Crimea was necessary to increase patriotism among the Russian population, and to decrease any chance that the Russian opposition—which was very much inspired by Maidan—might attempt anything like that in Russia.

A short and victorious operation was very much necessary, and now you see from the polls: something like over 80% of Russians support the Crimea annexation; over 80% support Putin's policies, and there's a great extent of national unity around the president.

**CM: Is there a military solution to this problem? Here's what we hear: the West isn't doing enough to stop Russia, but if the United States and Russia don't do anything, it's very possible that Ukraine is going to fall into civil war. Is there a military solution—either intervention by the West, or a civil war—that could solve this problem?**

VI: No. A civil war is definitely not a solution. That's a problem, and a very real one. People are already dying in clashes in the Eastern Ukraine—and according to recent polls, over 40% of the Eastern Ukrainian region's population believes that civil war is very probable in the near future. That shows that it is getting quite dangerous.

And if NATO forces would be involved

into pacifying Eastern Ukraine, they would be seen as foreign occupiers. And a military solution is not possible for the Kiev government either. There's a question as to whether Ukraine has an army right now—an army which can actually fight, not just the people and equipment on paper. There have been cases of soldiers sent to Eastern Ukraine just leaving their military machines to the local protesters and going back. They were not ready to fight them. They were not ready to shoot at them. So it's not only a question of whether a military solution is desirable, but if it's even feasible.

A popular uprising doesn't mean that revolutionary changes—structural and fundamental changes in social or political institutions—will follow.

**CM: Who is the greatest threat to the Ukrainian people? Is it the West? Is it Russia? Is it the crime bosses within Ukraine? Or is it the Right Sector, the neo-fascist right wing that you're concerned about?**

VI: I would say that for Ukrainians, as for any other people in the world, the main threat is capitalism, and all the problems and wars it leads to. The political crisis in Ukraine started much earlier than 2013—Ukraine suffered a lot already in the economic crisis of 2008. The main enemies of Ukrainians are both Russian and Western imperialism as well as Ukrainian oligarchs and the ruling class.

The best solution—though the most difficult and not the most probable solution—would be for Western Ukrainians and Eastern Ukrainians to unite on some common ground, some common platform of shared demands for social justice, and to fight against the ruling class, against Russian intervention, against possible Western intervention, and against both pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian far-Right nationalists.

**CM: You write a great deal about the Right Sector, about the neo-fascists. Back in early February, a couple weeks before the Yanukovich government fell, you had a piece in The Guardian headlined the Ukrainian protesters must make a decisive break with**

**the far Right, with the sub-headline Neo-fascists have become involved in the Euromaidan protest movement and we can't turn a blind eye to the danger that presents.**

Is it the neo-fascist ideology of the Right Sector that's popular, or is their popularity more driven by their violent tactics at the Euromaidan, by being the people who confronted the police?

VI: More the latter than the former. They were seen as people's heroes and the vanguard of the uprising. They got a lot of respect and symbolic capital for that.

But you have to understand that the political mainstream in the Ukraine is much further to the right than, for example, in Western Europe. Things which would receive very strong criticism in the West are more or less tolerable in the Ukraine. It's more or less okay to talk about things like “the defense of white European people;” this kind of thing can even be said by mainstream politicians. It's okay to be homophobic, not to recognize any need to defend LGBT people. In this more right-dominant ideology, the far Right from the Right Sector or from the Svoboda party are not actually seen as something extreme.

Right now, the Right Sector and Svoboda are being criticized because their violent and provocative actions are seen as something that can be used by Russia—the Russian media can capitalize on them and use them to show that there is a very serious fascist threat in Ukraine. So people, even when they criticize the Right Sector, they do not criticize them for their antidemocratic ideology. They don't criticize them for being extreme Right. They criticize them because they are not “consistent nationalists;” because they appear not to be thinking about the national interests of Ukraine.

The biggest problem in the Ukraine is probably this rightwing consensus, and there's not any serious Left force which could be a challenge to this.

**CM: So there is no real alternative, then? Are you saying it's inevitable that whoever is running the next**

**Ukrainian government will definitely be farther to the right?**

VI: No—if you’re speaking about this government, this is a neoliberal government. You cannot say that it’s any kind of fascist junta, which is a popular term used by the Russian media. It’s a neoliberal government; it includes some nationalists from Svoboda, but they are not dominant. And they would not be able to promote any far Right policies before the situation in the Eastern Ukraine stabilizes. That would just be extremely stupid.

And we know that the winner of the next election will probably be Petro Poroshenko, who is an oligarch. He is one of the hundred richest men in Ukraine, and he would continue the same neoliberal policy.

**CM: To what degree are Ukrainians even going to have a choice, though?**

VI: That’s another question, because as far as I can see from the polls, many people from the Eastern Ukraine are actually not going to vote in the coming presidential elections. Or if they turn out at all, they are going to vote against all candidates. So whoever wins the coming presidential elections will have serious problems with legitimacy, at least in the Eastern Ukraine.

**CM: You know our media really likes to try to find a celebrity within any story. And the celebrity that they have found here is Yulia Tymoshenko. Some people have referred to Yulia Tymoshenko as Ukraine’s Sarah Palin. How would you describe the potential for Yulia Tymoshenko to be the next leader of the Ukraine, and does it even matter if all she really represents is another neoliberal government running Ukraine?**

VI: I would compare her not as much with Sarah Palin, probably, as with Eva Perón, the wife of the 20th century Argentinian leader. She is actually a dangerous person. I am quite sure, if she were faced with something like the Maidan uprising against her, she would be much more ready to suppress it—even more than

Yanukovych, for example, or any other major politician in Ukraine.

And at this moment she doesn’t have good chances to win the elections. She is far behind Petro Poroshenko. One of the reasons why all these protests in the Eastern Ukraine started now, and why they are so violent, is actually to halt the national elections in May—to postpone them and give Tymoshenko some time to gain more popularity among Ukrainians.

**CM: You write that “two popular labels are being ascribed to events in Ukraine. It was either a democratic or even social revolution, or it was a rightwing or even neo-Nazi coup. In fact, both characterizations are wrong.” So if it’s not a rightwing coup or a democratic revolution, how would you describe it?**

VI: I describe it as a popular uprising which led to a change of elites. A popular uprising doesn’t mean that revolutionary changes—structural and fundamental changes in social or political institutions—will follow.

At this moment I do not see anything really changing the fundamentals of Ukrainian oligarchic capitalism. The oligarchs actually have even more power now; many were appointed as governors in some regions, and the likeliest next president is again another oligarch.

It’s not in their interests to fight corruption or to construct transparent institutions in Ukraine. Because their corruption, their close connection to the state, was one of the competitive advantages that allowed them to build their wealth in the first place.

So I do not see the potential for revolutionary change now. At this point it was a popular uprising leading to a change of elites, but not to revolutionary change.

*(The following questions were submitted to Ishchenko via email after the telephone connection between Chicago and Kiev was interrupted; Chuck Mertz read them on the following week’s episode of This is Hell! to round out the conversation. -ed.)*

**CM: ‘Coup’ has very negative connotations. However, a coup is “a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.” In that the changeover of power in Ukraine did not follow the electoral and parliamentary processes that were in the Ukrainian constitution, and the interim transition agreement was immediately abandoned when Yanukovych left Kiev, how was what happened in Kiev not illegal, sudden or violent? I am concerned that the political connotations of ‘coup’ is what seems to be driving the debate.**

VI: It was not a coup for a simple reason: those who seized power, the opposition parties, were not the vanguard of the Maidan but its very moderate wing.

After the first violent clashes started, the former opposition leaders distanced themselves, condemned them as government provocation and tried to intervene and stop them. Many times, the opposition leaders tried to convince the Maidan to accept compromises with Yanukovych.

As footage from Yanukovych residence security cameras showed, the opposition (together with European ministers of foreign affairs) pleaded with the people on the square to accept a final compromise with Yanukovych allowing him to stay in power until December—when he had already started to pack his things, preparing his escape from Kiev!

The ‘coup’ concept does not fully grasp the distinction between the movement—which was the (very much autonomous) driving force of events—and the political opposition, the people who actually took power. This is why I am calling Maidan a people’s revolt, not a ‘coup.’

**CM: The final question we ask each guest is what we call the Question From Hell: the question we hate to ask, you’ll hate to answer, and our audience will hate the response. Asking the Question From Hell usually makes me cringe—and none more than the one I have for you:**

Who will be responsible for more Ukrainian protester deaths: the deposed Yanukovich government or the post-Yanukovich government? We may need to distinguish between the Yanukovich government, the current interim government, and whatever government is elected post-interim administration.

It's a horrible question to ask, but it gets at the greater point of potential for more violence. My concerns in any event like this are always for the most vulnerable.

VI: As is very often the case, the new

government will blame its predecessors for all or most of the deaths and atrocities, even if they happened after their actual rule. And, as is also very often the case, this might be justified to some extent. If Yanukovich did not try to suppress the protest and did not cling to power to the bitter end, the violence would not have escalated to the level we see now—and might see even more in the nearest future. We will also need to assess the responsibility of the violent revolt itself, which is tightly connected to issues that are sharply divisive for Ukrainian people.

But if we are starting to speculate

about the future, why stop here? If the events will lead to full-scale civil war in Ukraine, and then to full-scale Russian intervention, and then to the Third World War, who will we need to blame for the end of the human civilization? The crazy, irrational capitalist system that inevitably produces competing imperialisms. This is the root of the problem—not only for Ukraine, but for the entire world.

*Transcribed and edited by Edward Sutton from AntidoteZine.com*

[LeftEast](#)

## Against Al-Sisi ... the leader of the counter-revolution

1 May 2014

The entire state apparatus - army, police, government, judiciary and media - are mobilizing behind Al-Sisi in preparation for his coronation, on June 5, as president. They want the anniversary of sad memory of the *naksa* (defeat) this year - what a coincidence - to be the date to announce the inauguration of the candidate of the alliance of the counter-revolution.

Thus Al-Sisi, who they have promoted for nine months as the saviour of the nation and the commander of the war against terrorism, but also as the successor of Abdel Nasser as well as of Sadat and sometimes of Mubarak, is he who has the solutions to all problems, the man who does not hesitate to exploit the disease of millions of people infected by hepatitis C by announcing the invention by the army of an (imaginary) device to diagnose and treat the disease. Al-Sisi, who initialled in place of the minister of housing a contract with the United Arab Emirates for the construction of a million apartments, and this, so as to exploit the dreams of the inhabitants of the cemeteries. It is for him also that the current provisional government has increased the price of gas and removed the subsidies on

commodities before his coronation in order not to affect the popularity of His Majesty by these decisions if they were to be taken after his arrival in power.

Against a background of a decline in the revolutionary situation among the masses, the attack of the counter-revolution and the return of the police state with more savagery to commit massacres without precedent, the arrest and torture of thousands, the siege and storming of the universities, the adoption of laws restricting freedoms like the law prohibiting demonstrations, and the confiscation of the independence of the labour movement and trade unions, the presidential elections are taking place and through them the counter-revolution intends to wrest an overwhelming victory over the revolutionary forces, which would give it the means to pursue the savagery and the attacks against the revolution and freedoms.

To this end the Revolutionary Socialists consider that participation in the elections, and not boycott, is the decision that is appropriate to the current political situation, to make propaganda against the candidate of

the counter-revolution and denounce him and all those who lie behind him as residues of the Mubarak regime or opportunistic lickspittles.

Despite our principled criticisms of the positions of Hamdine Sabahi with which we differ radically, especially after June 30, to begin with his silence on the violations of the Ministry of the Interior and the army against freedoms, the massacres, the arrests, torture, the onslaught against the universities, up to his support for the lie of the "war on terrorism" used by the state as a pretext to allow the return of the police state, at the same time we find that millions of Egyptians are beginning to doubt the speech and imaginary program of Al-Sisi and are in search of an alternative. These we call upon to vote for Hamdine, because each vote taken from Al-Sisi has its value, if not today, for tomorrow, to build a genuine broad opposition which is radicalized day after day.

The coming presidential elections reflect the impasse of the revolution in Egypt that has led to the absence of a candidate who adopted all the demands and objectives of the revolution. On this basis, we call on

Hamadine and also his campaign for a reconsideration of their default position in the present system, which restores the state of Mubarak, and call on his supporters and those who are going to vote for him in the elections to put pressure so that his declared program is committed to the aims of the revolution of January, which are freedom, social justice and human dignity. And that he adopts the following points:

1. A transitional justice that allows the judgment of the assassins of the martyrs from January 25 until today;

2. The release of detainees and the abolition of laws restrictive of

freedoms, including the law on demonstrations and military trials of civilians, and to focus on the right to organize;

3. The redistribution of wealth by imposing a new tax system and the application of minimum and maximum income for the public and private sectors;

4. The elimination of the state of tyranny and the establishment of a participative popular democracy and the consecration of the freedom and independence of the trade union and labour movement;

5. The elimination of dependency so as to ensure national independence.

We will not leave the masses as prey to the media of the counter-revolution, and we do not adopt a position of purity for the boycott of the elections, in spite of our respect for its justifications. But we will participate in the battle of the election to denounce the illusions in Al-Sisi and destroy the idol that is being constructed of a return of the state of Mubarak.

The Revolution continues!

Glory to the martyrs!

The power and wealth to the people!

*27 April 2014*