



## IV476 - September 2014

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30 September 2014, by **robm**

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## “Socialism of 21st century will be basis for working class salvation”

30 September 2014

The main slogan of the congress banner was, “Struggle, Solidarity and Socialism”.

The congress opened with singing of the “International” by a group of young comrades. Chaired jointly by Abid Hasan Minto, Farooq Tariq and Fanoos Gujjar with a four member standing order committee consisting of Nisar Shah, Ismat Shahjehan, Javed Akhtar and Haider Zaman, the congress first speaker Abid Hasan Minto briefly explained why we need a unity of the three parties to continue and need for a mass party of the Left.

The congress unanimously elected a 41-member federal committee presented by Abid Hasan Minto for the outgoing leadership on the first day, they took oath next day in front of over 350 delegates and observers. Veteran peasant leader, Choudry Fateh Mohammed administered the

oath.

Among the 41 members, Baba Jan got the maximum applause when his name was called. He was got a life sentence just two days before the congress. He had arrived in Islamabad to attend the congress, but went back to face the sentence after the court announced the punishment in a case of helping climate change victims during 2011.

The following office bearers were elected for the next two years by the elected federal committee: President: Abid Hasan Minto; Chairman: Fanoos Gujjar; General secretary Farooq Tariq; senior vice president: Akhtar Hussain; vice president Farzana Bari; Deputy general secretary: Javed Akhtar; Finance secretary Shazia Khan; Information secretary: Nisar Shah; Peasant secretary: Younas Rahu, Women’s secretary: Abida Choudry; education secretary: Haider

Zaman and youth secretary: Farooq Ahmad.

Farooq Tariq presented a general secretary’s report which covered the AWP’s activities and organization from November 2012 to September 2014.

The AWP manifesto and constitution was presented by Akhtar Hussain in two sessions and after presentations of written suggestions by delegates for amendments and recommendation was to be discussed by the newly elected federal committee.

The manifesto and constitution was accepted unanimously. The new flag was also unanimously recommended.

## Warm welcome to

## international solidarity

The only international delegate at the congress was Mahmood Hamrazan, (chief editor Voice of Solidarity) of Solidarity Party of Afghanistan, who travelled from Kabul to Islamabad to attend and deliver a message of solidarity. He was very warmly welcome by the delegates of the congress.

There was a great response when the solidarity messages of international organization were read at the congress by Farooq Tariq.

The following organizations sent the messages; 1- NPA (France), 2- Socialist Alliance (Australia), 3- Communist Party of Bangladesh ML, 4- Left Voice (Sri Lanka), 5- Malaysian Socialist Party (PSM), 6- Dutch Socialist Party (SP), 7- Workers International Network (UK), 8- Scottish Socialist Party, 9- The Smmilita Samajjik Andolon (United civil Society Movement) Bangladesh, 10- Jangibaad Birodhi Mancha (Forum Against Religious Intolerance and fanaticism) Bangladesh, 11- Communist Party of India ML, 12- Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL), 13- Left Party of Sweden, 14- Left Unity (UK), 15- South Asian Peoples Forum (UK), 16- Indian Workers Association (UK), 17- Afghanistan Solidarity Party, 18- Labour Education Foundation (Pakistan), 19- Fourth International (FI), 20- International Socialist Left (Germany), 21- Communist Party of Pakistan, 22- Gefont (Nepal), 23- Socialist Alternative (Australia), 24- Professor Chaman Lal (JNU New Delhi), 25- Afghan Workers Revolutionary Front, 26- Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians, 27- Friends of South Asia (USA),

Farooq Tariq also made the finance appeal at the congress that raised over 600,000 Rupees, a pre congress appeal raised nearly another one million Rupees.

## “Best tradition of the Left will be promoted and defended”

Speaking at last session of the congress, the newly elected president of the AWP Abid Hasan Minto said that we must learn from lessons of the collapse of socialism after 73 years in power. We need democratic socialism. Establishing a united party of the Left is a new unique idea that is being observed keenly by the Left parties of the region and internationally. Commenting on the target of the membership of 10,000 from the present 5623 members, he said that we would have many more than the target during the next two years. “All we need is party unity and many would join.” He appealed to those on the sidelines to join AWP to help build a society free from capitalist, imperialist, feudal exploitation. He said that best traditions of the Left would be promoted by the party.

Those who spoke in this open session include Nighat Khan of ASR Women’s Resource Centre, Amjad Salar Ali of Mazdoor Kissan Party, Professor Khaliq Kiyani of UKPNP, Dr Khalid Javed Jan (radical poet), Dr Rajab Ali Memon, Said Alam Mehsud of Pakhtunkhwa Ulasi Tehrek, president AWP KPK, Asim Sajad Akhtar president AWP Punjab, Zafar Iqbal president AWP Saraiki Waseeb, Sufi Abdul Khaliq from AWP Balochistan, Fanoos Gujjar, chairman AWP and Abid HASAN Minto president AWP.

There were slogans raised by the youth at the congress such as “Down with imperialism, feudalism, capitalism, Up up red flag, long live Socialism, ism ism Socialism, path of revolution is our path, join us for a Socialist revolution, Down with military generals and colonels, land to the tillers, trade union rights for every worker” and so on.

The success of the campaign on the social media by AWP young activists can be measured by the fact that Bilawal Bhutto (son of Benazhir

Bhutto and chairman of PPP) recommended to his disillusioned party workers to attend our congress and join. He said in a tweet message:

" In fact, if any former sympathizers are looking to attend a political event today I would suggest attending the #AWPCongress in Islamabad."

[http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n\\_1sc538b](http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1sc538b)

## Vows to launch campaign for the release of arrested activists

The congress passed several resolutions. It vowed to launch an international campaign for the release of Baba Jan and 11 other activists sentenced to life imprisonment just two days before the congress (see update below).

The rally was a great occasion and [here](#) and [here](#) are some links to the report of the rally and news about the congress.

*Islamabad*  
28 September 2014

## Baba Jan arrested in Gilgit

Baba Jan presented himself for arrest today in front of Anti Terrorist Court Gilgit. This will enable us to launch an appeal in the higher court.

Here is a report from Pamir Times Blog:

Gilgit, September 29: Baba Jan, a renowned progressive leader from the Gilgit-Baltistan region, presented himself for arrest in front of an ATC judge in Gilgit this morning. He was arrested and taken to the jail by the police.

Baba Jan, Vice President of Awami Workers Party and leader of the

Progressive Youth Front, was sentenced to life in prison along with 11 other people by an Anti-Terrorism Court a couple of days ago on the charges of putting government properties on fire and looting ammunition.

Baba Jan and the other eleven people deny the charges.

Talking to the *Pamir Times*

correspondent in Gilgit today, Baba Jan said that his struggle for justice and rights has always been peaceful. He said that the real culprits are roaming free and the killers of two IDPs from the Hunza valley are yet to be punished. He said that although the provincial government has declared them terrorists and sent them behind the bars, the peaceful struggle will continue.

It is pertinent to note that cases had been registered against Baba Jan and his 11 companions after riots broke out in Aliabad (Hunza), after two IDPs were shot dead on point-blank by police officials on the 11th of August 2011.

Baba Jan said that the decision of the Anti-Terrorism Court will be challenged in the higher courts of the region

## Comments and discussion on the situation in the Middle East

30 September 2014, by **François Sabado**

The historical and political responsibility of the USA and the Western powers is overwhelming. Over the long term, the failure or bankruptcy of Arab nationalist regimes also explains the explosion of the barbarism of groups like Daesh and Al Qaeda. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 destroyed the country and destabilized the entire region. But today the analysis of the situation and the policies that must flow from it cannot be reduced to the denunciation of Western imperialism. The present situation can only be understood by taking into account multiple overlapping conflicts and wars that combine with Western intervention and the role of other powers such as Russia and regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey.

Let us note:

â€¢ The dislocation of the Iraqi state and the conflict between the corrupt Shiite- dominated government and Daesh, which has drawn towards itself some Sunni tribes and segments of the former army of Saddam Hussein. The conflict has a third dimension, with the attack of the jihadists against the Kurds and their organizations.

â€¢ The war in Syria between the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and the Islamist factions, including Daesh,

but also the Free Syrian Army (FSA) expressing the initial dynamics of the popular rebellion, which is weakened but still exists in a series of towns and villages. We should note the manoeuvres of the dictatorship with Daesh and Al Nusra (Al Qaeda) with the aim of breaking the democratic rebellion.

â€¢ The interventions and manoeuvres of regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey who armed the jihadists, even directly the Daesh bands, against the Syrian regime. The latter being supported in its turn by Iran and the Hezbollah militias. These militias have more than once saved the regime.

â€¢ The Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, a result of the extreme rightward evolution of Israeli politics and society. The settler organizations representing the spearhead of this Zionist far right. The refusal by the Israeli government of any serious negotiation and compromise with the Palestinians is part and parcel of the counter-revolutionary chaos in the region.

This interweaving of conflicts is the result of the destructive interference of the imperialist powers, but also of their weakening and their decline in the region, which gives more

autonomy and space to these multiple counter-revolutionary forces.

Let us recall the presence and the strength of American imperialism throughout the region from the early 1990s to the late 2000s, culminating in the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and compare it to the current situation.

The United States has withdrawn most of its troops from Iraq and is in the process of withdrawing from Afghanistan on the basis of a political and military defeat. This defeat was also amplified by the democratic uprisings in the 2010s. It caused the hesitations and changes of position that we have seen in the last period: indirect intervention in Libya, where it was the French and British governments that were in the front line; changing positions several times in Egypt (support for Mubarak, then for the Muslim Brotherhood and now Sissi); hesitation over Syria where Washington, while denouncing the regime, has been careful not to weaken it too much so that it can continue to contain the democratic aspirations of its people and also the Islamist pressure.

The refusal, by the Western powers in particular, to help the democratic rebellion is a major reason for the

upsurge of jihadists in Syria and Iraq.

Today, in this galaxy of counter-revolutions, the barbaric monster Daesh has become too important, too numerous, too well-armed for the imperialist powers. It is going too far in the genocide of minorities such as the Yezidis, the Kurds and the Christians. It is going too far in its pretention to occupy territorial positions in Iraq and Syria. It is going too far in seizing oil-producing areas. It is necessary to contain it, weaken it and destroy its military capabilities. The Western powers, like most of the regional powers, each for its own reasons, have decided to intervene.

But the enemy of the peoples is not only Western intervention, but another imperialist power like Russia, which supports the Syrian regime. And also the other regional powers - the Gulf states - and the corrupt regimes in the region. But today, it is above all Daesh, which is the "Islamofascist" (although this characterization is certainly partial) concentrate of this barbarism in the region. It is crucial to show our solidarity with the peoples of the region, especially the most oppressed peoples - the Syrian, the Kurds - to denounce all these "counter-revolutions", all these enemies and not to be silent about the "barbarians" or to explain their criminal activities as just a consequence of Western imperialist intervention. They have their own responsibility, which is felt in their flesh by tens of thousands of victims.

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## **The Middle East dominated by counter-revolutions?**

The intervention of the West and the powers of the region can be explained primarily by the need to crush the "Frankenstein monster" that has escaped from its masters: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other regimes in the region. But we cannot understand this situation, either the development of Daesh or these imperialist "new initiatives", without analyzing the

present moment of the "Arab revolutions". The concept of a long-term revolutionary process reflects in fact the chronic instability, the mass movements that rebound, the structural crisis of the ruling classes. But this long-term analysis should not lead us to neglect the analysis of the present moment.

Although partial movements or strikes, or new mobilizations, as in Yemen, can appear here and there, it is clear that the situation today is polarized by a confrontation between "military dictatorship" and "Islamist forces" or even "inter-Islamist" factional struggles, as is the case in Libya. But, unfortunately, the situation is also determined by the clash between the military dictatorship of Sissi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the war in Syria of the dictator Bashar Al Assad against a rebellion now dominated by Islamists, a dislocation of the Iraqi state between Shiites, Sunnites and Kurds. And in this confrontation, the forces that dominate are those of the counter-revolution, military or Islamic. It is the retreat of the revolutionary processes that also explains the moment chosen by Israel to intervene in Gaza.

The only country that escapes such confrontation is Tunisia, although we should not underestimate what the Islamist forces, such as Ennahda, represent. But Tunisia, which moreover started off the Arab revolutions, has been able, through its social and democratic popular mobilizations and the existence of a workers' movement and of a major trade union movement, the UGTT, to contain the Islamists.

A revolutionary process must be analyzed over the long term, so it is wrong to speak of an "Islamist or military winter" after having announced an "Arab Spring". But it is undeniable that the present situation reflects a stopping and indeed an involution of the process and that we cannot understand the configuration that we see today without analyzing the failures of the revolutionary processes.

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## **What solidarity?**

We can see that our view of the situation cannot be reduced only to the American intervention. Moreover, contrary to neo- and post-Stalinist currents or movements such as Chavism in Latin America, our position has never been guided by the defence of one camp of states against another. Our point of starts from social interests and the defence of the rights of oppressed peoples. We have, from the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, rejected any "campist" vision, which would have led us, in the name of the struggle against American imperialism, to support Bashar al-Assad, along with the Russians and the Iranians. We have from the beginning tried to work to build solidarity with the Syrian people against the dictatorship. We have thus refused to support demonstrations against only American imperialism, where we would only find a large number of supporters of Assad.

Our position must start from solidarity with the struggle of peoples and in particular the most oppressed peoples, those of Syria, Iraq, and Kurdistan, who are struggling against the Assad dictatorship and the armed bands of Daesh. In the present critical situation, it is even a matter of saving lives and human societies.

We denounce the imperialist intervention, because its objective is not to help the peoples, but to defend its own strategic, economic, political and military interests in the region. The American air strikes that have begun with military targets in sparsely populated areas are already beginning to take a toll on the population in some Syrian villages. Even more, the Syrian rebels and the PKK forces denounce, in some areas, the lack of intervention to save the population. But beyond that, any foreign military intervention can only play into the hands of Daesh, which will present itself as the defender of the Sunni Arabs against the West. Therefore, no support for a foreign military intervention that cannot be separated from imperialist interests. But at the same time, we must reject unambiguously Daesh, the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and all



the reactionary forces in the region.

Instead we must by all possible means show our solidarity with the peoples who are victims of barbarism. This should involve political, humanitarian, material and military aid to the progressive peoples and organizations which ask for it, which means today the democratic sectors of the Syrian rebellion and the Kurdish resistance. Our policy is to give the peoples of the region the means of having their own self-determination, which requires the rejection of any subordination to imperialism. This solidarity also involves a denunciation of racism and Islamophobia, here and now. It also rejects the "national union" that acts as a cover for the imperialist policies.

So, can we support progressive Syrian and Kurdish sectors who are asking our governments to help them? Our criterion is the preservation of human life and the rights of peoples. And in this case, there is no hesitation.

Trotsky, in a text entitled "Learn to think: a friendly suggestion for certain ultraleftists" indicated: "Does the proletariat in peacetime reject and

sabotage all actions and measures of the bourgeois government? Even during a strike which embraces an entire city, the workers take measures to insure the delivery of food to their own districts, make sure that they have water, that the hospitals do not suffer, etc. Such measures are dictated not by opportunism in relation to the bourgeoisie but by concern for the interests of the strike itself, by concern for the sympathy of the submerged city masses, etc. These elementary rules of proletarian strategy in peacetime retain full forces in time of war as well." And further on: "In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases however they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign (this would make every sectarian a master strategist." (22May 1938)

This somewhat long quotation must

lead us to make, every time, the concrete analysis of the concrete situation. Our "own seal" is to remember every time the responsibilities of imperialism, mistrust of its politics, the need for an independent politics of social movements and national liberation movements ... but in the present relationship of forces and faced with barbarism, there may be "ten cases out of a hundred" where there may be "the same sign" between the workers' movement, the solidarity movement and those who govern us.

But the main thing is to build an independent movement of solidarity that rejects both the imperialist military interventions and the barbarity of Daesh. It is to give all the means of self-determination to the peoples of the region, a task that a working-class and progressive movement worthy of the name should take on. The present situation of the European workers' movement makes such an activity difficult, but it is essential. We must, even against the current, and despite our weak forces act in such a perspective.

September 24, 2014

# The largest climate protest in American history": Climate Convergence Moves Us Forward, but Challenges Us to Create a Strategy

**30 September 2014, by Dan La Botz**

The Convergence march was as broad politically as it was long. In the march were U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, former Vice-President Al Gore, and New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, New York State legislators and several New York City council members, their presence signifying that climate change had gone main stream.

At the same time, bringing up the rear were those of us in the anti-capitalist

contingent of a few thousand socialists, anarchists, and others who know capitalism is the cause of the problem and believe in a democratic socialist society, even if we don't know or agree about what to put in its place. And who can blame us, for it's not clear how we get from here to the new democratic, egalitarian, socially just and environmentally sound society that we know we need. Most folks were marching in the middle

somewhere, not trusting the corporations, dubious about government, wanting to get rid of fossil fuels but without a clear political vision of where we're going. That is perhaps the biggest thing missing from the movement right now, a unifying strategy for the majority if not a strategy for all.

A remarkable humanitarian and internationalist spirit pervaded the

march. I saw the flags of many nations carried by individuals or small groups from as far away as Australia. There were immigrants to America from all over the world who retain their connection with the pre-capitalist traditions of their homeland, like those carrying the banner reading "Pachamama," the earth mother worshipped in Peru since ancient times. There were signs reading "One Planet," "One Future," and "We Are All in this Together." People marched to save their local park, river, or lake, but they also marched to "Save the Planet," as many signs said, and to save us all.

Such universalist idealism was moving even if it tended to obscure for the moment the fact that though "we are all in this together" even those marching are not all on the same side. The profound division of capitalist society into those who have capital and those who have only their labor, between those who rule and those who are ruled over remains even in the era of climate change. Ban Ki-moon, President Obama, Al Gore, the U.S. Congress, other governments around the world, and the corporate executives may fear climate change, but they do not want the world of climate justice for all that we want. The reality is that what will be done to save all of us will have to be done by most of us against those whose few of us whose commitment to their money,

their power, and their capitalist economic system stands in our way. So what strategy do we put forward?

How do we move those who are anti-corporate to becoming anti-capitalist? And how do we move the anti-capitalists to become socialists? In America with its dominant conservative ideology and political system, with its culture of acquisitive individualism, and its historic antipathy towards socialism going back to the red scares of the 1920s and the 1950s this has always been the problem, figuring out how to get people to move from a posture advocating liberal reform to a position calling for radical transformation of the system. The only way is to educate ourselves collectively as a movement through actions at all levels that confront the power and over time reveal, through discussion, debate, and struggle the superiority of democracy and make obvious the right of the majority of people to control their own fate not only politically, but economically and in terms of climate.

The strategic elements of movements around the world that in the past won limited reforms and in some other countries won significant social change for some extended period of time have been three:

â€¢ First, a conscious mass movement, inspired by its vision of

greater justice, that mobilizes to confront the powers-that-be: the corporations, the military, the political parties, and the government, a movement which is not afraid to use its economic and social power to profoundly disrupt the system through demonstrations, strikes, and civil disobedience.

â€¢ Second, the construction out of that movement of an independent political force, outside of the existing capitalist parties, a political power that fights in the electoral and legislative arena to change the laws so that they represent not the wealthy and the corporations, but the people.

â€¢ Third, a revolutionary theory, strategy, and organization that arising out of the social and political movement is prepared with the support of the majority to take power and reorganize society along new lines based on the needs of all, not the needs of the few. In American history, we should note, we have seldom gotten beyond the first stage, and around the world today, the struggle at all levels is uneven.

We have no choice but to try. We have everything to lose, above all our planet earth, and we have a world to win.

September 24, 2014

[New Politics](#)

# Mélenchon, in search of a new policy?

29 September 2014, by **François Sabado**

This was a failure.

It was also the result of a policy that did not want to clarify the question of independence with respect to the PS. As a result, when PCF was allied with the PS in the last municipal elections, the Left Front exploded, and seeking an alliance with the Greens could not constitute an alternative to the government's policy .

There too failure.

As a result, the initial formula of Front de Gauche was "null and void".

Then Mélenchon declared that he did "not want any longer to bring together the left but the people", and referring to the experiment of "Podemos" in the Spanish State, he took his distance, placing himself beyond the parties... and launched a new project: a

movement for the Sixth Republic. [1]

The Podemos experience is, indeed, one of the most interesting experiences in Europe, of a vast popular gathering of more than 100,000 members, running at between 15 and 20% in the opinion polls, on the initiative of personalities and radical left currents, including our comrades of Izquierda Anticapitalista. But one cannot seize the dynamics of

Podemos without taking into account the principal features of the Spanish situation: crisis of the post-Franco transitional regime, national questions coming to an acute crisis in Catalonia, impressive fightback against the brutality of the austerity plans in the Spanish state, the *indignado@s* movement, a succession of nationwide strikes, the “tides” of mobilization in health and education. Podemos, seemed the political expression of these movements with new personalities, like Pablo Iglesias, incarnating them – a break from the traditional political game.

There is something right in Mélenchon’s approach, to aim for the emergence of a movement breaking with the traditional left, but is he best placed to incarnate the revival, as former minister and the representative Left front marked by the choice of the PCF to ally with the Socialist Party?

But more substantially, Podemos is the expression of a mass movement which has not yet marked the French economic situation. The French situation was not submerged by movements like those “indignados”, the “social tides”, the national

liberation movements. This is what Mélenchon does not understand. He takes from Podemos the expression of strong personalities and the references to the South American revolutionary nationalist model, such as Chavism in Venezuela. However, one thing is the progressive role that Chavez played against American imperialism, another thing is a political and socio-economic model which falls under the long tradition of Latin American *caudillismo* and state capitalism based on oil revenue. In short, we do not believe that this kind of model can be an answer to the challenges of the crisis in Europe in this beginning of the 21st century.

Also when he claims to launch a movement for the Sixth Republic, far from basing it on the preparation of a constituent process from below, of a truly popular movement, he presents it as the support of a candidature for the presidential election, giving his approach a “Bonapartist” character, of being above parties. Moreover, on the contents of his Sixth Republic, Mélenchon remains as ever evasive on the elimination or not of the election of the president of the republic by universal suffrage. There still, his Chavist inspirations do not lead him

towards implementing a really democratic project.

Lastly, after having underestimated the need and the consequences of the debate with PCF on the relationship with the PS – remember that when the NPA raised this question it was accused of being sectarian – and then having had himself a more than ambiguous stance on claiming to bring together the left majority in order to be Hollande’s prime minister... Mélenchon follows a path of skirting around the labour movement and what remains of the left. In recent years, we have rejected all the formulas of union of the left with the PS, which has become a neo-liberal party, but we do not think that the left can come together without the trade unions, associations, currents, which, from the left, oppose the government, or, when there is real activity of the masses, without self-organization. Initiatives like April 12th [2] demonstrate this. But the unity of the employees and their organizations or their self-organization requires a policy of independence from the state and its institutions. It is a question which Jean Luc Mélenchon, defender of a republic that makes an amalgam of state and nation, still does not raise.

## Party of the European Left’s Summer University: What scorecard for the radical left in government?

29 September 2014, by **Denis Rogatyuk**

The question of the non-social-democratic left’s ability to function as a genuine anti-capitalist alternative to the existing political elite, while at the same time being in government in coalition with the elements of the same elite, has been a key point of discussion on the left in Europe.

“The Left and Political Power” seminar was moderated by Gunna Starck from the Red-Green Alliance of Denmark, with the participation of speakers

from three key affiliates of the European Left that have had significant experiences of being in government. They were Helmut Markov (Die Linke, Germany), Rosalia Martin (United Left, Spain) and Jussi Salamo (Left Alliance, Finland).

### Finland

Jussi Salamo explained the way the

Left Alliance of Finland attempted to function while being part of a six-party “left-right” government coalition from June 2011 to March 2014. It saw its role as relieving the worst excesses of the previous “centre-right” administration, which he called “the most right-wing government in the country’s history”.

Due to the Left Alliance’s relatively small size within the grand coalition, coupled with the fact that it failed to

prevent the passing of austerity legislation while within the coalition, there was a severe decline in the party's popularity. However, its decision to leave the governing coalition in March 2014 in opposition to cuts to various social welfare programs has since boosted its political standing and popularity. The party now appears as a "voice of reason" within parliament, in the face of the threat presented by both the neoliberal-minded coalition government and the Eurosceptic and right-wing opposition of the True Finns party.

Salamo also pointed out that the radical left in Finland has had an established role in forming coalition governments with centre-left and social-democratic parties throughout its history. In particular, the Communist Party of Finland and the Finnish People's Democratic League played a fundamental part in forming governments and attaining cabinet positions with the Social Democratic Party of Finland throughout 1960s-1980s.

## United Left

Speaking on behalf of the United Left (IU) of Spain, Rosalia Martin talked about the experience of governing in a coalition with the social-democratic Socialist Workers' Party of Spain (PSOE) in the regional government of the autonomous community (state) of Andalusia. As part of the coalition, IU was put in charge of overseeing state public works and housing.

IU's original aim in entering a PSOE administration was twofold: to keep the welfare system safe from the austerity measures carried out by the conservative national People's Party (PP) government of prime minister Mariano Rajoy, and to implement anti-corruption legislation against the ruling political elite in Madrid. The alternative to the coalition with the PSOE was a PP government in Andalusia, which has been ruled by the PSOE since the end of the Franco dictatorship.

Martin stated that the PSOE-IU government of Andalusia was constantly under pressure from the

right-wing media, seeking to exploit any mismanagement of economic and social problems within the state and use it as evidence in its media war against IU. The government has also been facing the economic challenge of implementing an austerity-free budget, even in the face of an income cut of €2.5 billion. Martin claimed that essential welfare and social services such as education, health care and public sector jobs have been mostly shielded.

On the other hand, while being part of the government, IU has been playing a key role in supporting and organising the Andalusian movements against evictions and in support of maintaining and expanding social housing. In particular, it was instrumental in passing and implementing the housing eviction law of April 2013. This legislation allows the Andalusian government to expropriate properties of banks and mortgage companies that forcibly evict homeowners. The occupants and homeowners are allowed to stay in the properties, as long as they pay 25% of their net monthly income in rent to their lenders.

The law also gives the regional government the ability to fine banks and mortgage companies if they keep houses that are fit to live in empty beyond a certain time. At the same time, the movement against evictions and in defence of evicted tenants, the Mortgage Victims Platform has been one of the most visible and active grassroots campaigns in Andalusia and IU members have actively campaigned in it, helping prompt the party to implement the new housing law.

IU faced possible expulsion from the coalition government in April this year, after the attempts by the PSOE to deprive it of the housing and public works portfolios, but the local PSOE leadership retreated when they realised that the IU was prepared to risk the coalition over the issue.

At the same time, the Andalusian government has become a painful thorn in the side of Mariano Rajoy. Indeed, the IU's resistance to passing austerity measures and its efforts to institute the new housing law have

been cited by the national government as "a major risk for the reputation of the Spanish state, and a danger to the financial stability and the stipulations of the banking system". The national government has appealed the law to the Spanish Constitutional Court.

Martin summed up the purpose IU's participation in government as uniting the popular forces opposed to the agenda and the politics of both the PP and the PSOE, as well as institutionalising the forces of popular participation and providing a political voice to the growing grassroots and social movements within the country.

## Die Linke

Helmut Markov, Die Linke's deputy prime minister of the Brandenburg state government, gave an overview of the left's history of governing within a "red-red" coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) since the 2009 election for the state.

In the aftermath of that election, where Die Linke outpolled the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the SPD was forced to abandon its previous coalition with chancellor Merkel's regional counterparts and instead form government with Die Linke. For the first time in Brandenburg since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, the effective successor of the former East German ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party, was in the position to form part of a government.

"The parliamentary left-wing forces should never seek to become a part of the government or to speak about their desire to govern. Actions speak louder than words, and the action that is required is simply to govern according to their principles", Markov said.

Markov added that in order to govern in line with the party's principles, Die Linke had developed a program of progressive legislation that greatly benefitted the working families of Brandenburg, as well as small businesses and entrepreneurs that actively invest in and conduct business within the local economy. Die Linke had played a key role in:



â€¢ Implementing the first state-wide minimum wage (â‚¬8.50 per hour).

â€¢ Encouraging the generation of socially conscious private investment, particularly in the area of green technologies and renewable energy.

â€¢ Lowering the eligible voting age in the state election from 18 to 16 years.

â€¢ Ensuring that German police officials serving in Afghanistan were pulled back to duties in Brandenburg.

â€¢ Lifting the sanctions for refugees regarding their freedom of movement throughout the state.

â€¢ Focusing on the creation of public school teachers and educators.

â€¢ Guaranteeing a sustainable and ethical supply of energy, as well as affordable electricity prices for all citizens across Brandenburg.

â€¢ Ensuring that Brandenburg has the highest level of renewable energy generation, compared to other fuels, than any other state in Germany.

Markov recalled how, similar to the IU experience in Andalusia, Die Linke had been faced with difficult and sometimes impossible expectations, particularly in the face of the spending cuts and austerity measures that the state government was required to implement as part of the federal budget (from 2010 until now). In particular, he pointed out that the state government was required to eliminate 10,000 public service jobs as part of the cuts to the Brandenburg state budget.

Being a smaller part of a coalition with a party that does not fundamentally oppose austerity measures meant that Die Linke could not reverse or stop their implementation without forcing the state government to collapse and bringing on a new election. The only real option left was to ensure the maximum number of social and public service structures remained intact, and that the cuts were redirected into other spheres of the state budget.

In one instance, a number of state-employed forestry workers were sent into early retirement with redundancy

packages that would guarantee their standard of living and with programs for re-training in another field of work. That example showed that, while Die Linke's attempts at holding back austerity resulted in a marginally better outcome for workers, it still placed the party on the same level of responsibility as the SPD.

Markov also pointed out that Die Linke had learned from its previous bad experience of forming a coalition with the SPD in the Berlin state government (2001-2011). When in power, a government of the left is under the constant surveillance by opposition parties, the media and the big business, and ready to present any misstep as weakness and an opportunity to erode its support among the working class.

Markov finished off by saying that any left-wing party that enters government, whether on its own or in coalition with a less progressive political force, has very little room for mistakes and bad decisions. On top of that, it faces the dual challenge of maintaining criticism and organising actions against the ruling federal government, now an SPD-CDU grand coalition, while working with the local political elements of the same coalition.

## Some reflections

For this participant, the presentations and subsequent discussion at the seminar gave rise to the following reflections.

First, with the balance of forces still largely skewed against the radical left and revolutionary forces in Europe (with the possible exception of Greece and potential exception of Spain), electoral victories like those in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, that have given radical forces outright majorities, remain quite unlikely, even in the best of imaginable scenarios.

Second, any left-wing party that wins a minority of seats that are decisive for determining who will govern will always face a dilemma. Entering into a coalition with reformist, and sometimes conservative forces, implies that the left parties will be

held at least partially responsible for any piece of legislation or economic measure that ultimately serves the country's economic and political elite.

On the other hand, on entering government the left can have an opportunity not otherwise available: to enact legislation favouring and supported by the popular majority. If successful, this process can improve life for the left's support base, impart confidence to its struggles and fortify it against attacks by right-wing forces and the media aligned with them. Demonstrating the movement's ability to not only mobilise but also implement changes in policy (as has been the case in Andalusia), can help movements grow and organise.

Third, upon entering government, left-wing political parties also have the additional challenge of maintaining themselves in power long enough to implement the policies they originally propose. And just how much austerity can a left-wing political party allow to pass without seriously losing popular support? For instance, for IU in Andalusia, being in coalition with PSOE meant having to pass a total of â‚¬2.5 billion in cuts in the last two years. Being a minority with only 12 of the coalition's 59 seats has meant that IU's ability to influence the direction of spending cuts has been limited.

The example of the Die Linke-SPD coalition in Brandenburg demonstrates that the only way a left-wing party can balance progressive legislation with accepting austerity is by ensuring that the overwhelming bulk of the original program is implemented before any austerity measures are introduced, and that it is understood that such measures having been forced on a government that will do everything in its power to reverse them as soon as possible.

The specific national context in which the decision to participate in a ruling coalition is taken is also critical. In Europe, for example, cases as varied as Sinn Fein's participation in the Northern Ireland government, the Dutch Socialist Party's participation in regional coalitions with centre-right forces, and the decision of IU's Extremadura federation to keep the PP in government in that state, show

how complex and unique local factors can be.

Whatever judgments are made in such cases, the bottom line is surely that even the most progressive laws, budget measures and economic initiatives have to rest on the conscious support of a mass social movement fighting for an all-round alternative to the status quo. Such a movement will accept that a progressive government will at times be forced to retreat in the face of a more powerful enemy – but on condition that basic goals are not abandoned, nor the actual balance of forces and institutional arrangements accepted as unchangeable, nor any actual gains won accepted as the most that can be achieved.

It is interesting to note how the parties that presented at the PEL

summer school on their experience in government are now doing in the polls.

In Andalusia, a July 30 University of Granada poll shows that the steady growth in support for IU during the first two years of the IU-PSOE administration (reaching a high of 18.7% compared to its 11.4% 2012 election result) has now stopped, with new arrival Podemos taking 6.6% behind an IU that has slipped back to 10%.

In Brandenburg, which goes to elections on September 14, an August 27 Infratest Dimat poll has Die Linke on 21%, compared to the 27.2% it won in the 2009 state election.

In Finland, the Left Alliance is at 8.2% in the latest Taloustukimus poll, down from the 9.3% it won in the May 25 European election but still up from the 7% to 7.7% scores it was getting while

supporting the previous governing coalition (the Left Alliance's peak in national elections was 11.2%, won in 1995).

As matters stand, the conditions under which European left parties committed to anti-capitalist transformation decide to participate as minority partners in governments run by social-democratic majorities looks like remaining the trickiest of decisions to be faced in the coming period.

However, the rise of Syriza and the latest polling from Spain, which give Podemos and IU combined more than the PSOE, point to a future where the shoe may finally be on the other foot – what proportion of a social democracy in crisis will be prepared to be take part in coalitions committed to putting the interest of people before that of the corporate elites?

## How Did Leaders Respond to the People's Climate March?

**28 September 2014, by Pablo Solon**

According to Ban Ki-Moon and other leaders, it was a success. To see if that is true, we should look at: 1) what science is telling us; 2) the previous commitments made by governments; and 3) how these commitments at the UN have improved in order to address the mismatch between what has to be done and what is being done.

The main point of reference for any assessment is the greenhouse gas emissions gap for this decade. What we do now is more important than what we will do in the next decade or in 2050. If we don't close the emission gap by 2020, we will lose the possibility to catch up with the path that is needed to limit the global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels.

### Insufficient Pledges

According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report, to be on that path, global emissions should be around 44 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year by 2020. Governments made pledges for emissions cuts for this decade at UN talks in Copenhagen (2009) and Cancun (2010). The result was a gap of around 13 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year by 2020! In other words, with the weak voluntary pledges made under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – implemented without strict rules – emissions will be around 56 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year by 2020, about 30% more than the maximum amount the earth can handle, according to science.

But the tragedy is even bigger. After eight years of negotiation in the UN, and with the current voluntary pledges of governments, we have only reduced 3 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year from the business-as-usual scenario, and we should have reduced at least 16 gigatons per year by 2020. So, putting aside words and speeches, governments reduced less than 20% of what is needed this decade. So that is the reality. Now, how did world leaders improve their voluntary pledges for this decade if they believe, as Ban Ki-Moon said in his summary of the Climate Summit, "that climate change is a defining issue of our time and that bold action is needed today to reduce emissions"? The United States ratified its current weak pledge of 3% of emission cuts by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, which means that they will do even less than what was agreed for the first period of the Kyoto

Protocol which they never ratified and which ended in 2012. President Obama even went so far as to call on other countries to "follow US leadership" on climate! If everybody did what the United States is doing, the emissions gap would be much larger!

The European Union and all the other historical emitters didn't increase their voluntary pledges for this decade. Also, China and the emerging countries didn't increase their previous pledges. Nobody addressed the key issue of the gap of this decade. Some prefer to make promises for the next decade until 2030 or 2050, speaking about emissions reductions of 50 to 85% without even mentioning that, according to science, global emissions must be 30 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year by 2030 "based on the assumption that the 2020 least-cost level of 44 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e per year will be achieved," according to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report.

## Weak Financing

The other key point to assess is funding for developing countries that are suffering from climate change while being the least responsible for the problem. Almost six years ago, developed countries committed to support developing countries with \$100 billion per year by 2020. At that time, the offer enticed many governments to accept the Copenhagen Accord and the Cancun agreements. The assumption was that the \$100 billion per year were going to come from public sources from developed countries, since States cannot commit private or market funds that they do not control.

Several years have passed, and the \$100 billion per year is still up in the air. Developed countries have re-packaged some of their development aid with the label of climate, and even so, the total amount is far from reaching that promise. Developing countries were expecting to see a great share of these \$100 billion per year go to developing countries through the Green Climate Fund, but in reality, the Fund is tiny.

Based on what happened at the New

York Summit, there would be no significant increase in funding for developing countries from public sources in developed countries and the Green Climate Fund will have tiny resources. EU countries have offered €14 billion in public climate finance to partners outside the European Union over the next seven years, which is only €2 billion per year. France has pledged \$1 billion to the Green Climate Fund over the "coming years." Switzerland and South Korea are considering \$100 million to the Green Climate Fund over an undetermined period of time. Luxembourg pledged \$6.8 million – 1% of GDP – to the Green Climate Fund. The commitment of \$100 billion per year has not been achieved at all, and the Green Climate Fund has in total only pledges of \$2.3 billion – in total, not annually. To hide this failure, in his summary, Ban Ki-Moon used the words "mobilize" instead of "provide," and spoke about "public and private finance," mixing private investment that is subject to profits in developing countries with public aid from the developed world.

## Clever Packaging of Markets

For Ban Ki-moon, some heads of state, the business sector and the World Bank, the Climate Summit was a success because, from the beginning, their aim was not to close the emissions gap or to fill the Green Climate Fund. Rather, they sought to use this event – which is not part of the official process of UN negotiations – to launch more initiatives and carbon markets and to use the "summary of the chair" (Ban Ki-moon) as a way to introduce these proposals in the coming official negotiations in Lima, Peru, this December.

Their two clear goals were focused on "carbon pricing" and "Climate Smart Agriculture." "Carbon pricing" is a new name used to promote carbon markets in a new, clever way: by combining candy and poison. Under "carbon pricing," the World Bank, which is the leading promoter of this initiative, mixes two very different things: carbon taxing and "cap and trade." Carbon taxing penalizes

companies and industries for their actual polluting emissions, while under cap and trade, governments establish an emissions cap and give stakeholders permits to pollute. After the permits have been distributed to the level of the emissions cap, they can be traded privately. The wealthiest and most polluting companies can buy from others and continue to pollute, and the market defines the price of each permit, which involves a lot of speculation and leads to the creation of new financial bubbles.

The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) of the European Union established the biggest carbon market in 2005. After eight years of implementation, even conservative sources estimate that between one third and two thirds of the carbon credits brought into the ETS "do not represent real carbon reductions." Instead, the ETS has worked to subsidize polluters and pass the costs to consumers. Carbon markets are particularly susceptible to fraud. A German court jailed six people involved in a €300-million fraud scheme selling carbon permits through Deutsche Bank, and courts in London jailed 11 people. Also, the UN had to disqualify its main Clean Development Mechanism verification agency in 2009, and in 2011, it had to suspend Ukraine due to emissions under-reporting fraud. A good summary can be found in Scrap ETS.

These carbon markets move a lot of money that benefits many businesses, but certainly not the poor. According to the International Energy Agency, "The value of carbon credits produced from new CDM projects reached around \$7 billion per year prior to the global financial and economic crisis." But from all the CDM projects, "only 0.2% of the total have been designed to increase or improve energy access for households."

To think that markets are going to solve the climate chaos is madness. But we cannot be surprised, because it is the same madness that the World Bank promoted with privatizations and "structural adjustments" all over the world with very well known bad results that have even lead to some self-criticism within that institution.

The other new market mechanism that Ban Ki-Moon highlighted in his summary, and that is also promoted by the World Bank, is Climate Smart Agriculture. La Via Campesina, a global organization with 200 million small farmer members, has rejected this initiative in these terms: "Climate Smart Agriculture, like Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), will expand the carbon market and its use for financial speculation. The possibility of big profits with investments in carbon credits generated from farmlands involved in Climate Smart Agriculture projects will increase speculation in the carbon market, leading to further "carbon land grabs" by large-scale investors and producers, and the further displacement of peasant and smallholder farmers, just as REDD displaces indigenous people. Under this Climate Smart Agriculture

framework, there is little hope of reducing and removing greenhouse gases, trying to solve food insecurity or any significant rural economic and social development. The problems of poverty, food insecurity and climate change are not market failures, but rather are structural flaws that will persist and worsen with its implementation."

## **We Need More Mobilizations, Clear Demands**

After this week in New York, it is once again obvious that real solutions are not going to come from the UN, heads of state, corporations or the World Bank. Our main goal in strengthening marches like the one on September 21st is not to target the UN climate negotiations, but to build a movement

that is strong enough to challenge and change the capitalist system. The main lesson from this week is that we need to make even stronger and more permanent mobilizations with much more clear messages targeting the main polluters, which are the big corporations. A march that calls for "climate action" without clearly saying what that action should be can be manipulated or used to promote wrong actions. In that sense, more than 370 organizations around the world have put forward a 10-point plan to really address the structural causes of climate change. At the next UN negotiations Lima, Peru, the challenge for social and grassroots movements is to come out with a plan of action to support clear demands to stop climate chaos.

*26 September 2014*

[Focus on the Global South](#)

# **A review of the origins and development of the revolutionary process (part 1)**

**27 September 2014, by Joseph Daher**

The increasing militarisation and the rise of reactionary Islamism in the revolutionary process has also led numerous observers and analysts to put aside the reasons for the outbreak of the popular uprising three years ago for liberty and dignity against the dictatorship of the Assad regime and to ignore the popular movement which still exists, despite its continued weakening, for two major reasons: the terrible repression of the regime's security forces and the rise of the reactionary and Islamist armed forces who have attacked the activists and members of the Free Syria Army (FSA).

To understand the evolution of the Syrian revolutionary process over the past three years, we should first take a brief historical review. We will analyse the regime put in place in the era of

Hafez Al Assad and its consequences for Syrian society. In 2000, Bashar Al Assad accelerated neoliberal policies, despite a short period of a supposedly democratic opening known as the Damascus Spring of 2000 which rapidly closed.

We will then analyse the reasons for and dynamics of the uprising, which should be studied in relation to the revolutionary processes underway in the region, but also according to its specific characteristics (situation, actors, meaning). Finally, we will touch on the development of the uprising, from peaceful opposition to the current armed radicalisation.

We will attempt to demonstrate the diverse ramifications and complexity of the Syrian revolutionary process, questioning the terms broadly used

today to describe the situation in Syria, like civil and/or confessional war. These notions do not allow us to grasp events and propose an alternative analysis, centred on the concept of revolution, which should be analysed both in its material aspects and in its ideal components.

## **Syria after independence**

Since its independence in 1946, Syria has been marked by a number of legacies from its long insertion within the Ottoman Empire, within which cities enjoyed political and economic ascendancy over the rural areas. The cities thus dominated their rural hinterlands and constituted primordial nodes of the international trading

system linking Europe to Asia [3], notably the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, from which the political elites of the country all came, from independence, in 1946, until 1963.

During this period, Syrian political life was articulated by a large number of military coups. In the meantime, the country was headed by two political groups: the Peoples' Party and the National Bloc, representative respectively of the interests of the bourgeoisie of Aleppo and Damascus. From 1958 to 1961, Syria and Egypt were united within the United Arab Republic, under the leadership of Nasser. The coming to power of the Baath party, following a new military coup, in 1963, would mark the end of the political domination of the urban bourgeoisie, originating very predominantly from the Arab and Sunni Muslim population of the country for decades - and even, in some aspects, centuries, within the Ottoman Empire - and inaugurated a new era where the new regime was dominated by social forces from the rural and peripheral areas and by religious minorities, notably the Alawites [4]. The coup of 1963 may therefore, in many respects, be considered a response to the social crisis which affected the rural popular classes since independence, a reaction of the villages to the domination of the urban notables.

The policies of the radical wing of the Baath Party had appreciable socio-economic consequences from the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular in favour of the most disadvantaged areas, to the detriment of the bourgeois merchant and industrial classes and the large landowners. Agrarian reform policies, nationalization and the creation of large public sectors put an end to the more rigid class inequalities, rooted in monopoly control of the means of production, by encouraging a broader access to economic opportunities and to property [5]. Sections of the agricultural proletariat and the small peasantry thus significantly benefited from agrarian reforms and the expansion of the public sector, and of the army and the bureaucracy in general.

The consequences of this process

converged in the economic and social consolidation of the rural middle class, while the redistribution of land put an end to the reign of very large land owners, as opposed to the middle (sometimes even rich) peasantry, that the new regime of the Baath could not weaken, since it was in large part derived from it. This position allowed this class in particular to take advantage of government subsidies and to broadly escape production controls [6].

## **The Baath before the takeover of power by Hafez al Assad in 1970**

How to analyze the phenomenon of the Baath in Syria? Since the country's independence, it recruited mainly in the rural areas, where the religious minorities are concentrated, mainly for historical reasons. It was therefore logical that the members of these communities predominated within the party. Its ideology also attracted religious minorities who expected that "socialism", Arab nationalism and secularism would help them escape their minority and hence subordinate status, and the narrow dependent social framework of their tribal and regional links [7].

In 1963, the members of the Baath Party came from the rural middle-classes or even lower layers, thus enabling them to benefit from the social mobility afforded by the new state emerging from independence in 1946, in particular through the institution of the military. It should be added that it also received the support of a large fraction of the urban intelligentsia - teachers and civil servants mainly [8]. The new leadership of the Ba'ath, thus strongly radicalized in relation to its original founders, adopted a rhetoric close to that of the radical left and took a series of political decisions and measures aimed at preventing the return to power of the big urban bourgeoisie, merchant and industrial, as well as the large land owners: nationalization of a large part of private assets (1964-1965), in addition

to the agrarian reform policies initiated at the time of the United Arab Republic (1958-1961) [9].

The big urban bourgeoisie - merchant and industrial - as well as the big landowners formed the spearhead of the coup of 1961, which put an end to the experience of the United Arab Republic, a regime that had threatened its economic and political power due to its policies of redistribution of wealth and land. The policy of Arab nationalism and the Ba'ath of the era was characterized by a state capitalism which promoted, on the one hand, a policy hostile to the national private sectors and foreign capital, and, on the other, a policy which had as its objective a vast redistribution of wealth within their societies. At the same time, any autonomy of the labour movement and any form of left and progressive opposition were violently repressed.

We will see that the arrival of Hafez al Assad put an end to the radical social policies of the 1960s to engage in the path of conciliation toward the bourgeois classes of society. This also corresponded to the loss of popularity of Arab nationalism after the defeat of June 1967 and the death of Nasser, in 1970.

## **The seizure of power by Hafez al-Assad in 1970 and the construction of a dictatorial and bourgeois regime**

The coming to power of Hafez al Assad in 1970 marked a new turning point for the country, decisive for the future decades. The new Syrian strong man was from the so-called "pragmatic" section of the Baath Party, which was not in favour of radical social policies and a confrontation with the conservative countries of the region, like the monarchies of the Gulf. The new regime was welcomed with great joy by the big bourgeoisie of the cities of Aleppo and Damascus. The big urban bourgeoisies, who had been very



active against the left wing of the Ba'ath between 1963 and 1970, demonstrated in the streets of the major cities with banners of which one said, for example: "We implored the help of God - Al Madad. He sent us Hafiz al Assad" [10].

From this period, the government built a network of loyalties through various links, including economic ones, with persons from different religious ethnic and tribal communities. The beginning of the so-called "corrective movement" launched by Al Assad also put an end to the radical policies of the 1960s, which had questioned the heritage and the political power of the big bourgeoisie. The objective of Assad was to ensure the stability of his regime and the accumulation of capital by co-opting the most powerful sectors of the business community - the big traders, as well as a small group of big industrialists, concentrated mainly in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, as well as the very big landowners, but also by gradually involving new bourgeois actors promised a rapid rise within the state apparatus.

The regime of Hafez al-Assad was an authoritarian regime that deprived of any legal existence political and social organizations that did not accept its exclusive domination or opposed its clientelist policies or practices - the massive corruption of the ruling class, political and military, was used primarily to ensure its loyalty. It was during this period, starting in 1970, that the new regime built an army which was completely subservient to the personal power of the dictator and his bodyguard. The war of 1973, presented as a victory by the Syrian regime, would also strengthen the control of Hafez al-Assad over the army. From this date, not a single bullet would be fired against the state of Israel from Syrian territory, although the Golan Heights remain occupied until today. The structure of the high command and elite corps was thus based on clientelism and confessionalism: the senior officers were recruited in the Alawite tribes, allied to the Assad family, to ensure their almost total allegiance to the state leadership.

Thanks to this close intertwining of public with private interests, the state became a real machine to accumulate considerable resources, a godsend for the nomenklatura, in particular the close circles of the supreme leader, his family and his most faithful lieutenants. The informal networks and the nepotism which bound the various sectors of the state with the business community have multiplied, giving birth to a "new class" of bourgeois rentiers: the impact of these changes has weighed heavy on the regressive developments of Syrian society, up to the eve of the revolution which began in 2011. The misallocation of resources and the proliferation of non-productive activities in the commercial sector, low in employment of labour but lucrative, have been the main consequences of these political, social and economic transformation.

¶ From 1986, the Syrian regime adopted the first measures of deregulation of its centralized "command" economy, at the price of important economic setbacks and a widespread failure of development, filled only by aid - a fraction of the oil rents - from the Gulf monarchies. In the same year, the crisis of the national currency was the sign of the accelerated consolidation of economic networks of the patronage built by the regime, although at an informal level. From 1991, it came to largely dominate the economic areas presented abusively as part of the "private sector", developed under the pretext of governmental reforms called "economic pluralism" (al - ta'addudiyya al iqtisadiyya) [11].

¶ This "new class", organically linked to the state, needed to invest its wealth in the different sectors of the economy. Decree No. 10 (1991) thus constituted the springboard by means of which it was able to launder its accrued income [12]. This decree was intended to promote and encourage national and foreign private investment in sectors of activity which had been the monopoly of the public sector, such as the pharmaceutical industry, agriculture and agro-food, the hotel industry, and transport. It would facilitate investment in the private sector and open up possibilities of export-import thanks to

tax cuts and other tax incentives, of course, always under the control of the state, rewarding its best placed members and deepening the system of widespread corruption. The transition from a command economy to crony capitalism was thus accelerated during the 1980s with the gradual abandonment of a centrally directed economy.

The 1990s have seen the emergence of a "new class" - new rich or a hybridized bourgeoisie - the result of a merger of the state bureaucracy and the survivors of the old "private" bourgeoisie, whose status owed nothing to the Baath regime, since it did not originate from collusion with it. We will analyze how this new class developed, in particular in an early phase, playing on its connections with the state, used as a cash cow to milk and promoter of a new economic direction by means of the gradual introduction of neoliberal policies of deregulation. In return, it has fully supported the regime's strategy by consolidating its power, particularly in the face of the fractions of the old private bourgeoisie.

## **The priority of repression and its functionality**

¶ The advent of Hafez al Assad in power also marked a new era for Syria in terms of political, social and economic repression, marked by the establishment of the state of emergency, in 1963. This is reflected inter alia by a subtle policy of strengthening of the divisions within society between ethnic groups, communities and even tribes, which recalled certain practices of the French mandate, like the division of the country into five or six regional departments, above all according to communal criteria, with Druze and Alawite sub-groupings. The independent popular organizations - trade unions, professional groups (such as those of doctors, lawyers, engineers or pharmacists), civic associations and so on - were first monitored, and then repressed, and finally dissolved in 1980. They had been hitherto in the forefront of

fighting for a return to democratic freedoms and the lifting of the state of emergency. In 1980, these organizations were replaced by structures placed under the direct control of the state [13]. The most bloody symbol of the repression of this regime remains however the massacres in the city of Hama, in 1982, by the security forces and the military, which reportedly caused the death of 10,000 to 40,000 persons. These killings in many respects indicated the provisional end of the bloody conflict between the supporters of the regime and the members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had taken up arms from the late 1970s.

¶ The repression also struck all the political parties who refused to submit to the diktat of Hafez al Assad and participate in the National Progressive Front (NPF), a coalition of forces owing allegiance to the regime. At the beginning of the 1970s, several secular parties, in particular of the left, had been the targets of the regime, including the February 23 Movement (a radical Baath tendency, close to the former president Salah Jadid), the League of Communist Action (Rabita al amal al shuyu'i), part of whose members came from the Alawite community and, to a lesser extent, the Communist Party of the political Bureau (CPPB) of Ryad Turk. The national gathering, which included various parties of the left, had also been severely repressed in the early 1980s [14]. During this decade, the Muslim Brotherhood was also affected strongly by the repression.

The regime thus imposed its total domination on key sectors of society, such as the universities and the army. It banned all independent political activity, except of course that of the Baath Party, which was alone allowed to organize conferences and public demonstrations, from campuses to barracks, or publish and disseminate a newspaper. Even the political parties allied to it within the National Progressive Front did not have the right to organize, make propaganda or to have a small official presence in the public space. We will analyze later the specific role of the Baath party, in particular after the coming to power

of Hafez al Assad. It is sufficient to note here that it controlled a wide range of corporatist, so-called popular, organizations, grouping peasants, youth, women and so on, through which many sectors of society have been placed under the tutelage of the regime.

¶ The role of the Ba'ath, thus transformed into an instrument of control of society, and thus deprived of any ideological dynamism, was therefore deeply changed with the arrival of Hafez al Assad in power. The organization of the party was changed, with the suppression of internal elections and their replacement by a system of designation from above, of co-option, decided by the regime and the security services, while the elements opposed to the policies of the regime were repressed. Rifaat Al-Assad, the brother of Hafez, has summarized his conception of the party thus during its 7th Regional Congress: "The leader decides, the party approves and the people applaud. It is thus that socialism operates in the Soviet Union. Who does not applaud, goes to Siberia" [15]. The party elites of the post-1970s have thus tended to become docile bureaucrats, while their comrades from the 1950s and 1960s were often dedicated and/or enthusiastic activists [16].

We see the ideals of unity, freedom and socialism, which were at the origin of the Baath, disappear from the real policies of the Assad regime to be invoked solely as rhetorical slogans. We will analyze also how the regime resorted to means other than repression to establish its power, including corruption, the instrumentalization of religion, dividing the Syrian population by ethnic groups, communities and so on. The weapon of confessionalism has developed in conjunction with the repression of the secular and liberal left opposition, popular civil organizations and political parties, while favouring "primary", so-called archaic identities, especially tribal ones.

¶ The death of the dictator Hafez al Assad, after a thirty year reign, had brought a wind of hope to Syria among broad sectors of society who hoped for a political opening, and

particularly for the political opposition who wanted a democratic transition process through reforms. President Bashar al-Assad, son of Hafez, thus became president in 2000, and a few months of apparent promise followed, with a speech by the new president to parliament which called for "creative thinking" and recognized "the urgent need" for constructive criticism and reforms aimed at a certain modernization [17]. At the same time, the notorious political prison of Mezze in Damascus, a symbol of the brutal political repression of the regime, was closed, while a large number of political prisoners were released. Human rights organizations and forums for debate also began to multiply at the beginning of this new reign.

¶ Syrian civil society and political organizations were thus mobilized, from the beginning of 2001, calling for reforms and a democratization of the state. This was the meaning of the "declaration of 99" or the "Committee to revive civil society" (announced by a press release under the name of the "Declaration of 1000"), which comprised intellectuals, artists, writers, researchers and even the representatives of some political parties. At the same time, the parliamentarian and critic of the regime Riyadh Seif announced the formation of the Social Movement for Peace. The regime responded quickly faced with these developments by repression and by counter-attacking brutally at the rhetorical level, by means of the press, or even physically, by the arrest of activists. At the end of summer 2001, eight of the most prominent leaders of civil society were imprisoned, and all the forums for debates, with the exception of one, were closed [18].

¶ Between 2004 and 2006 a wave of sit-ins developed, at the initiative of young political activists and civil society organizations, on various issues relating to democratic rights, such as freedom of expression and/or assembly, a new phenomenon in Syria. In 2004, the Kurdish uprising, which had started in the town of Qamichli and had spread in the predominantly Kurdish regions throughout the country - Jazira, Afrin -, but also in Aleppo and Damascus, was severely

repressed by the security forces, with the regime also appealing for the collaboration of the Arab tribes of the Northeast. Many activists were arrested or killed, more than 2,000, while others were forced to leave the country [19]. Basic democratic rights were therefore non-existent on the eve of the Syrian uprising of March 2011, whereas the announced reforms were still awaited.

## The acceleration of neo-liberal policies and the growth of social inequality

Since the accession to power of President Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian regime has increased and accelerated the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies. The latter have benefited in particular a small oligarchy which has proliferated since the era of his father, because of its mastery of the networks of economic patronage and their loyal customers. Bashar al-Assad's cousin, Rami Makhlouf, as we will see later, perfectly embodies this mafia-like process of privatization conducted by the regime in favour of its own.

New monopolies have been created in the hands of Bashar's family while the quality of goods and services has decreased, particularly in the health sector and education where private institutions have multiplied. At the same time the financial sector has developed with the growth, from 2004, of the first private banks, dominated by Syrian capital and the Gulf oil monarchies, of insurance companies, the Stock Exchange of Damascus and bureaux de change. The coming to power of Bashar has however restricted the circle of those who enjoyed the "spoils" of the regime; these were distributed more widely under his father, when several groups could conclude business and win the favour of the state.

â€¢ The son of a former commander of the Syrian Republican Guard and second cousin of the new dictator,

Makhlouf thus controlled, on the eve of the uprising of 2011, nearly 60% of the economy of the country, thanks to a complex network of holdings [20]. His economic empire includes telecommunications, oil and gas, as well as construction, banks, airlines and retail. He is also owner of the only duty free firm, as well as several private schools to which the children of the dignitaries of the regime and of the Syrian bourgeoisie are sent. The personal fortune of Rami Makhlouf is estimated at close to 6 billion dollars [21]. It is to be noted that at the beginning of 2011, the British magazine "World Finance" had extolled Makhlouf's visionary leadership and his outstanding contribution to the Syrian economy, calling him a symbol of the positive change at work in the country. The Chilean case provides a good illustration of the link between neo-liberal policies and political dictatorship in the countries of the periphery.

â€¢ The neo-liberal policies of the regime have satisfied various social sectors: the upper layers of the new bourgeoisie, which had developed within the state during the previous decades; the old bourgeois elites of the private sector, who had begun to invest again in the country; and foreign investors, in particular in the Gulf region, by opening the Syrian economy to their operations at the expense of the majority of the population, hit hard by continuous inflation. The neo-liberal policies put in place during these last ten years have caused the collapse of the public sector and led to the domination of the private sector, which now accounts for nearly 70 per cent of economic activity [22].

To better reflect the impact of these economic policies and of their role in the triggering of the popular uprising, it is necessary to look also at the sectors that have benefited from these policies, be it the leaders of the security service and army apparatuses; the networks of the bureaucracy; the crony capitalists sponsored by different sectors of the public services, who have developed and enriched themselves still more within the private sector, particularly in the course of the 1990s, after the

implementation of investment laws Number 10 of 1991 ; and the bourgeoisie of Aleppo and Damascus, which has benefited more particularly from the launch of the so-called "social market economy" in 2005 .

â€¢ The growth of real GDP and real per capita income has decreased since the early 1990s. The process of economic liberalization has created an ever growing inequality within the country. The poorest people have difficulty in coping with this new economy due to a growing shortage of jobs, especially for the young graduates and the inhabitants of the peripheral regions, while the middle class, in particular civil servants and young people finishing their studies, are quickly approaching the threshold of poverty because their incomes have not kept pace with inflation, which reached 17 %, officially, in 2008 [23].

â€¢ On the eve of the uprising of March 2011, the unemployment rate stood at 14.9%, according to official figures - 20-25% according to other sources; it was respectively 33.7% and 39.3% among those aged 20-24 and 15-19 years [24]. In 2007, the percentage of Syrians living below the poverty line was 33 %, which represented approximately seven million people, while 30% of them were just above this level [25]. The proportion of poor is higher in rural areas (62 %) than in urban areas (38 %). Poverty is more widespread, more rooted and more marked (58.1 %) in the northwest and northeast (the provinces of Idleb, Aleppo, Raqqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh), where 45% of the population lives [26].

â€¢ In addition, the Syrian regime undertook to reform its system of subsidies, penalizing even more the popular classes and the poorest, while privatisations have proliferated. This is accompanied by the reduction of the quality and quantity of public health services, which has forced the people to turn to the dearer private sector in order to enjoy basic services. The report conducted by the IMF in 2010 welcomed the many measures taken by the Syrian regime: "the unification of the exchange rate and the restrictions on access to foreign exchange for current account



transactions appear to have been mostly eliminated. The private banks now lead the growth of the financial sector, and the Damascus stock exchange has recently reopened after a closure of 40 years. Taxes have been simplified and the trade regime has been significantly liberalized" [27].

â€¢ The development plan of the Syrian regime from 2006 to 2010 had the stated aim of "continuation of the deregulation of the market, as well as the deepening and the growth of its inclusion in the world to attract private investment, with extensive structural reforms in order to ensure a good governance of the economy and an equitable growth" [28].

â€¢ Syria's economic growth, which was on average 5% during the years preceding the beginning of the uprising, has not benefited the working classes; in fact, inequalities in terms of wealth have continued to increase. For example, between 1997 and 2004, the Gini coefficient rose from 0.33 to 0.37 [29]. In 2003-2004, 20% of the poorest accounted for only 7% of total expenditure, while 20% of the richest were responsible for 45% of the latter [30]. A trend which has continued to grow up to the outbreak of the revolution.

â€¢ In agriculture, the privatization of land at the expense of several hundreds of thousands of peasants from the north-east, from 2008, because of drought, should not be perceived as the consequence of a simple natural disaster. The growth and intensification of the exploitation of the land by big agribusiness companies - including lands previously retained for grazing, and even the illegal drilling of wells -, as well as the establishment of lines of selective water meeting the requirements of the new major owners - facilitated the corruption of the local administration which accompanied the agricultural crisis. In 2008, 28% of farmers were exploiting 75% of irrigated land, while 49% of them had only 10% of the latter, which is evidence of the progress of inequalities within agriculture [31].

In the same way, the regime has imposed its domination on the trade union bureaucracy, and this has hampered the fight against neo-liberal and authoritarian policies, particularly since 2000. The standard of living of the majority of the population continued to decrease, whereas political repression continued. For example, in May 2006, hundreds of workers protested within the public construction company in Damascus

and clashed with security forces. At the same time, taxi drivers went on strike to Aleppo to protest against their conditions of work and life.

â€¢ The neo-liberal reforms of the regime have encouraged a policy based on foreign direct investment, which went from \$120 million in 2002 to \$3.5 billion in 2010 [32], particularly in the areas of export, services, and tourism. Before being shattered by the events which began in March 2011, the latter had become a flourishing industry: it represents 12% of current GDP, or approximately 6.5 billion dollars, and employs 11% of the labour force [33]

The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of large parts of Syrian society, in a climate of corruption and increasing social inequality, prepared the ground for the popular insurrection, which thus needed no more than a spark. As Bashar al-Assad put it at the end of January 2011, in an interview with the "Wall Street Journal": "Despite more difficult circumstances than in most Arab countries, Syria is stable. Why? Because you must be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people" [34]. The Syrian leader was very wrong, as he would gradually find out.

# Marina Silva's Rise Is a Result of the Left's Failures, Not Success

26 September 2014, by **Federico Fuentes**

A fortnight out from Brazil's October 5 national elections, the big news has been the significant surge in support for Marina Silva, a former Workers' Party (PT) government minister and environmental activist, with some polls predicting she could end up winning the presidential race.

Incumbent president and PT candidate Dilma Rousseff maintains a narrow lead over Marina, but the elections will almost certainly go to a second

round run-off on October 26.

If this occurs, current indications are that Marina has a chance of winning, a remarkable feat given that a little over a month ago she was not even a presidential candidate.

Her candidature only came about as a result of the August 13 death of PSB presidential candidate Eduardo Campos. Having previously taken up the vice-presidential spot as part of a

deal between the PSB and her own unregistered party, Sustainability Network, Marina was promoted to the top spot.

Since then the PSB's fortunes in the polls have soared: while Campos had been polling around 10%, this figure more than doubled as soon as Marina took over. Recent polls give Marina between 30-35%, meaning that the PSB has pushed aside the main right-wing opposition party, the Brazilian

Social Democratic Party (PSDB), and currently sits in second place.

## Marina's politics

Marina is no newcomer to Brazilian politics. Her background is as a long-time environmental activist who fought side by side with the legendary Chico Mendes, who was assassinated for his campaigning work in defense of the Amazon forest.

Many looked favorably upon her appointment as environment minister in the first-ever PT government, headed by Luiz Ignácio Lula de Silva. By 2008, however, with the PT government mired in corruption scandals, she resigned from her post.

Among the reasons she cited for her resignation were the government's prioritization of development over the environment, and internal resistance to her stance on issues such as biofuels, hydroelectric dams and genetically modified foods.

In 2010, she stood as a Green Party presidential candidate, and polled an impressive 19.4%. She later went on to set up Sustainability Network, arguing that the formation was neither left nor right. Instead, its focus was on creating a "new" kind of politics in which people and the environment, not parties, mattered most.

Given all this, it is unsurprising that environmentalists [35] and progressives disillusioned with the "developmentalist" policies of left-leaning South American governments have pointed to Marina as a potential "leading force for sustainable economic development, and alternatives to extractivism, throughout the region" [36]

The reality is however, that Marina's election would most likely lead to a conservative, not conservationist, shift in Brazilian politics.

Moreover, her rise can in many ways be attributed to the failures, not successes, of Brazil's lefts, starting with the "anti-extractivist" left.

Much has been made of Marina's environmental credentials and anti-development talk. However, when it

comes to concrete policies and programs, Marina offers little in terms of a progressive alternative to the PT.

The problem is that much of the "anti-extractivist" left, lacking any clear strategic project and blinded by its hostility to what it calls the "developmentalist" left, has uncritically pinned its hopes on Silva.

Many have already noted the similarities between Marina and the right-wing PSDB when it comes to economic policies. Underpinning this is their shared opposition to state intervention (or as Marina calls it "developmentalism") and belief in the virtues of the market.

In these elections, both parties are advocating greater independence for the central bank, increased labor casualization, measures to improve corporate profitability, cutting down the size of the state-banking sector, slashing state bureaucracy "red-tape", and improving trade relations with the United States.

Then there are the backflips that Marina, a conservative evangelical, has done in terms of social policy, such as dropping support for gay marriage and abortion rights from her program.

Perhaps less attention has been paid to the shifts in Marina's environmental policies.

The last few weeks have seen Marina backtrack on previous anti-petroleum statements [37], saying that any government she leads would continue to see Brazil's massive deep-sea, pre-salt oil exploitation project as a priority.

Similar, Marina stated she was no longer opposed to GMOs [38]. She has also campaigned strongly in favor of Brazil producing biofuels, something ecological movements have denounced not only for its negative environmental impacts but for the fact it re-directs food product away from people and towards cars.

And while Marina held up a number of licenses for hydroelectric dams when she was minister, she now considers them to be a vital source of energy.

In the end, it is hard to find any issue on which the "anti-extractivist" Marina can be said to be to the left of the PT, even regarding environmental concerns.

## Marina's support

However, Marina's rise can also be attributed to the failure of Brazil's other lefts - the pro-PT and anti-PT left - because, independently of Marina's policies, much of her support is coming from sectors that neither identify as right-wing nor pertain to traditional conservative sectors.

Most of the country's trade unions and social movements remain wedded to one extent or another to the PT. This is also true for large sections of the country's poor, who have benefited the most from the PT's social welfare programs.

At the same time, Marina has evidently been able to woo sections of the traditional middle class who have historically opposed the PT and see in Marina a viable alternative. Many of those who continue to support the PSDB will undoubtedly come behind Marina in the second round if it means defeating Dilma.

However, polls indicate that an important part of Marina's support is coming from the 45 million people that comprise the 16 to 33 year old category, many of whom are highly educated (at least in comparison to their previous generation), but find themselves with precarious jobs and living conditions. They make up a third of the electorate, have had little experience with trade unions or politics, and a majority of them believe the country would be better off without political parties [39].

Fed up with politics-as-usual, this grouping was unlikely to be inspired by traditional politicians such as PSDB candidate Aécio Neves, Campos or even Dilma, as the PT increasingly is seen as part of the system.

On the other hand, Marina's outsider status and "new politics" discourse, despite running on the PSB ticket and forming regional alliance with other traditional parties, has converted her



into a viable alternative for many of these youth.

Polling that correlates political identification with voting intentions show that if Marina was to win the second round, she would do so not only with the support of right-wing identifying voters but also a majority of center and center-left voters, who together represent 48% of the electorate [40].

On the other hand Dilma would only maintain a (large) advantage among left-identifying voters.

Ruy Braga argues that it is fair to assume a large cross over between youth and center and center-left identifying voters [41]. In the context of the established two-party system, he argues that at least part of Marina's support base should be seen as "an electoral manifestation of a progressive desire for change."

This also seems to be the case if we consider the fact that these elections follow on from the massive mobilizations that shook Brazil in the middle of 2013.

Sparked by opposition to proposed fare hikes, these protests quickly mushroomed and began raising a mixed bag of issues such as expansion of public services, anti-corruption, opposition to police repression and support for greater judicial independence.

Two key sectors within these millions-strong mobilizations were this new youthful "precariat", and sectors of the traditional middle class who saw these protests as a way to undermine the PT government.

While it is fair to point out the somewhat dubious motivations of a section of these protests, it is just as true that many of the demands were driven by real shortcomings in the PT government.

Ironically, while the PT argued that its weaknesses were the results of limitations imposed by the existing balance of forces, much of the PT left saw the protests as a threat, rather than as an opportunity to push for greater change.

Meanwhile, the anti-PT left continues

to be viewed by many as dogmatic, irrelevant or little different to the PT itself.

The inability of both these lefts to harness these mobilizations towards progressive goals is a big factor in explaining Marina's rise.

None of this is to say that a Marina victory would represent a positive step forward for Brazil, much less South America, given Marina's negative comments about Venezuela and other radical governments in the region.

There should be little doubt that a Marina government will be to the right of any potential Dilma government.

Nevertheless, the demands and desires of those that may end up voting for Marina are legitimate, and the left would do well to think about how they could win over this natural ally to supporting a genuine proposal for change.

16 September 2014

[TeleSur](#)

## After the cease-fire - the Minsk "Armistice" has made it possible to freeze the conflict at a crucial moment

25 September 2014, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

The "Minsk Agreement" has not been able to give precise answers to the questions posed by the conflict in eastern Ukraine, starting with one of the main ones: the one concerning the real participants in the conflict and their real objectives. While the agenda of the negotiations in Minsk envisaged discussing the plan presented by Vladimir Putin in person, Russia continues to deny its role as a party to the conflict.

Despite the growing avalanche of facts demonstrating the direct presence of

Russian troops on Ukrainian soil, the Kremlin's strategy remains unchanged: it is to present itself as an anxious "third party", ready to seal the fate of the Ukrainian state with its "Western partners". The bloodshed in the Donbass, which has already killed more than 5,000 civilians, must necessarily appear as the backdrop so that an agreement that redefines the place of Russia in the post-Soviet space and in the system of international relations is found with the West.

### Before the point of no return

The agreement signed in Minsk expressed no opinion on the status of the "people's republics" or on their borders (which correspond either to the administrative boundaries of Lugansk and Donetsk Oblasts or to a distinctly smaller proportion of these territories which is effectively under the control of pro-Russian groups). However, this agreement establishes

the most important thing: the end of military operations with a view to resolving the conflict. The defeats of the army engaged in the "anti-terrorist operation," the weariness of society with regard to the war (according to recent polls, over 50 per cent of Ukrainians are in favour of an immediate cessation of military operations, without conditions) and the collapse of the national economy are forcing the Ukrainian authorities to sign an armistice. The balance sheet of the NATO summit in Wales, in the course of which Ukraine was literally denied military aid, has also been a strong argument: the 16 million euros generously promised to meet the needs of Ukraine are barely enough to buy three tanks...

Moreover, it has become almost impossible for Russia to conceal its full participation in the conflict: in fact, in the last week of August, the Russian opposition media began to publicize evidence about the secret funerals of some paratroopers who had been killed in action, and the independent "Committees of Soldiers Mothers" reported hundreds of serving soldiers killed or wounded on

Ukrainian soil.

Finally, the economic and social catastrophe that affects Donetsk, Lugansk and other cities in the region has reached such a scale that there is a risk of going beyond the point of no return. Most of the hundreds of thousands of refugees resettled either in Russia or in the central and western regions of Ukraine are hoping to return home as soon as possible. Otherwise, the state will necessarily have to provide them with jobs and proper housing, and the demographic losses in eastern Ukraine will at that point be difficult to compensate. The prospect of seeing the emergence of an unrecognized state, with a ruined economy, where there is the accumulation of a large quantity of uncontrolled weapons scares Russia even more than it does the West.

## The conflict "frozen" ... and now?

Moreover, it is very difficult to imagine these territories returning to

a united Ukraine under any sort of "special status" after a war that was short but fierce (and, despite the military involvement of Russia, had within it obvious elements of civil confrontation). Artillery bombardment of civilian neighborhoods and the abductions and summary executions on both sides were accompanied by a particularly powerful stream of aggressive propaganda. The Ukrainian and Russian television channels (some of the latter being mainly watched on the territory of the unrecognized "people's republics") conducted an enormous effort of dehumanization of the opposing party by building up the image of the absolute enemy with whom it is impossible to agree and whom one can only destroy.

The Minsk "Armistice" has made it possible to freeze the conflict at a crucial moment, when the events generated and controlled by different elite groups (in Moscow, Kiev and Washington) are likely to develop according to their own cruel logic. A moment when the principal fault of those guilty of this tragedy is no longer to have started it, but of no longer being able to stop it.

# Neo-fascist upset in Swedish elections

25 September 2014, by **Farooq Sulehria**

Sweden went to elections on September 14 to elect a government for the next four years. As was expected, a so-called informal Red Green coalition gained a majority (43.7% votes) against its rival 'Bourgeois Alliance' (39.3%). The Red Green Alliance is not a formal alliance. Consisting of Social Democrats, Left Party (a reformed mutation of the old Communist Party), and Greens, the Red Green Alliance has represented ideological polarization in Swedish electoral politics since the 1990s. It represents the mainstream Swedish left. In contrast, the right-wing 'Alliance', consisting of Moderates (Conservatives), Liberals, Centre

Party, and Christian Democrats, was a formal block. It won the last two elections and during eight-years of misrule, it managed to aggressively dismantle the famous Swedish Model of welfare state. It will be news only for casual observers of Swedish developments that the country now tops among OECD lands where class gulf has widened most.

The much talked about Feminist Initiative (F!) received 3.2% votes, almost one percent short of 4% threshold a party must reach to enter Riksdag. A few months ago, when elections for the EU Parliament were held, F! was able to bag almost five percent of the votes and one F!

member secured a seat in the European Parliament earlier this year. Founded in 2005, F!'s public face has been Gudrun Schyman who was earlier chairperson of the Left Party. Described by Britain's *Sunday Times*, as the 'Dancing Queen' for her participation in the Swedish version of the internationally popular formatted TV show, *Lets Dance*, Gudrun Schyman is not the only popular face available to F!. In the recent election, for instance, Benny Anderson, member of former legendary Swedish band, ABBA, endorsed F! by generously donating a huge sum for F!'s election campaign.

Sweden can be proud of an enviable

gender equality compared to any other country even in the West. Therefore, the emergence of F! surprises even the western commentators. However, the emergence of F! was possible only because Swedish women have won many rights. Not merely, they need to defend them, a feminization of politics is important to fight discrimination and injustices women still face. Considered a leftwing formation, F! has helped to bring an intersectionality perspective into the Swedish politics. For instance, during the recently concluded canvassing, F!'s relative rise has highlighted the position of women in the structures of various political parties. It turned out that the Left Party, often claiming to be feminist and socialist, had an embarrassingly low representation of women in its top echelons. Likewise, to the amusement of many on the left, Swedish Liberals' (Folkpartiet) most widely propagated slogan was: Socialism utan feminism (Socialism without feminism). Personally, I am not a huge fan of F! since I find they reduce every problem to gender and skip the class question especially at a time when the welfare system in Sweden is under attack and class differences have begun to grow. It is piecemeal dismantling of Sweden's enviable welfare system, since the 1990s, that has contributed to the rise of neo-fascist Swedish Democrats (SD).

## **Rise of neo-Fascists:**

Incidentally, F! also generated lot of enthusiasm in certain circles because, to its credit, it was viewed by certain circles as a party to block SD's entry to Riksdag. In the previous elections, SD received 5% to reach the parliament. Many on the left voted F!

in the hope of edging out SD which did not fare well in the pre-election opinion polls. Also, for the last one month, far left was able to mobilize huge anti-fascist manifestations. But bagging 12.9%, SD emerged as the third largest party. Since outgoing prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt had announced ahead of polls not to build a government in alliance with SD even if he had to go, therefore, Social Democratic leader Stefan Lofven will replace Reinfeldt as the next prime minister.

However, SD's huge vote (48 MPs in the next Riksdag) has already unsettled the Swedish politics. It had delivered the end of Red Green Alliance. The Social Democrats have announced to form the next government without the Left Party. Social Democratic PM-designate, Stefan Lofven, instead, wants to form a government in alliance with the two right-wing parties: Liberals and Centre Party. Thus, practically, the right-wing alliance has also fallen apart. In other words, a right wing alliance will be replaced by an anomalous 'right-left' alliance. The Social Democrats have refused to build a coalition government with the Left Party despite opinion polls whereby a majority wants Social Democrats to build a coalition government with the Left Party and Greens. The Left Party, that retained 5.7 percent vote share, campaigned to fight back privatization of schools, hospitals and other institutions of welfare. It seems, a Socialdemocratic government in alliance with right-wing parties, in a position of invoking fascist scare, is intent upon dismantling welfare system rather than reviving it. In other words, the very cause of neo-fascism's growth will find favourable objective conditions to flourish.

Islamophobic and anti-immigrant, SD now will also be able to influence an enviable Swedish immigration policy. Only a day before the polling, my Swedish friend Marco Espvall had proudly claimed in his Facebook post that his neighbourhood, Sodertalje, has received more Iraqi post-2003, than the USA and Canada. Despite a right-wing government, Sweden opened its borders for the Syrian immigrants after the break out of civil war. A Syrian landing Sweden is granted permanent Swedish residence. Such has been the progressive nature of Swedish migration policy that an anti-immigrant party in neighbouring Denmark has been campaigning, of late, to close down borders with Sweden 'from where illegal immigrants' sneak into Denmark.

## **Far Left remains marginal:**

The far left is a marginal force in Swedish electoral arena. While far left groups (Anarchists included), were in the forefront, if not instrumental, in anti-fascist mobilizations that swept Sweden ahead of September 14 elections, they were not able to translate the success of anti-racist activism into votes. Notable among far left groups, besides anarchists, are Justice Socialist Party, or SR (an affiliate of CWI), Socialist Party, or SP (Swedish section of the FI) and KP (Communist Party, a stalinist party). These groups usually concentrate on the elections for the municipalities, held the same day, and manage to retain half a dozen or so mandates across Sweden. Encouraging as it may be, it remains insignificant. In the recent past, RS and SP built an election alliance which generated hopes for the far-left But it did not last long.

# **Condemn the Police Violence on the Students' Agitation in Jadavpur University:**

# **Uphold the Right to a Campus Free of Sexual Harassment and State Terror**

**25 September 2014, by Radical Socialist**

The students, from the very beginning, were demanding a fair and speedy investigation, especially when two women members of the Internal Complaints' Cell (ICC) reportedly visited the girl's home and asked her about the details of that night along with what dress she was wearing or whether she was in an inebriated state. Moreover the student was advised by the Vice Chancellor not to come to the campus for a fortnight.

As per the decisions of several General Body meets of the students across political affiliations or independents, the students started sit-in-demonstration in front of the administrative building of the University. They demanded an impartial transparent probe with the induction of a gender right activist, a psychiatrist and a former judge in the ICC. Instead of getting patient hearing the repeated student deputations received verbal threats of police action to break their protest, from the VC.

Despite that, the students continued their sit-in-demonstration with songs and recitations. Their demand was to get a public assurance from the VC and Executive Council (EC) members and about the investigation and its present status. These simple demands were met with violent police operation after 2 am of 17 September, 2014, which coincided with the switching off the lights in the area around the administrative building. All norms of arrest and operation were violated. There were only a few woman cops and the main operation was carried out by the male cops and the thugs without uniforms. They did not, as usual, hesitate to trample over the

students, dragging them by their hair and sexually assault the girl students deliberately hitting their breasts.

While many of the injured students were in trauma and pain, the VC was escorted by the security forces helped by the goons so that he could safely enter his car. Most of the EC members, too did not stop to talk to the students many of whom had to be admitted into the adjacent KPC hospital and two of them were critically injured. 37 students were arrested and taken to Lalbazar Police Head Quarter, where they were further intimidated and detained for hours. Later they were released after issuing PR bonds.

The VC with a solid support from the State Education Minister, kept on peddling lies about the aggression of the students. The Commissioner of Police too talked about "outsiders" and "arms" hidden by the agitating students. As reported by the students, there is a veiled threat of clamping a "code of conduct" to browbeat any agitation or dissent against the authority.

In view of the foregoing the Radical Socialist:

• Unequivocally condemns the University-government-terror nexus and police violence on the peaceful agitation of the students

• Strongly condemns the physical and sexual assault by the police

• Demands immediate investigation into the police atrocities and punishment of the guilty police officers

• Demands the immediate resignation of the Vice Chancellor who has lost any moral authority to

continue his office

• Demands public apology from the Executive Council members who as yet did not issue any statement of clarification

• Demands the immediate dismantling of the existing ICC and its reconstitution as per law, University regulations and the suggestion of the students

• Demands adequate measures to ensure the safety and the right to free mobility of the students and university staff

• Opposes any imposition of code of conduct and surveillance system inside the campus in the name of disciplinary action or in the name of maintaining law and order

• Support the spontaneous agitation of the Jadavpur University students under the banner of "Independent Students' Movement for Justice, Equality and Freedom"

Radical Socialist also appeals to all the Rights groups and democratically-minded citizens to come into the support and solidarity of the agitation being continued by the Jadavpur University students and joined by students all over India.

We also urge the all the college and universities' teaching, non-teaching and officers' associations to oppose all forms of government control in the campuses and to demand immediate establishment of sexual harassment cells in all educational institutions so that an atmosphere of confidence can prevail among the students and staff both inside and outside the campuses.

*19 September 2014*

[Radical Socialist](#)



# After Scotland, Catalonia

24 September 2014, by **Esther Vivas**

However, the United Kingdom is not Spain, and David Cameron is not Mariano Rajoy. I say this not because I have a special sympathy for the “British Empire” or its prime minister, on the contrary, let us not forget the oppressive and colonial past of this empire and the policy of cuts of the Conservatives. But in recent days we have seen that in some countries there is a first division democracy while others are in the second division. And Spanish democracy, with hindsight, is light years from playing in the Champions League.

Meanwhile, the same president and party that does not allow for the right of the Catalans to vote does not want demonstrations at the Congress of Deputies. Some are very afraid of the right to decide, either of peoples or persons, in line with the nervousness felt against those who occupy streets and squares, as we saw with Zapatero and the 15M movement.

They appeal to the legality of the Constitution, but what Constitution? That which guarantees the right to

housing, but forcibly evicts thousands of families while bowing before the banks? That which was approved in a Transition overseen by the military? They talk of legality, but what legality? That which allows thousands of people to be defrauded with total impunity? If the movement of the indignant taught us anything, it is that the “legality” of the few cannot prevail over the legitimacy of the many.

That a people could vote might be illegal, say Mr. Rajoy and his henchmen, who have left everything neatly tied up to outlaw the Consultation, but a people has the right freely to decide its future. To defend the right of the Catalan people to vote and defend the Consultation is not to defend the Government of the CiU or those who claim that Madrid robs us. In Catalonia, as has been demonstrated well in the Pujol case, we have thieves at home. And this, despite what some may say, reinforces the pro-sovereignty process because it is clearly the antithesis of the country we want. More than ever, the social aspirations are joined with and

inseparable from the national ones, and it is essential to strengthen this link.

We want to vote because it is our right as a people and we want to vote to try to build a better country. Achieving this will not be easy. But, the debate on the right to decide and independence opens the door to trying again. Do not forget that the crisis of the regime occurs in a context of political, economic and social crisis. If Rajoy loses on November 9 and the Consultation succeeds, the Catalan people will not be the only winners; all the citizens of the Spanish State will win against an authoritarian government and its policy of cuts.

After Scotland, will it be the turn of Catalonia? Yes, many hope. And we look forward to the support of “sisters and brothers” from the rest of the state, with those from beyond the Ebro who also want another country and democracy. Solidarity from below against authoritarianism from above.

*Article in **Publico**, 20/09/2014*

# The climate justice call echoes across the globe

24 September 2014

Dozens upon dozens of contingents, representing indigenous activists, unions, students, community organizations, political groups and more, showed the broad range of people who want real action against climate change—before it’s too late. For some of the marchers, it was three hours before their part of the demonstration stepped off.

And it wasn’t just New York City that was in the streets. The main U.S. protest was one of more than 2,600 events held in over 150 countries on the same day. From India to Tanzania to South Africa to Brazil to Germany and Taiwan, people across the globe raised their voices against ecological destruction.

But this expression of dissent and determination is in stark contrast to the attitude of those who preside over the system that is causing climate change.

The demonstration in New York City was organized to issue a challenge from the streets in the run-up to a United Nations climate summit. Such



meetings have been little more than a show—with the world's most powerful governments, in particular the U.S., frustrating attempts to set substantive targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

The consequences of putting profits before the fate of the planet are becoming increasingly clear—ever more so by the month.

Meteorologists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced last week that the months of June, July and August marked the hottest summer on record for the planet as a whole. 2014 is on track to break the record for the hottest year, set in 2010.

At a solidarity demonstration held in rural Papua New Guinea, primary school students marched to a lighthouse that has become partially submerged as a result of rising sea levels. In other threatened spots across the Pacific Islands, solidarity marches calling for "Action, Not Words" had a similar message of real urgency.

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DESPITE THE grave concerns that mobilized demonstrators, the overall tone of the People's Climate March was celebratory. Many of the protesters pointed to the sheer size of the march as an achievement in itself.

The dozens of contingents spanning the march route connected various local and national struggles with the fight for climate justice across the globe. A section of the march set aside for university students stretched for blocks. Other contingents ranged from Palestinian activists to anti-capitalist and antiwar groups, immigrant groups, and even skiers and snowboarders organized under the slogan "Protect Our Winters."

There was a sizable labor contingent as well, including members of Transport Workers Union Local 100, 1199SEIU Healthcare Workers East, the New York State Nurses Association, the Communication Workers of America and many more. This marked an important step for the

climate justice movement—and hopefully a shift away from the traditional hostility to environmental issues among sections of the labor movement.

Will Johnson from Louisville, Ky., came to the march as part of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign. He explained that the police killing of Mike Brown and the resulting rebellion in Ferguson, Mo., got him involved in political activism, but he sees a connection between social justice struggles and the fight to stop climate change. "They're turning people who are middle class into the lower class, people who are lower class into the poor, and the poor into God knows what," he said.

Making the connection to Detroit, where the city has shut off water service to many impoverished residents, Johnson added, "How are you going to keep doing stuff that pollutes our air and our water—and then you are making things like our 'free' water no longer free to us. They think we're expendable, but we're all human."

Hundreds of people turned out to march in the "Palestine Bloc," including members of Adalah-NY; the International Socialist Organization; Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition; Students for Justice in Palestine; and Jewish Voice for Peace. As the march progressed, neighboring contingents took up the chants for justice for Palestine, including: "From Detroit to Palestine, stealing water is a crime!"

Hanna Moreia, a medical student, marched with Physicians for a National Health Program, which promotes a single-payer health care system for the U.S. Warning that "climate change is definitely a health care issue," she explained, "More natural disasters means more people showing up in the ER. We're seeing lots of mosquito-born tropical diseases like Dengue Fever spreading to areas that they haven't been before."

Marching behind Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein's Global Climate Convergence contingent and in front of the ecosocialists of System Change Not

Climate Change, the New York state Green Party drew in supporters from across the state for a contingent of nearly 150. Marching among them were Green candidates for governor and lieutenant governor of New York Howie Hawkins and Brian Jones. Their campaign is connecting to the desire for an electoral alternative to the status quo—in order to fight around ecological questions, among many other issues.

Mary Jo Long, who marched with the contingent, stated, "It's great to see a lot of younger people—as someone from the older generation." She explained that she was particularly concerned with opposing fracking for natural gas in New York state.

Lucille, a woman from Fort Greene in Brooklyn who also marched with the New York Greens, said she felt "a strong sense of pride" being on the march. "For the longest time," she said, "the Green Party hasn't been taken seriously—but now with the Hawkins/Jones campaign there's a strong sense that we can make progress as long as we are loud enough."

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THE SIZE and scope of the march was impressive and inspiring. But the political tone set by the leading organizers of the demonstration was flawed in important ways.

For one, organizers refused to have the march stand for specific demands—apparently out of fear of alienating more moderate and conservative participants. That left an opening for Democrats to continue to pose as a party concerned about protecting the environment, despite the fact that their pro-corporate agenda has been a main driver of climate change, both in the U.S. and at an international level.

Even President Barack Obama tweeted his support for the march—the same Barack Obama who, along with his Republican and Democratic predecessors in the Oval Office, has consistently undermined attempts at UN summits to set stricter targets for emissions reduction.

Likewise, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was welcomed to join the march, even though the demonstration was, among other things, a direct protest against the continued inaction of world leaders and the upcoming UN conference.

At the UN summit this week, Obama is expected to highlight supposed "strides" made by the U.S. in tackling climate change. According to Reuters, in advance of the upcoming summit, the White House "unveiled new executive actions and public-private partnerships with major companies to boost the use of renewable energy and target potent greenhouse gases."

Environmental activists, however, say such "partnerships" are simply a way for corporations to put a "green face" on continued pollution and exploitation of natural resources in the name of profit. This proposal is typical for a president who campaigned with the promise that he would protect the environment, but who has pushed for an "all of the above" energy policy that aims to increase extraction of fossil fuels in the U.S., including shale oil refining and fracked natural gas.

On September 16, Obama's Environmental Protection Administration quietly announced it was putting the brakes on one of the most important parts of the Obama administration's "climate plan"—by delaying the implementation of a regulation that would have set new rules cutting carbon pollution from power plants.

This regulation was supposed to be the "signature environmental accomplishment of Obama's second term," according to the Guardian. Instead—like so many other promises from Obama and the Democrats—it has been delayed until after the November election, under pressure from Republicans and industry lobbying groups demanding that the rules be withdrawn or scaled back.

The compromising message of the Democrats came through in speeches from politicians and mainstream environmental groups that were broadcasts on a sound-system on some streets. Among the marchers was New

York City's Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio, fresh off his announcement that he was committing the city to an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050—a fine-sounding goal for which there is no plan, say critics.

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ALL THIS highlights the political challenges that must be confronted if the climate justice movement is going to go forward.

But there was ample evidence among the marchers, nevertheless, of what the massive demonstration achieved. Never before has such a wide cross-section of people and organizations come together around the issue of climate change. The relationships built up during the organizing for the demonstration and during the march itself are something to build on for the future.

And the much more radical sentiment that has fired ecological activism over the past several years—in the fight to stop the Keystone XL pipeline for example, or the struggle against fracking, waged against a Democratic president and Democratic governors in some cases—could be felt all along the march.

It was also evident at events leading up to the People's Climate March—particularly the NYC Climate Convergence on September 19-20, organized by System Change Not Climate Change and the Global Climate Convergence. This event drew activists from around the U.S.—some 2,500 people registered, and hundreds more attended the numerous meetings, exceeding the expectations of organizations—to plot a course toward tackling the root cause of climate change: capitalism itself.

Attendance exceeded the expectations of many organizers. In addition to the opening and closing plenaries, which included speakers like Bolivian activist Oscar Olivera, Idle No More's Erica Violet Lee and author Naomi Klein, there were numerous sessions around a variety of topics such as "Race, Class and Climate Change" and "What is Ecosocialism?"

The panel "Water Wars: Cochabamba,

Gaza, Detroit" made powerful connections between different struggles that had conference-goers talking afterward. Oscar Olivera, for example, compared the experience of the movement against the privatization of water in Bolivia to the oppression of Palestinians. "Like Israel," he said, "multinationals use control of water to control the people."

A series of meetings highlighted indigenous struggles and gathered activists from across North America. "There are lots of questions about how do we build solidarity, and what's the relationship between folks who are fighting on the frontlines within ancestral territories and reservations and what people can do in the broader community," said activist Ragina Johnson. "But it was very successful and a big step forward for System Change Not Climate Change and the left in general."

More than 50 people turned out for a meeting on "A Green Political Alternative to the Two Parties of Capital" with Green Party candidates Howie Hawkins and Brian Jones and Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant.

Some people were also planning to participate in a September 22 called "Flood Wall Street." Under the slogan "Stop capitalism. End the climate crisis," activists plan to sit in on Wall Street and in other cities to draw attention to the fact that the "economy of the 1 Percent is destroying the planet, flooding our homes and wrecking our communities."

All this—from the march itself, to the NYC Climate Convergence, and much more besides—shows the growing determination to fight climate change and the destructive system and institutions that cause it. The mobilization in New York and elsewhere around the world showed that the fight for climate justice is more urgent than ever—and more people than ever recognize that.

Julian Guerrero and Sherry Wolf contributed to this article.

*September 22, 2014*

[Socialist Worker](#)

# Thousands of Hong Kong students hold large pro-democracy rally on the first day of class boycott

22 September 2014, by **Bai Ruixue**

The students' boycott is demanding that the authorities adopt civil nominations in the 2017 Chief Executive election, reform the Legislative Council by abolishing the functional constituencies, and apologize to HK people and take back the political reform package. In the case that the authorities refuse to fulfil these requirements they demand that Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and other leading officials should resign. In outlining their demands the Hong Kong Federation of Students has also stated that they will escalate their actions if the government does not respond to the boycott and "use the power of the people to return the power to the people".

Students from 26 higher education institutions in Hong Kong are boycotting classes. The rally this afternoon was organised by the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and, according to the organisers, an estimated 13,000 students were thought to have taken part. Students brought banners with slogans including, "Self determination for Hong Kong", "Continue non-violent struggle and fight for civil

nomination", "Resist colonization and oppose selection from the top", "Either we break our silence and let our anger erupt or we will be eliminated in silence" (from Lu Xun) and "Representative government alone is not enough, we also need to protect people's livelihoods".

At the rally student union leaders condemned the decision made by the NPC on August 31st. One student leader described how even after the end of British Colonial rule in 1997, the Hong Kong political system has just been a copy of the colonial system and has continued to serve the tycoons. The Hong Kong government's failure to implement the universal pension scheme and standard working hours was also criticised. In discussing the importance of their taking action the HKFS Chair also said that "We are not speculators, we are the guardians of destiny". Students from several different universities and academic disciplines also spoke at the rally, including several who were among the 511 people arrested taking part in the Occupy Central protest on July 2nd. Many of the speakers emphasised how they were taking part due to their

being Hong Kong citizens, their love for Hong Kong and their desire for it to achieve democracy. The rally was also addressed by a group of university lecturers who promised the students that they would continue to support them for as long as they wanted to continue their protests for democracy. Former student's union activists from different generations also spoke at the rally to show support for the protest actions being taken by the current generation of students.

The university students plan to continue the boycott of classes all week, with secondary school students also planning to join in and hold a one day class boycott on Friday. Having adopted the slogan of "boycott classes, don't boycott learning", a program of public lectures has been organised to begin from tomorrow and to take place each day this week outside government headquarters at which more than 100 academics and other supporters have volunteered to speak. Occupy Central then plans to hold another mass demonstration on October 1st.

*22 September 2014*

# Disillusionment and an explosion of workers' struggles

22 September 2014, by **Anne Dissez**

For five weeks the strike of metalworkers pitted the majority union NUMSA, which is the

metalworkers' federation of the COSATU confederation, against SEIFSA and NEASA, the two

employers' organizations in the sector. It was very hard, especially in the para-state electricity company, Eskom,

and strongly fueled an ongoing debate on the nationalization of this enterprise.

## Waves of strikes ...

The metal sector includes 10,500 companies and 300,000 workers: 200,000 of them were at different levels involved in strikes on a terrain that is all the more sensitive for the South African economy because Eskom has no longer been able, for just under 10 years, to meet the energy needs of individuals but also of businesses. Several large mines have had to stop production in recent years due to power cuts, something extremely rare in South Africa.

At the beginning of the strike, the demands put forward by NUMSA concerned mainly wage increases, 15 per cent at the opening of negotiations, 10 per cent at the finishing line, plus a housing allowance of 1,000 rand and the commitment by the employers not to have recourse to temporary work that is provided by labour brokers.

This issue was a very sensitive point of the strike. In the past, the adjustment of the labour force was done with the help of migrant workers from neighbouring countries, but especially from the Bantustans, these pseudo-republics recognized only by the apartheid regime, which made these workers foreigners in their own country. Today this is done by temp

agencies, a recent practice in South Africa and a new factor in the division that exists within the confederation.

To calm things down and reduce anger levels, the question has just been the object of an amendment to the Labour Code. In fact, a statement written in a rather wooden jargon that does not convince all the COSATU federations, in particular NUMSA, which is at the head of the revolt against the influence of the leadership of the ANC on COSATU, and which sees in this amendment to the Labour Code only the recognition of temporary work as a factor in the adjustment of the labour force.

## ...and political repercussions

The period of negotiations was marked by the intensity of the two major conflicts that have marked the social movement this year: the mining conflict in the platinum sector and the metalworkers' strike. Two events that went beyond wage demands and the living conditions of workers. They confirmed and deepened the division within COSATU over links with the ANC, but also over the politicization of the trade-union debate.

A special conference was held in mid-August, which brought together leaders from 17 COSATU federations (out of 19) joined by the general secretary of the ANC, Gwede Mantashe, the deputy general

secretary Jessie Duarte, the treasurer Zweli Mkhize and Ibrahim Patel. The subject of the meeting? The preparation of next year's COSATU congress, which is already looming as the congress of all the dangers.

The situation opened up by the election of April 2014 implies profound changes in political life. First of all, there has been a significant decline in the audience of the ANC and the strengthening of the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, which is imposing its presence in all the debates and which the ANC can no longer simply present as coming from the old (apartheid) regime. There has been the emergence of a new opposition party, EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) led by Julius Malema, the former leader of the ANC youth wing who was expelled in 2012, which, having been in existence for less than a year, won 25 seats in parliament and is making life very hard for its former comrades. Finally, there has been the explosion of workers' struggles, the biggest that South Africa has seen in its entire existence, including during the apartheid period. The alliance of COSATU and the ANC was the motor force of the anti-apartheid struggle. After 20 years of what is called democracy, it is becoming the most visible expression of disillusionment.

*This article was first published in L'Anticapitaliste, weekly paper of the NPA in France, issue 255, September 11, 2014.*

# Changing the playing field, going on the offensive: the experience of six months of Podemos

22 September 2014, by **César Castaño Ares**

Podemos' results in the recent elections to the European Parliament were, without a doubt, spectacular: close to 1,250,000 votes (8%) and 5 MEPs, making it the fourth political

force in the Spanish state, and all of this accomplished in only 129 days. However, these numbers represent just a first step on a difficult road fraught with challenges to achieve the

objectives initially posed. The success or failure of a project that began in the public arena on Friday, 17 January 2014, in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés in Madrid will depend on the



capacity of those who make up Podemos to respond to the challenges of the future, the manoeuvres of the dominant political and economic caste and the changing social and political situation.

Podemos emerged as a call, in the form of a manifesto, to “Make a move: turn indignation into political change” [42], but also to “change the playing field on which they want us to play” in the words of MEP Teresa Rodríguez. [43] The main success of the campaign carried out by Podemos in these months has been to shift the political axis away from a confrontation between left and right, in which the dominant parties were comfortably settled, to a confrontation between the “people” and the “caste”. The emergence of this new political axis would have been impossible without some of the slogans that were central in prior mobilizations: “somos los de abajo y vamos a por los de arriba”(literally “we are those on the bottom and we are coming for those on the top”) popularized in the movement of the *indignados*, and “we are the 99%”, which came from the Occupy movement in the United States. At the same time, it represents a new, more developed way to place class struggle at the centre of politics. But this is not a class struggle where the sides are sociologically and programmatically predefined, but rather a process where the construction of a collective social consciousness is the result of social and political action, of individual’s experiences in their particular life context. Finally, the change in the axis of political confrontation has allowed Podemos to present itself not as an alternative to the pre-existing left, but as an option for change confronting the political system itself: the two-party system- which the conservative Popular Party and the social democratic PSOE have built over the past decades; the pacts of the Transition- which have dominated the Spanish political system since 1978 - and more generally, politics understood as a system of agreements made between economic and political elites.

In the last three years, the majority of the Spanish population has responded to austerity policies and to the context

of social emergency in which they have been living, first in the form of the “Indignados” movement, and after, through multiple social movements, such as the anti-eviction movement [Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH)]. [44], worker and user assemblies in defence of public services such as education and healthcare, or more recently, the so-called Marches for Dignity. [45] This period of mobilizations, together with the failure of austerity policies, is resulting in a crisis of neoliberal hegemony, which is spreading throughout a large part of Europe. In the specific context of the Spanish state this is taking the form of a crisis in the political regime constructed through the pacts made during Spain’s Transition to democracy in 1977-1978. There are three main manifestations of this crisis: the development of conflicts between Spain’s different nationalities and the central state, the difficulty in resolving the problems caused by debt within the framework of the European Union and the Euro, and the discrediting of the political parties which have formed part of the government. [46]

In the window of opportunity opened by this crisis in hegemony, the challenge for Podemos is to transform this social majority against the dominant politics, which sympathizes with the PAH, the “Indignados” and the Marches for Dignity, into a political majority in favor of a constituent change that can confront the austerity policies which dominate in the European Union and the Spanish state. To achieve this, in the past electoral campaign Podemos relied on three elements, which to a large extent clash with the common practices of the pre-existing left, but which also reveal some of the initial weaknesses of the project:

- 1) The presence in the mass media of a leading figure, Pablo Iglesias-spokesperson and head of the electoral list-, able to reach the majority who are socialized through television. The centrality of a media figure in a project that has as its objective popular empowerment, has been assessed on repeated occasions, even by Pablo Iglesias himself, as an initial weakness of the project, which will have to be overcome as it

develops.

- 2) The design of a discourse focused on responding to the problems that the majority of the population considers central in the country - political corruption, the problems derived from the economic crisis, and those related to the political system and politicians-, relegating to a secondary position other issues, which should be of no less importance in the Podemos program.

- 3) The construction of a structure of popular participation at the local level, the “Circles”, not based on principles of political-ideological affinity, but on agreements of the bare minimums in the face of a situation of social emergency, which have the virtue of having included thousands of persons disenchanted with the current dominant forms of politics, but which at the same time, face the challenge of being efficient work tools without losing their diversity.

At present, Podemos is building a social consciousness that aims to reach the majority; this social consciousness has grown rapidly since the elections but has yet to attain its full potential. The main challenge we face in the near future is to turn that social consciousness into political consciousness, into agreements regarding how we must articulate and organize the political change for which Podemos was born. The minimal consensus which defines that common social consciousness is based on the core elements developed in the electoral campaign’s discourse, which has also functioned as the basis for the political articulation of the Circles. However, the challenge facing Podemos goes far beyond campaign slogans. Some answers may be inferred from the political program, while many others will have to be created anew. The challenge, in this respect, is to be able to define a political strategy for the coming period which is not based on the ideological homogenization of the project, but on open and plural debate with the social majority that has already expressed its repudiation of austerity policies.

On this point, the activity of the Circles is key in at least two ways. On



the one hand, the strength of the Circles is the only real brake on the always dangerous autonomization of public representatives with regard to those they represent, and they must be always alert to avoid decision-making being carried out by a small group of political elites. On the other hand, the Circles are the tool that ensures that debates take place at the

local level, so that they reach the broader citizenry and are not restricted to members or to the always weaker mechanisms of online participation. Whether or not Podemos' initial weaknesses can be overcome is going to depend, again, on the capacity of the Circles to develop their own participatory dynamics, local spokespersons firmly controlled by the citizenry, and strong

spaces of socialization. Such weaknesses, shared in part by all of the left, include: the dependence on high profile media figures and the typical logics of 'entertainment politics', in order to construct a political project that can bring together a social majority to break with the dominant political system and austerity policies.

# Mobilize and organize to Stop and Prevent Planet Fever!

**22 September 2014**

So it is, when planet Earth gets a fever. For the past 11,000 years, the average temperature of the Earth has been around 14°C [57.2°F]. It is now about to reach an increase of 1°C. And, if we do not take appropriate measures now to stop this fever from spreading, the forecast is that our planet will be well on its way to anywhere between 2°C to 6°C rise in temperature before the end of this century. Under such feverish conditions, life as we know it will dramatically change on planet Earth.

We have no other recourse but to take action now. Not just any action but the right action and at the right time. When, for example, a human person has a fever, we urge them to rest their body, give them a lot of liquids, prescribe the right medicine, and if the fever goes up we bring them to the hospital and try to find the underlying cause of the fever, which can range from a simple infection to life-threatening diseases like cancer.

## Right Prescriptions

In the case of a planetary fever, the right prescription requires at least 10 actions to be undertaken and applied.

1. Make immediate binding commitments – not voluntary pledges – to control planetary temperature rise to no more than

1.5°C [2.7 °F] this century by reducing global greenhouse gas emissions per year to 38 Gigatons by 2020.

2. Let the Earth rest by making binding commitments to leave more than 80% of known fossil fuel reserves under the soil and beneath the ocean floor.

3. Move away from resource extractivism by placing bans on all new exploration and exploitation of oil, bitumen sands, oil shale, coal, uranium, and natural gas including pipeline infrastructure like Keystone XL.

4. Accelerate the development and transition to renewable energy alternatives such as wind, solar, geothermal and tidal power with more public and community ownership and control.

5. Promote local production and consumption of durable goods to satisfy the fundamental needs of the people and avoid the transport of goods that can be produced locally.

6. Stimulate the transition from industrialized, export-oriented agriculture for the global supermarket to community-based production to meet local food needs based on food sovereignty.

7. Adopt and apply Zero Waste strategies for the recycling and disposal of trash and the retrofitting of buildings to conserve energy for heating and cooling.

8. Improve and expand public transportation for moving people and freight within urban centres and between cities within urban regions through efficient trains.

9. Develop new sectors of the economy designed to create new jobs that restore the balance and equilibrium of the Earth system such as climate jobs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and Earth restoration jobs.

10. Dismantle the war industry and military infrastructure in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated by warfare, and divert war budgets to promote genuine peace.

## Wrong Prescriptions

At the same time, we must also be aware that all actions are not appropriate actions and that some initiatives can worsen the situation. Perhaps our most pressing challenge is the fact that big corporations are capturing the climate agenda to make

new businesses designed to take advantage of the crises. In response, we need to send a message, loud and clear, to corporations: “Stop Exploiting the Tragedy of Climate Change!”

More specifically, we need to resist the “greening of capital” as the solution by rejecting the following policies, strategies and measures:

• The commodification, financialization and privatization of the functions of nature through the promotion of a false “green economy” agenda which places a price on nature and creates new derivative markets that will only increase inequality and expedite the destruction of nature.

• This means saying No to REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) ... No to Climate Smart Agriculture, Blue Carbon and Biodiversity offsetting – all of which are designed to create new for-profit business for corporations.

• Techno-fix “solutions” like geo-engineering, genetically modified organisms, agrofuels, industrial bioenergy, synthetic biology, nanotechnology, hydraulic fracking, nuclear projects, waste-to-energy generation based on incineration, and others.

• Mega and unnecessary infrastructure projects that do not benefit the population and are net contributors to greenhouse gasses like, mega dams, excessively huge highways, stadiums for world cups, etc.

• Free trade and investment regimes that promote trade for profit and undercut domestic labor, destroy nature, and substantially reduce the capacity of nations to define their own economic, social and environmental priorities.

## Preventative Cure

Finally, we also need to go beyond identifying right and wrong prescriptions to naming the disease that constantly causes and drives this planetary fever. If we don’t take this

step, the fever will keep coming back again and again in a much more aggressive way. We need to take stock of the roots of the disease in order to weather the storm.

Scientists have clearly traced the problem of increasing greenhouse gas emissions back to the industrial revolution 250 years ago while tracking the spurt that has taken place during the past century. From this analysis, it is clear that the industrial model of increased extraction and productivism for the profit of a few is the prime cause of the problem. We need to replace capitalism with a new system that seeks harmony between humans and nature and not an endless growth model that the capitalist system promotes in order to make more and more profit. We need a system that links climate change and human rights and provides for the protection of most vulnerable communities like migrants, and recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Mother Earth and her natural resources cannot sustain the consumption and production needs of this globalized modern industrialized society. We require a new system that addresses the needs of the majority and not of the few. To move in this direction, we need a redistribution of the wealth that is now controlled by the 1%. In turn, this requires a new definition of wellbeing and prosperity for all life on the planet under the limits and in recognition of the rights of our Mother Earth and Nature.

We urgently need to organize and mobilize in September in New York and the world to push for a process of transformation that can address the structural causes that are driving the climate crisis.

## INITIATORS

Alternatives International  
ATTAC – France  
Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo – La Via Campesina (CLOC-LVC)  
Corporate Europe Observatory  
Ecologistas en Acción  
ETC Group  
Fairwatch – Italy

Focus on the Global South  
Fundación Solón – Bolivia  
Global Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power and end TNCs’ impunity  
Global Forest Coalition  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance  
Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) – Nigeria  
Indigenous Environmental Network  
La Via Campesina  
Migrants Rights International  
No-REDD Africa Network  
OilWatch International  
Polaris Institute – Canada  
SENTRO – Philippines  
Thai Climate Justice Working Group (TCJ)  
Transnational Institute

## ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS

Academia para o Desenvolvimento das Comunidades Rurais (ADECRU), Mozambique  
Action Jeunesse pour le Développement (AJED-Congo)  
ActionAid  
Adéquations, France  
ADENY, France  
AFRICANDO, Gran Canaria, España  
Aitec-IPAM, France  
Alianza politica sector de mujeres, Guatemala  
Alliance for Democracy, US  
Alofa, Tuvalu  
Alter Equo  
Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), South Africa  
Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance Against Mining) – Philippines  
Amigos da Terra Brasil – FoE Brazil  
Amigos de la Tierra América Latina y el Caribe (ATALC)  
Amigos de la Tierra – FoE Spain  
Amigu di Tera – FoE Curaçao  
Amis de la Confédération Paysanne  
Alsace  
Amis de la Terre France  
Aniban ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (AMA) – Pilipinas  
Aprilia in Movimento  
Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales, México  
Asamblea Permanente del Comahue por el Agua (A.P.C.A.) de Neuquén, Argentina  
Assembly of the Poor, Thailand  
Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Asia-Pacific Solidarity Coalition (APSOC)	Centre for Civil Society, Durban, South Africa	Earth Law Center, US
Asociación Argentina de Abogados Ambientalistas (AAdeAA)	Center for Earth Energy & Democracy, US	East Africa Climate Change Network
Asociación aurora vivar, Peru	Center for Encounter and active Non-Violence, Austria	ECA Watch - Austria
Asociación Catalana para el Agua y el Ambiente (ASCA), Catalunya, Spain	Centre for National-Democracy Studies, Indonesia	Echoes of Silence, United Kingdom
Asociación Civil Arbol de Pie, Bariloche - Argentina	Centre for 21st Century Issues (C21st), Nigeria	Ecohermanas
Asociación de Pobladores del Departamento de La Paz (ASPODEPAZ)	Cercle Modesto Cugnolio, Italia	EcoNexus
Asociación humanidad libre, Peru	CESTA - FoE El Salvador	Ecos del Silencio Nicaragua
Asociación Indígena Ambiental - AIA	CETRI - Centre tricontinental	Ecomujer Germany, Germany
Asociación Regional Centroamericana para el Agua y el Ambiente (ARCA), Costa Rica	Climate and Capitalism, Canada	Ecuador decide
Association For Promotion Sustainable Development Hisar India	Climate Justice Alliance (US)	Ecumenical Advocacy Network, Philippines
Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le Développement Durable de Bizerte - APEDDUB	Coal-free central luzon movement, Philippines	Effet de serre toi-même, France
Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP)	Coalition nationale Malgache pour l'Education Pour Tous - CONAMEPT	Emmaüs International
Association pour la défense des droits de l'eau et de l'assainissement, Sénégal	Coalition pour la Protection du Patrimoine Génétique Africain (COPAGEN)	End Ecocide on Earth
Associazione Marco Mascagna	COECOCEIBA - FoE Costa Rica	Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, US
Athens SAVEGREEKWATER, Greece	Col·lectiu RETS, Catalunya, Spain	Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria
ATTAC Argentina	Colectivo VientoSur, Chile	Earth in Brackets
ATTAC Austria	Collectif 07 Stop aux Gaz et Huiles de Schiste, France	Farmworker Association of Florida, US
ATTAC/CADTM Maroc	Collectif citoyen les Engraineurs, France	Fédération Artisans du Monde, France
ATTAC Germany	Collectif pour le triangle de Gonesse, France	Federación de Estudiantes del Perú
ATTAC Hellas	Collectif Stop aux Hydrocarbures extrêmes (38), France	Federación nacional de Trabajadores del Agua Potable y Alcantarillado del Perú - FENTAP
ATTAC Ireland	Comitato Abruzzese per la Difesa dei Beni Comuni, Italia	Finance & Trade Watch
ATTAC Italia	Comité de Derechos Humanos de Base de Chiapas Digna Ochoa, Chiapas, México	FÁS NUA, Ireland
ATTAC Japan	Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine, Canada	Foro Ciudadano de Participación - FOCO, Argentina
ATTAC Poland	Common Frontiers	Fondation Sciences Citoyennes, France
ATTAC Spain	Confédération paysanne, France	Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy
ATTAC Togo	Conseil pour la Terre des Ancêtres, Democratic Republic of the Congo	Foreste per Sempre, Italia
Bangladesh Agricultural Farm Labour Federation (BAFLF)	Consejo de Defensa de la Patagonia, Chile	Fórum Mudanças Climáticas e Justiça Social, Brasil
Beyond Copenhagen Collective, India	Cooperativa de Producción, Trabajo y Servicios Múltiples La Union Integral (COOPUNINTE), República Dominicana	Forum per i beni comuni e l'economia solidale del Friuli Venezia Giulia - Italy
Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha (India peoples science campaign), India	Coordination Climat et Justice Sociale de Genève, Suisse	Forum Solidarida Peru
Biofuelwatch, UK/US	Critical Information Collective	France Libertés - la Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, France
Biowatch South Africa	Culture and Ecology (ICE)-Kenya	Franciscans International
Bizi! - Pays Basque	Democracy Center, Bolivia	Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular de Honduras
Border Agricultural Workers Project	DIÁ LOGO 2000 - JUBILEO SUR ARGENTINA	Frente nacional por la vida y soberanía (FRENVIDAS), Peru
Brigada Cimarrona Sebastian Lemba, Republica Dominicana	Dichiariamo Illegale la Povertà (DIP), Italy	Freshwater Action Network (FAN)
Campaign for a Life of Dignity for All (KAMP)	Dimensioni Diverse - Milano	Freshwater Action Network America del Sur (FANAS)
Campaign for Peace and Democracy	Diverse Voices and Action for Equality, Fiji	Freshwater Action Network - Central America (FANCA)
Campaña de Afectados por Repsol-Repsolmata, Catalunya		Freshwater Action Network - Mexico (FANMex)
CEEweb for Biodiversity		Freshwater Action Network South Asia (FANSA)
CENSAT agua viva - FoE Colombia		Fresh Eyes - People to People Travel, UK
Centro de Estudios para la Gobernabilidad y Democracia - CEGODEM		Friche En Ville, France
Centre for alternative technology, UK		Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Friends of the Earth Malta	KFEM (Korea Federation for Environmental Movement) - FoE Korea	América Latina - Asociación Paz con Dignidad
Friends of the Earth Sierra Leone	Kilusang Maralita sa Kanayunan (KILOS KA), Philippines	Oceanium Togo
Friends of the Earth Sweden	KRuHA (people's coalition for the right to water), Indonesia	Oltre La Crescita, Italy
Fundación Mundubat, España	La Belle Cause	Oregina di Genova, Italy
Garjan.org, Nepal	La Nature en Ville, France	Osmonde XXI, France
Générations Futur, France	Landless Peoples Movement South Africa	Otros Mundos Chiapas - Amigos de la Tierra México
Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature	Ligue Internationale des Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté	Pachamama Alliance, US
Global Exchange	LILAK - Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights, Philippines	Pakistan rural workers social welfare organization (PRWSWO)
Globalization Watch Hiroshima, Japan	Maison de la Nature et de l'Environnement "la Porcherie" (MNE.P), Democratic Republic of the Congo	Pambasang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan - National Rural Women Coalition - Philippines
Global Justice Ecology Project, US	Marcha mundial de las mujeres, Peru	PAPDA - Haiti
Global Social Justice - Belgium	Marcha mundial de las mujeres macro region norte	Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ)
GRAIN	Maudesco - FoE Mauritius	Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM)
Green Cross France et Territoires	Medical Mission Sisters, US	Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático
GroundWork, Friends of the Earth, South Africa	Medio Ambiente y Sociedad, Mexico	Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo (PIDHDD)
Grupo Carta de Belém - Brasil	MELCA, Ethiopia	Plataforma Rural, Spain
Gruppo d'Acquisto Solidale Il Melograno Associazione di Siena (GAS)	Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM), Philippines	Policy Alert, Nigeria
Grupo de Estudios Ambientales (GEA), Mexique	Mindanao Peaceweavers (MPW), Philippines	Programa de Extensión "Por una nueva economía, humana y sustentable" de la carrera de Comunicación Social de la UNER, Argentina
Grupo de Solidaridad-Arenal (GRUDESA) - NICARAGUA	Migrant Rights Council of Nepal	Programa FEES del CLAI
Grupo de Trabajo de Cambio Climático y Justicia (GTCCJ) de Bolivia	Mother Earth Action Co-operative Ltd, Canada	Public Services Labor Independent Confederation (PSLINK) Philippines
Human Rights Ambassador for Salem-News.com, UK	Mouvement de la Paix, France	Quaker Earthcare Witness, US
Humanitarian Group for Social Development (HGSD), Lebanon	Mouvement pour une Alternative Non-violente	Rebrip, Brasil
ICCA Consortium	Mouvement Utopia, France	Red de Cooperacion Amazonica - REDCAM
IDEASforus Togo	Movement Generation, US	Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad, Costa Rica
ILLA centro de educación y comunicación, Peru	Movement no coke high lazio	Red educacion popular entre mujeres (REPEM)
Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID)	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, México	Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE)
Institut Européen de Recherche sur la Politique de l'Eau (IERPE)	Movimiento Madre Tierra - Amigos de la Tierra Honduras	Redes - Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy	Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano	Red nacional genero y economia, Mexico
Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program, US	Movimiento por il lavoro i diritti l'ambiente	Réseau international CADTM
Instituto de Estudios sobre Desarrollo y Cooperación Internacional del PaAs Vasco	MST-Italia	Réseau Femmes Rurales
Insurrectas Autónomas, Honduras	Mujeres de negro contra la guerra, Spain	Réseau Féministe Â« Ruptures Â»
International Institute of Climate Action and Theory	Mujeres para el dialogo, Mexico	Réseau International Enda Tiers Monde
International Network on Migration and Development	Natural Bonder, South Africa	Rete Clima
IRPAD/Afrique, Bamako (MALI)	Nepalese youth for Climate Action (NYCA)	Rettet den Regenwald, Germany
Jóvenes Ante la Emergencia Nacional, México	NOAH - Friends of the Earth Denmark	RIM Youth Climate Movement
Jubileo Sur/Américas	Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition, US	Robin des Toits, France
Jubilee South Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (JSAPMDD)	Noviciado franciscano de la provincia de San Pabl Apostol, Colombia	Rural Coalition, US
Justiça Ambiental - FoE Mozambique	No Vox International	Sanctuary Asia, India
Justicia Climatica, Republica Dominicana	Nuclear-free bataan movement, Philippines	Serve - Net (Service Education Research Volunteers and pro-Environment Network)
Kalpavriksh - Environment Action Group, India	Observatorio de Multinacionales en	SERR - Servicios Ecumenicos para
Keep Ireland Fracking Free, Ireland		



Reconcilacion y Reconstruccion  
 Share The World's Resources, UK  
 Siembra, Mexico  
 Sobrevivencia/Friends of the Earth-Paraguay  
 Social Movements for an Alternative Asia (SMAA)  
 Sociedad Civil Amigos del Viento  
 MeteorologÃa Ambiente Desarrollo, Uruguay  
 Sociedade Sinhá Laurinha - Slau, Brazil  
 SOLdePaz.Pachakuti, Asturias, Spain  
 Solidaires - France  
 South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, Durban, South Africa  
 Stop Fessenheim, France  
 Stop nucléaire Besançon, France  
 Stop gaz de schiste Anduze (30), France  
 SUMPAY Mindanao, Philippines  
 Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN), Uganda  
 Syndicat Autonome des Travailleurs de la Sénégalaise des Eaux (SAT-SDE)  
 Swarna Hansa Foundation, Sri Lanka  
 System Change not Climate Change, Canada & US

Taca Agir pour le climat  
 Terra Nuova  
 Thai Poor Act, Thailand  
 The Corner House  
 The International Grail Movement  
 The Woodlandleague, Ireland  
 Third World Health Aid, Belgium  
 Timberwatch Coalition  
 Touche pas À mon schiste, France  
 TripleA Marbella, Spain  
 Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development  
 Umphilo waManzi, South Africa  
 Union des associations pour la création d'un PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL La BRIE et les deux MORIN  
 Université Nomade, France  
 Urgenci Community Supported Agriculture network Europe  
 Virage-énergie Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France  
 VOICE, Bangladesh  
 Vrouwenraad, Belgium  
 WARBE, Bangladesh  
 WomanHealth Philippines  
 World March of Women  
 World March of Women - Philippines  
 World Rural Forum

Youth Action, Nepal  
 Young Environment Leaders League (YELL), Philippines  
 Young Leaders Initiative - CAR, Philippines  
 Young People We Care - YPWC, Ghana  
 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - WILPF US  
 World Rainforest Movement  
 ADHERING POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS  
 Mouvement des objecteurs de croissance MOC  
 EELV Les Jalles 33160 Saint Médard en Jalles  
 Europe Ecologie les Verts des Landes  
 l'Altra Europa con Tsipras - Comitato di Padova  
 Comitato saronnese "L'Altra Europa con Tsipras"  
 Jeunes Verts Togo  
 The Brooklyn Greens/Green Party of NY  
 Labor Party-Philippines

*September 16 2014*

[Climate Spacehttp://climatespace201...](http://climatespace201...)

## Project fear denies Scottish independence

**19 September 2014, by Alan Thornett**

The whole of the Westminster establishment and the three 'main' political parties were lined up against a Yes vote. To these we can add virtually the whole of the media, the banks, the supermarkets and the City of London. The military establishment entered the debate around in defence of Trident. They have managed to prevail by exploiting fear, intimidation and appeals to every kind of reaction and conservatism over the most remarkable grassroots campaign ever seen in these islands. Internationally they enlisted support from Barack Obama to the President of the EU.

Labour politicians, led by a re-emerged Gordon Brown, were even more forceful than Tories in pushing this intimidation towards the voters.

Until a week or so ago, when support rose dramatically for the Yes campaign, and blind panic set in, the Westminster elites had expected a walkover. They didn't even bother with contingencies. When Hammond was asked why there was no contingency to move Trident he said it was because the Government considered the possibility of a Yes vote as a 'very low probability'. It was a statement that not only reflected the divide between Westminster and Scotland but the contempt with which the Tory leadership regarded that divide.

The Yes campaign should be congratulated and celebrated, despite the result. It generated a huge national debate that rose to ever-higher political levels as the

referendum date approached. This is expressed in the remarkable statistics with registration at 97% and the turnout at 84.6%. This is a clear sign that when real change is on offer people will engage with it and grasp the opportunity to shape their own destiny.

The Yes campaign was not based on crude nationalism or anti-English sentiment, but on the idea of a different kind of Scotland with new level of political democracy and involvement. It was based on the idea that people living in Scotland should rule Scotland and that the long period of English dependency should come to an end. It was based on the idea that they should not have Tory governments imposed on them that they did not vote for, and which had

virtually no support in Scotland.

It reflected resentment in Scotland that a range of Tory policies from student fees, benefit cuts, especially for the sick and disabled, the bedroom tax, tax cuts for the rich, and foreign wars were imposed on them by people with no support in Scotland.

The strength of the Yes campaign is also expressed in the enthusiasm with which 16 and 17 year olds took to the campaign and the debate having been given the right to vote for the first time in the referendum. It was expressed in the remarkable energy that gripped the Yes camp in the final weeks of the campaign.

On the morning of the result Labour politicians, even more than Tories, were talking about this vote settling the issue of independence for a very long time and even for good. The critical mass of support for independence, however, has increased dramatically in the course of this campaign and that is unlikely to change. People in Scotland have spent months debating and defending the idea of independence and are more committed to it than they have ever been.

It is not surprising that it is Labour politicians are so vehement this morning. Labour has been heavily damaged by running a shoulder-to-shoulder campaign with the Tories. The biggest Yes votes were in the strongest Labour industrial (or de-industrialised) heartlands of Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, West Dumbarton and Dundee.

The Scottish Labour Party has suffered a serious fragmentation and is likely to be in trouble particularly when it comes to the next Holyrood election in 2016 when the SNP will be seeking another majority and to replace Labour as the main left of centre social democratic party in Scotland. Those tens of thousands of Labour voters who supported the Yes campaign and were attacked by Labour for doing so may well then stick with the SNP. Particularly since a big vote for the SNP in that election would be the best way to reignite the issue of independence.

Nor should it be assumed that the Westminster elite will now deliver the extra powers to Holyrood just because they have signed a pledge on fake parchment that they will do so. This is already being cast into doubt by Tory back benchers who intend to oppose it and coalition ministers who don't want it.

Cameron knows that to do so will strengthen the call for independence in Wales. Leanne Wood, as the leader of Plaid Cymru, has played a good role in supporting the Yes campaign in Scotland, is already making it clear that she is not prepared to see Wales left behind as Scotland discusses more powers.

It also raises the issue of the huge demographic deficit in Britain as a whole as one of the most centralised countries in Europe. It raises issues from the alienation of the Northern Cities and the Northern regions from Westminster and the South East and it raises once again the issue of First-

Past-the-Post electoral system which means that most votes don't count when it comes to an election.

It is clear from the first statements Cameron has made on this that he is more interested in looking over his shoulder to UKIP, to English nationalism, and his right-wing back benchers that fulfilling a pledge with Scotland. He is far more interested in simply stopping Scottish MPs voting on English issues, which would be popular with Nigel Farage, than looking to any kind of new constitutional settlement for England.

This poses a problem for Labour because the pledge was made first and foremost, not by Cameron, but by Gordon Brown. Cameron's main aim now is to turn clock back on this whole development, but it won't be easy. The Yes campaign comprehensively won the political debate. Many of the 1.6 million who voted for independence may well remain politically engaged and will not take kindly to backsliding on promises or new attacks from Westminster.

The radicalisation of the Yes campaign could well translate into a new radicalism in Scottish politics. This could also have its reflection throughout Britain. Demands for more devolution and democratic reform are inevitable. Westminster has not represented Northern English cities and Northern Regions any more than it has represented Scotland.

Despite the defeat things can never go back to where they were. Business as usual is not an option.

## Left activists in Ukraine are uniting into a new party

### 18 September 2014

On September 6-7, 2014 a conference "The war in Ukraine and policies of the Left," was held in the Ukrainian House, supported by the Rosa

Luxemburg Foundation. It brought together about 100 participants from across Ukraine and abroad. It was stated that the war in the Donbas

benefits only the ruling classes and imperialists of the West and East. Anti-social and anti-democratic changes have been given a new

impetus. Social problems continue to be resolved at the expense of the workers.

Stopping the war and extending people's rights are possible only by the creation of a left-wing political force. Details of such an association were discussed on September 7th in a session devoted to the representation of the workers movement. The political party "Socialist Ukraine" is ready to provide a basis for the consolidation of the workers. Now, filling this project with revolutionary content depends upon all willing participants from the Left and trade union activists. (Party leader Volodymyr Hoshovsky is prepared to agree to changes in the name, charter and programme, as well as to re-election of the leadership). Also participating in the discussion were representatives of the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine in Kryvyi Rih.

A draft programme and statute were presented. The programme includes transformations that would help overcome the crisis in Ukraine, as well as reducing the domination of the oligarchs over the political process. The statute is based on the following principles:

- Financial independence (of the party) and a developed internal democracy;
- Full financial transparency (online publication of revenues) and limits to contributions to party funds. Complete financial independence from the

oligarchs and businesses;

- Minimising the delegation of authority to the centre, and creation of a collective leadership of the Party;
- taking decisions on all questions by electronic voting;
- Creation of different factions as the guarantee of ideological diversity within an overall socialist and democratic trajectory for the party.

Opinions were expressed that the proposed draft programme is not much more radical than the programme of the Socialist Party, and that the statute - reproduces some atavisms of the Brezhnev era. At the same time, some participants in the discussion said that a party with broad democratic mechanisms will be unable to respond quickly to events. In turn, the initiators of the organizing committee said that together we can overcome all these problems: to supplement the programme with radical strategic goals, to minimize the influence of central (party) organs and to encourage grassroots activity.

The conference formed an organising committee whose aim is to renew the party "Socialist Ukraine". Activists from different cities of Ukraine (Kyiv, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Zhitomir, etc.) have expressed a desire to join the organising committee. The next meeting will be held on 18 October in Kryvyi Rih.

We invite everyone to join in the work of the organizing committee (if you

wish to join write to the email address: [zpopovych@gmail.com](mailto:zpopovych@gmail.com) ). Our immediate plans concern working on the programmatic documents and the statutes, as well as holding discussions about them in the capital and the regions.

Earlier it was decided not to participate in pre-term parliamentary elections since the current electoral system allows only the rich to win. However, we will hold campaign events, persuading citizens of the need for their own political force. Temporarily, until the completion of the registration process, we will use the resources of the Assembly for Social Revolution, including its site [REV.ORG.UA](http://REV.ORG.UA) for informing people about our actions.

This initiative has been supported by the human rights activist Volodymyr Chemerys, the writer Artem Chapai, the initiator of the movement for the cancellation of the external debt of Ukraine, lawyer Anatoli Bashlovka, a researcher at the Centre for Social and Labour Studies Volodymyr Ishchenko, head of the NGO "Alterra" Ihor Panyuta, culture and art critic Lisa Babenko and others.

The organising committee has been joined of the socialist union "Left Opposition", "Assembly for Social revolution", the movement "Against the Current" and other initiatives.

September 14, 2014  
[Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#)

## "A radically different alternative"

### 18 September 2014

**What is your view on the present political conjuncture, in the run-up to the presidential elections?**

**Luciana Genro:** Elections are always a very important moment, a time that encourages discussion on the future of the country. We are in a situation in which the three candidates who are the media favourites (Dilma Rousseff,

Marina Silva and Aécio Neves) represent the same economic model, one that is rooted in the financialization of the economy, the domination of the banks and of agribusiness.

**What do you think are the main problems and issues in Brazil today?**

**Luciana Genro:** The main problem is that we have an economy that is oriented to the payment of the interest on the public debt. Brazil is making a huge fiscal effort. Over 50 per cent of tax collected comes from workers who earn up to three times the minimum wage, and a large part of these resources is used for the payment of

interest on the debt. Forty per cent of our budget is used for this purpose, by a budgetary effort, while the primary surplus (the positive balance before interest payments) is 90 billion reais a year, which includes the Union, the federal states and the municipalities.

As a result, the entire economy is facing the payment of interest on the debt that only benefits a very small number of people. This represents approximately five thousand creditors (those who hold the debt, especially domestic holders), since the majority of the debt is held by banks. It is they who benefit from such an economic logic. The insufficiency of public services is largely due to this. In the area of health, for example, we have a structural lack of resources, a lack of doctors, hospitals, infrastructure. So the main problem really is all this tax effort that is made, for the benefit of a handful of speculators.

From this observation, there are solutions that can be proposed. The first of these is the need for an audit of the public debt, because there are a number of irregularities, which have already been identified by the Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry (CPI) on the debt, which was set up on the initiative of a member of the Federal Chamber, Ivan Valente (Socialism and Freedom Party - PSOL - São Paulo). The CPI showed that the question of the origin of the debt could be discussed, that there was a collection of interest on liabilities for interest (which is unconstitutional, according to the Brazilian Supreme Court itself) and that the decisions on interest rates were taken by the Central Bank on the basis of the opinion of supposedly independent analysts, all of whom were in reality linked to the financial markets.

All the irregularities signaled by the CPI should be further investigated as part of an audit, which would, in our view, lead to the cancellation of a significant portion of the debt, not least because twenty years ago Brazil produced a primary balance for the payment of the debt and this debt is constantly increasing, now reaching some 330,222.28 million dollars. Our first step would be the suspension of payment and an audit to verify whether we really still owe something.

Moreover, there should be a change in the tax structure of the country, a structure that is extremely unfair because it is the "middle class" and the poorest layers who make almost all the effort, whereas the multi-millionaires and the banks pay very little tax.

### **What is the importance of the 2014 elections for the left and what role can they, or should they, play in this contest?**

**Luciana Genro:** Elections are very important, because that is when we manage to break through even slightly the media blockade of which our opinions are victims. Thus, there is free access to the media which, although very unevenly distributed, enables us to show that we are there. Coverage by the traditional media, although it is still very unfair and also distributed unevenly, gives us a space, whereas these media do not normally provide a platform for the proposals and opinions of the left.

Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in uniting with the PSTU (United Socialist Workers' Party) and the PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) parties for which I have very great respect, so as to form together a left opposition. We have failed to build this unity at the national level; it exists only in some states.

Yet despite the fact that we are separate, we have the same discourse of denunciation of the present economic policy, its unjust nature and the concentration of wealth, which are characteristics of the model established by the government of FHC (Fernando Henrique Cardoso) and pursued by the PT (Workers' Party).

### **So you do not consider that these representatives of the left have lost a great opportunity, opened by the massive protests in 2013 (and also in 2014), to stand in this election with greater political and social influence?**

**Luciana Genro:** Of course I do! So much so that when I still had the opportunity of putting myself forward as a candidate for the vice presidency, a running mate for Senator Randolfe Rodrigues (the first name suggested

by the PSOL as presidential candidate, who provoked strong opposition], I declined, in order to ensure the unity of the PSOL. It was of course after an internal debate that we took this decision. I declined to be a candidate for the vice presidency in order to ensure the unity of the PSOL, so that the PSTU and the PCB could come and make up the list and that they could not claim that the PSOL was showing itself to be "hegemonist" by wanting to occupy the top two places (as candidates for the presidency and the vice-presidency) on the list, which would have made the alliance unsustainable.

Unfortunately, they did not accept the offer of the PSOL at that point and preferred to stand their own candidates, positions that I respect, understand and regret. However, even separately, I think we are united in the same struggle and that it is not because of an electoral process in which we have different candidates that we will be not be together in the struggles, the social movements and the battles that are bound to take place after the elections.

### **If we consider the most fundamental aspects of the PSOL, how does the party fit into this scenario and on what programme is it going to stand in these 2014 elections?**

**Luciana Genro:** The PSOL seeks to present itself as an alternative radically different to the three candidates that are frequently seen on television. So this is a great opportunity for us to show that we have an alternative proposal to what predominates in the political and electoral process due to extremely unfair coverage by the mainstream media.

The PSOL positions itself as a left opposition party. We came into existence because we saw that it was necessary to continue to defend the causes that had been abandoned by the PT. I was expelled from the PT (in 2003) for not having agreed to bend down before the pragmatism that wanted us to give up the demands of the left in order to join forces with figures like Sarney and Collor and implement an economic policy



consistent with the interests of the financial markets. I am moreover proud of this expulsion, which attests to the fact that I did not give in, I did not sell out, I did not abandon my political ideas in exchange for power.

We also present a proposal that is structurally distinct from what the government is proposing, namely the conservative "continuism" of the PT. This is characterized by social liberalism, that is to say, a liberal economic policy which, through some wealth distribution programmes, claims to have a vaguely social coloration. Such redistributive programmes do nothing to change the situation, since all the choice morsels at the feast remain in the hands of big business. Nor do we accept the conservative retreat represented by Aécio and the PSDB (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy), who is slipping back into the mania for privatization of the toucans (the toucan is the symbol of Brazilian social democracy), going so far as to build an airport with public money so that he could give it to his own family!

Finally, we do not accept either the programme of Marina Silva, who claims to represent the "new politics", but who has, for example, a group of traditional advisers to coordinate her programme of government and who takes advice from economists historically linked to the PSDB to propose measures that are very close to the agenda of this party, such as for example the autonomy of the Central Bank.

So our proposal is radically opposed to the logic of the three economic programmes that all three candidates are defending. The principal measure is the debt audit and the suspension of payment of the debt. We also want a revolution in the structure of taxation; a tax increase on banks and big companies and fortunes would relieve the middle class and the workers.

It is necessary to put the BNDES

(Brazilian Economic and Social Development Bank) at the service of micro and small enterprises, that is to say, of economic and social development, as indicated by the very name of the bank, rather than remaining at the service of large oligopolies and monopolies, as we have seen in the case of Friboi (the main Brazilian agribusiness multinational) which received 7 billion reais to buy smaller companies (installations of refrigeration for meat) and to further concentrate the industry.

It is a proposal that will change structurally the economy. And also politics. We advocate greater emphasis on direct participation by the people, through a mobilization of the population that would force Congress (both houses) to approve measures in the interest of the people, also through the use of plebiscites and referendums so that people can express themselves more directly on the main political issues in Brazil.

It is also necessary to promote a change in the political and electoral system, to end private funding of campaigns and to democratize the media by making it impossible for them to belong, as they do now, to big politically powerful groups. We need to develop small-scale media, community radio stations ... It is necessary to democratize access to television and to prevent a few families from completely controlling it, as is the case today.

Land reform is also fundamental, not only to take into consideration the rural population, but also to improve life in the cities by increasing the supply of healthier and cheaper food.

Finally, we have a whole series of changes which mean greater investment in what really interests the people, based on the logic that it is necessary to oppose certain interests. And these interests that must be

challenged are those of big business, of the banks and the multinationals, those who are privileged by the present economic model.

**Do you think that in the framework of these elections and in the context described here, the debate opened up by the PSOL and by the left in general will make itself heard and in one way or another make a difference?**

**Luciana Genro:** I think we are managing to do that, to some extent. Despite all the difficulties and inequities of the electoral process, in terms of campaign structure, money, time and TV coverage, I think we are managing to have an audience with a significant sector of the population and especially with young people, who are quite eager for an alternative to traditional politics.

I see it as a process of accumulation. The month of June 2013 showed that there was a negation of old-style politics. The possibility of building a new kind of politics is becoming possible, because the negation of the old is the first step towards building the new. However, such building is a process.

Often we encounter obstacles in the middle of the road. The candidacy of Marina Silva is one of those obstacles, because it expresses a symbol that does not correspond to reality. The problem is that there exists among people who are refusing the old politics an important sector that has illusions in the candidacy of Marina, for the very reason that she has high visibility in the media which very much like candidacies coming from the system, but pretending to question this system, as is the case with her.

Anyway, we are accumulating strength. And I think that the PSOL will have a good election and that we will come out of it stronger to continue to lead the social struggles, struggles that are the best instrument to achieve real change in society.

# Open the borders now!

**17 September 2014, by David Finkel**

Why has this happened? It's the legacy, first, of the much-praised Ronald Reagan whose administration sponsored Central American military dictatorships, death squads and contra armies in the 1980s. Civil wars substantially shattered those societies.

This crime was compounded by the Reagan gang's insane "war on drugs," which effectively put the multi-billion dollar drug trade in the hands of violent criminal syndicates (and brought crack cocaine into U.S. inner cities). Many of the brutal gangs terrorizing young people in El Salvador today actually formed in Los

Angeles by refugee youth from shattered families and brought when they returned home.

Let's not deny the Clintons their share of the credit. The North America Free Trade Agreement and subsequently another for Central America (NAFTA and CAFTA) largely destroyed indigenous agriculture and the livelihood for farmers, especially in El Salvador and Honduras. Finally, credit the Obama administration for enabling and endorsing the 2009 Honduran coup and subsequent savage repression.

Amidst the social catastrophe, brutal armed gangs prey on these countries' young people, whose families send them on the desperate road north to escape slavery or death at home.

The crisis at the U.S. border is the harvest of genocide, counterrevolution and "free trade." Every one of these asylum seekers is entitled, at minimum, to a full hearing in their own language, with due process and effective representation. In reality, the borders need to be opened to them and a full moratorium on deportations is necessary "now."

# Chicago Teachers Union President Launches Campaign for Mayor

**16 September 2014, by Dan La Botz**

Karen Lewis, the President of the Chicago Teachers Union, while she has not formally announced her candidacy, has clearly launched her campaign to oust the current Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. Emanuel, who formerly served as President Barack Obama's Chief-of-Staff, has won the reputation of "Mayor 1%" for his pro-corporate programs. In September 2012 Lewis led the CTU's 30,000 members out on strike against Emanuel's educational reform policies that had detrimentally affected teachers, parents, and students. It was an inspiring strike that brought her union a partial victory but failed to stop a number of public school closings.

Now Lewis is back again to challenge Emanuel in the political arena. The candidacy of a union leader such as

Lewis in a big city election is a novelty in contemporary American politics. Will she be able to trounce him? And if so, what will it mean for the labor left that she leads and for Chicago's working class?

The still unofficial campaign is up and running. The Chicago Teachers Union House of Delegates [47], a body of hundreds, has endorsed her. She has an exploratory committee [<http://abc7chicago.com/politics/kar...>] that has recruited volunteers who are now out collecting the 12,500 signatures she will need to get on the ballot. She has personally contributed a \$40,000 "loan" to her own campaign [48]. The American Federation of Teachers has promised one million dollars for her campaign if she runs [49]. She has scheduled a meeting with African American

businessmen [50] and has begun a series of meetings throughout the city with teachers, police officers, firefighters and public school parents [51].

For 22 years, Karen Lewis was a high school teacher who taught chemistry in the Chicago Public School. An African American woman who converted to Judaism, she has been an outspoken critic of Emanuel's policies. She blames Emanuel for closing libraries, police stations, mental health clinics and schools. "If you take the institutions out of the neighborhood, what are you left with? This has got to stop, and it will not stop if we continue to have the same kind of top down autocratic leadership that does not listen to the people," says Lewis. We are in an unsustainable death spiral if we

continue this notion of subtraction.”

The mayoral race is a non-partisan election, so Karen Lewis will not be a candidate of any political party. She will, however, be attempting to win the support of the so-called “lake front liberals” or “progressive Democrats,” a middle class constituency largely organized in the Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization (IVI-IPO). She will also be attempting to win the support of Chicago’s African American economic elite, historically the most important black business group in the country. Though black business has seen some decline, African Americans in Chicago own some 50,000 businesses. As the corporations have consolidated their hold over American politics, both middle class liberals and black businesspeople have found their options narrowing. Can a teacher union president and her working class constituency provide leadership to such groups—or will they lose their character in such a coalition?

Lewis’ chances, at least at this stage, look good. An August 14 poll by the conservative Chicago Tribune found that if the election were held on that date, Lewis would defeat Emanuel by 43 to 39 percent with 14 percent undecided [52]. Emanuel who had a 59 percent approval rating among white voters is now down to 44 percent with the same group, while 60

percent of black voters disapprove of his performance. As an African American, Lewis can expect to capitalize on that discontent among black voters. She will be a black woman candidate and no doubt the black women’s candidate, a tremendous organizing force in African American communities. Many working class voters of all ethnicities will see this as a chance to knock down the arrogant Rahm a peg or two.

## What Is the Balance of Forces?

While the CTU’s inspiring 2012 strike brought a partial victory to teachers and inspired other teacher groups throughout the country, it also revealed that virtually no other major union in the city was prepared to follow its example and stand up and fight back against the powers-that-be. By and large, Chicago’s labor unions remain completely tied to the Democratic Party, and it is unlikely that many will break away to support Lewis. Still, even if, as seems very likely, the union leaders stay the course with Emanuel, some and perhaps many of their members could be expected to vote for Lewis.

Chicago’s major African American and Latino organizations, most of them nominally non-partisan not-for-profits,

have also been pillars of the Democratic Party establishment. Similarly with women’s and LGBT organizations. All of these groups have historically feared that organizing or voting against the Democratic Party would lead to political and financial punishment. Lewis and her supporters will be challenged to find the methods and program that can break these groups from the machine. While it is unlikely she can move the leaders, will she be able to win away the base of these organizations?

What about the neighborhood? The CTU created an Independent Political Organization that subsequently formed an alliance with a number of Chicago community groups and created United Working Families as an organization to campaign around neighborhood issue. United Working Families hired a Democratic Party operative, Kristen Crowell who had organized voter campaigns in neighboring Wisconsin. Crowell now plays the central role in shaping Lewis’ political message. Will Lewis’s campaign become simply a liberal or progressive Democrat affair, or will she propose a program, a strategy for struggle for the Chicago working class organized around workers’ needs for education, health care, more equitable taxes, \$15 an hour and full employment? Time will tell—but our own organizing efforts could make the difference.

# Podemos - governmental force or framework of struggle?

**16 September 2014, by Teresa Rodriguez**

## How is Podemos building itself five months after the European elections?

The main task is to build a political organisation with political principles, and democratic rules of functioning, combining rank and file self-organisation and the ability to integrate the broad masses in its

functioning. We have on the one hand more than a thousand self-organised circles and more than 100,000 “members” who have joined by internet. The challenge is to create a democratic organisation capable of basing itself both on its organised base and on the massive participation of people on internet.

This is a process that will end in mid-November, after a two month process that we call the “Podemos citizens’ assembly”. This work is done in parallel with the beginning of an institutional intervention by the members of the European parliament.

**How can this European work aid anti-capitalists?**

In the first place we should be the voice of the social movements in the institutions. Thus I work in the environment commission of the Parliament, together with around fifty ecologist movements, to denounce attacks on the environment and support these movements to win victories. For example on toxic waste in lakes.

Also as an MEP one has access to information which makes it possible to anticipate future attacks, and the mobilisations necessary. Thus, we have denounced the secret negotiations concerning the trans-Atlantic treaty as one of our first acts in the European parliament. The third aspect is to denounce from the inside an institution which defends finance and the banks.

### **What are the current debates in Podemos?**

Does Podemos want to be solely a governmental force, for power, or also a framework for mobilisation and struggle? The debate is located in the tension between the ambition of coming to power by electoral means, and not being too precise on demands,

and the need to specify our programme and what we stand for. For a section of the leadership, the risk is that if we specify too many things we could lose votes.

For us, it is also necessary to strengthen the power of the local circles. This isn't an ethical or democratic question. We are opposed to those who think that digital participation via the internet is enough, rather than the direct democracy of the circles. The internet cannot replace physical contact between people to build solidarity and interventions.

### **What orientation does Izquierda anticapitalista (IA) have towards Podemos?**

We think Podemos is the political expression of a deep discontent with the current system and a desire for radical change through self-organisation and the massive entry of people onto the political scene. From this point of view we defend a party which is rooted in the popular layers and struggles, and which is a tool of popular self-organisation.

IA can bring to Podemos a certain experience of our insertion in the social movement, and we do so in a very generous and disinterested fashion. The political current that IA represents has yet more to contribute inside Podemos. In any case, we will determine our policy concerning Podemos at our next congress in late 2014- early 2015.

### **In Catalonia there will soon be an important referendum. What are the positions of Podemos on the national question in the Spanish state?**

There is no ambiguity on this subject. Podemos defends the right to decide on all questions: national, economic and social sovereignty. In this context, Podemos defends the right to self-determination. This was a position clearly expressed by the movement.

In Catalonia, Podemos supports the process which leads to the referendum of November 9, with a critical position in relation to the ruling CiU because they defend budget cuts and austerity. The only country the CiU has is money.

# **Why Danish leftists supported military aid to Iraq**

**15 September 2014, by Michael Voss**

The parliamentary group of the Red-Green Alliance (RGA - Enhedslisten) voted together with all out parties for sending a Hercules airplane to Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government. The plane will transport weapons and ammunition to the Kurdish militias fighting Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS).

According to the statutes of the RGA such a vote in parliament has to be approved by the National Leadership (NL) of the party. A thorough discussion took place a few days before the vote in parliament, which

was also before the exact wording of the proposal was known. The National Leadership voted instead on a resolution, allowing the parliamentary group to vote Yes under certain conditions. Almost all NL-members had some kind of doubts before voting, but finally the text was adopted by a majority of 14 for – myself included – to 6 against, and 5 not voting or not present.

Many valid arguments were put forward against the decision. Most basic was the problem of supporting a military action under the command of

the US. The US government and military defend the interests of US big business and imperialism, both in the narrow sense of gaining access to resources, markets and profits, and in the more general sense of geopolitical dominance.

US imperialism is the basic reasons for the sectarian fighting in the region – due to the previous Iraqi wars, and specifically US imperialism has a big part of the responsibility for the existence of IS. Some of their close allies have been funding ISIS, and Turkey – without any objection from



Washington - has allowed ISIS to operate across Turkish borders.

Finally, Denmark has had three very bad experiences of participating in US-led warfare in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Everyone in the RGA leadership and the parliamentary group was aware of all this. But the decision was based on a concrete analysis of the situation in area. US imperialism created ISIS and allowed it to grow to a certain point. But it grew too much and became militarily too strong and dangerous for US interests - exactly as happened with the Taliban. So at the moment US imperialism wants to stop IS.

I don't think that much argument is needed to back the fact that revolutionary socialists also want to fight and stop IS, a murderous, sectarian and deeply reactionary force. A victory for IS will set back any social, democratic, pro-women or anti-imperialist development that may have taken place in parts of Syria and Iraq.

In that way there is a temporary coincidence of interests between imperialism and socialists on the simple issue of fighting IS. We want to supply the Kurds with weapons, and US imperialism want to supply the Kurds with weapons - for the time being. Not supporting it, only because of the US command, would be as if Lenin had refused to travel in the sealed train supplied by German imperialism through imperialist Germany to Russia in the middle of the Russian revolution, as another NL-member said.

But don't we risk being a part of a broader US military campaign that has quite other intentions than we have, and which will do much harm to the people of the region? That was another argument against the decision. No one will deny that this

can happen, also with the acceptance of the Danish government. But - in accordance with the resolution of the National Leadership - our MPs made sure:

- that the Danish Hercules plane cannot be used for any other purpose than delivering arms to the forces fighting IS;
- that this decision does not allow any other Danish military activity in the region;
- that whatever happens, a new parliament decision is necessary if the government wants to prolong the activity of the airplane after 1 January 2015

Counting as an argument against the decision was also doubts about who exactly will receive the arms. No one in the RGA was keen to supply this government with weapons, to say the least. But in the formal language of the parliamentary decision it was called an action for the Iraqi government and other forces fighting IS.

The National Leadership was assured and convinced that this was necessary for the decision to be in accordance with International Law - only governments can receive military help from other governments. Secondly the Iraqi army is not lacking weapons, and Eastern European weapons would be of no use for them. Thirdly the Iraqi army is practically not fighting IS at all.

That still leaves the question if the most progressive Kurdish forces, Turkish PKK and its Iraqi counterpart, YPG, actually will receive the weapons, or if the regional Kurdish government in Iraq will monopolise them. This government traditionally is in conflict with the PKK/YPG, and it is pursuing a strict neo-liberal policy in the areas that it controls.

There is really no telling exactly who will get how big a share of the weapons. But all the Kurdish forces have established a common military front to fight ISIS. There is evidence that they are actually sharing weapons, and the PKK/YPG is doing most of the effective fighting.

Confronted with relevant arguments against and without any 100 % guaranties of the outcome, I and the majority of the committee voted for the resolution allowing the MPs to vote Yes in Parliament. What tipped the balance between Yes and No for many of us, was the fact that all the progressive Kurdish forces, including socialists, in the region plus all the Kurdish organisations in Denmark, including several RGA-members, not only advised us to vote for, but begged us not to oppose the decision. They were sure that such a decision will most likely result in weapons for the PKK/YPG, a necessary strengthening not only of the fight against IS, but also a strengthening of the progressive forces in the region.

As a follow up to the decision the RGA have taken other initiatives to stop military and financial supply for IS, to popularise the fight for the Kurdish peoples' right to self-determination and to have the PKK removed from the US and the EU list of so-called terror organisations. A special Danish aspect is the fact that the TV-station of Kurds for all Europe was based in Denmark until it was recently banned, and 10 people from the Kurdish community face trial for collecting money for organisations that - according to the police - transfer the money to PKK.

When the first shipment of weapons to the PKK/YPG by a Danish airplane under US command has taken place, it will be hard for the authorities to explain that they are supporting a terror organisation.

## Shock and awe against a yes vote

# 15 September 2014, by Alan Thornett

They had not remotely predicted it. Less than year ago the Unionist Better Together campaign had been 20% ahead and they were completely complacent. Now the roof had fallen in and they were staring at the possibility of the unthinkable - a vote for independence in Scotland.

The reaction has been remarkable. Cameron, Miliband and Clegg dropped everything and headed for Scotland to say that there is no problem with devo-max after all. Gordon Brown was dragged out to make the announcement on behalf of them all. Plenty of additional powers, he said, could be devolved to the Scottish Government if independence was rejected on 18 September

Meanwhile Downing Street went into overdrive to organise what has been described as a shock and awe campaign to intimidate Scots into voting no - the normal method of politics of the Westminster elites. Banks and businesses were mobilised to make bullying statements to the effect that independence would lead either to them reducing their activities in Scotland or putting up their prices.

RBS, Lloyds, TSB, Clydesdale and Tesco Bank all made such statements within the course of a few hours. The Bank of England backed it all up. At the same time ASDA, John Lewis and Kingfisher (major retailers in Britain) announced that they would be forced to put their prices up if there was a vote for independence - a move no doubt in response to the news that a majority of women were now proposing to vote yes. The BBC is under pressure to announce that it is under pressure to announce that it will double its licence fee in Scotland.

The media outlets, including the BBC, backed this with relish as everything including the kitchen sink has been thrown at the yes campaign. And it might well have an impact on the yes vote, it is hard to tell. Fear and intimidation can be effective. On the other hand some of the tactics of the Unionists are likely to backfire as they

are based on the assumption that people aren't able to think through the consequences of their decisions.

Most of the media in any case back the no campaign. Even in Scotland only the *Sunday Herald* has backed the yes campaign. *The Scotsman* is backing the no campaign as are the Scottish editions of the *Express*, the *Star* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Sun* at the present time is sitting on the fence with the option to switch to the yes campaign if Murdoch judges this to be important for future sales.

The biggest problem the Unionists have is that the Yes campaign is a dynamic grass roots campaign that is not easy to beat down (butterflies against a clunking fist as Paul Mason put it). The political level of the campaign, and therefore the political level in Scotland (already higher than in England) has advanced in leaps and bounds particularly in the latter stages of the campaign.

Nor has the debate been based on nationalism. It has been a debate about democracy and democratic rights. It has been about the neoliberal agenda and the role of Westminster (Tories and Labour) in it. It has been about a future from Scotland free from its English dependency.

The yes campaign has got to where it is against the weight of the whole Westminster political establishment and a remarkable political line-up. The No campaign includes Labour and everything to its right: the Tories, the Lib Dems, and UKIP along with the DUP (and the Orange Order) and the BNP. Apart from the SNP the only voice in Parliament which strongly supports a Yes vote is the Green Party.

It also includes George Galloway. He appeared at the remarkable youth debate in Glasgow last night, hosted by the BBC, with 7,500 16 and 17 year olds present, the biggest such event ever in Scotland, as a part of a Unionist panel of two - the other panel member being a Tory. The Yes

campaign team was Patrick Harvie of the Greens and Nichola Sturgeon of the SNP. It was a huge vindication of the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds in the election.

George Galloway was four-square behind the fear and intimidation campaign and enthusiastically relayed the threats from the banks and big business. He argued that there is no need to worry about cuts and neoliberalism since we will have a Labour Government next year that will change all that. He quoted oil magnates to the effect that North Sea oil is running out, and was countered by Patrick Harvie to the effect that Scotland's future is in renewable energy.

The poll now hangs in the balance. The political genie, however, cannot be put back into the bottle however the vote goes: either independence or a close vote. The turnout for the referendum is set to break all records, and young people have responded strongly to their inclusion in the ballot.

The political development that has taken place is at its strongest in the working class areas and amongst Labour voters. The latest TNS poll shows a 12-point increase for independence among poorer voters. The biggest shift towards independence comes from those who didn't vote at all at the last Scottish elections in 2011.

Whatever the result the grotesquely undemocratic UK set-up is thrown into chaos - particularly if the vote is yes. Demands for more devolution and democratic reform are inevitable. Westminster has not represented either Wales or the big Northern English cities any more than it has represented Scotland. Things can never go back to where they were. Business as usual is not an option. We are approaching the party conference but the agenda has already moved on.

In Scotland those sections of the left that have been a part of the Radical Independence Campaign have a major

opportunity to grow and increase their social weight. There is the opportunity to relate to an unprecedented and positive political conversation that is not going to stop. If the no vote wins the discussion will continue. If the yes campaign wins then the debate on a Scottish constitution immediately

opens up.

Meanwhile there is everything to play for and a real opportunity for Scotland to gain its independence in the vote next week. Shock and awe, and the threats from the banks and big business, and the representatives of the Westminster establishment, team

Westminster, from David Cameron to Gorge Galloway, should be treated with the contempt they deserve. An independent and different Scotland is possible, with a much stronger left within it.

12.9.14

## The Tangled Imperial Web: Iraq. War. Again.

15 September 2014, by David Finkel

Leaving aside the boilerplate twaddle about U.S. "leadership" in combating every global crisis from terrorism to Ebola - never mind our vanguard role in waterboarding, "extraordinary rendition," drone bombs wiping out wedding parties in Afghanistan and Yemen, F-16s and Hellfire missiles supplied to Israel for serial massacres in Gaza - president Obama at least hasn't recycled George W. Bush's lies about a quick, cost-free victory that would be paid for by Iraq's oil revenues. His address made it clear that to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the enemy will take time, money and risk.

Obama announces new U.S. deployments in Iraq, September 10, 2014.

Obama spoke of a broad coalition of allied nations, without actually naming a single one. The president's insertion of 1500 or so U.S. military "advisors and trainers" certainly has the ring of euphemism. In tactical terms, however, the limited and specific aims he outlined are probably attainable. The question of what comes afterward in Iraq, Syria and the entire region opens onto a vast strategic void.

That the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" is a totalitarian and genocidal entity is beyond any doubt. But this monstrosity didn't arise in a vacuum, or from doctrines of seventh-century Islam as some bigoted pundits would have us believe. It's more a modern hybrid of Nazism and the Mafia, although without the powerful industrial base that powered Hitler's

Germany, or the honor codes that generally restrain Cosa Nostra from the mass slaughter of innocent noncombatants.

The "Islamic State in Iraq and al-Shams" (ISIS), as it was originally called, and its predecessor "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia," arose directly from the destruction of Iraq by the 2003 U.S. invasion. Roughly analogous to the rise of the Nazis from the humiliation and economic destruction imposed on Germany following World War I, the Iraqi al-Qaeda branch grew from the brilliant decision of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld to dismantle the Iraqi state and the ruling Baath party and abolish the Sunni-dominated army, replacing the institutions of the shattered state with - a vacuum.

Sectarian killing on an industrial scale ensued, mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods disappeared, Iraq largely melted down in civil war, and the U.S. occupation bogged down in disaster. In 2006-8, the United States paid Sunni tribal leaders to turn against al-Qaeda, with significant success. But the money dried up as the Bush and subsequently Obama administrations relied on the corrupt and sectarian al-Maliki government, and as U.S. combat troops inevitably withdrew. The prescient words of journalist Robert Fisk, in the very early days of the U.S. occupation, summed up the story: "The United States has to get out of Iraq. The United States will get out of Iraq. And the United States can't get out of

Iraq."

Meanwhile, when the Arab Spring brought forth in 2011 a popular uprising in Syria and the Assad regime responded with massive military brutality, the United States found itself in a policy trap. While proclaiming "Assad must go," Washington and its regional allies were fearful of the consequences of the rebellion. As a result the leaders of the loosely organized Free Syrian Army (aka "moderate opposition") got the impression that the West would stand behind them, but actually received just about enough aid to guarantee they would lose - while Assad enjoyed all-out assistance from Iran, Russia and Lebanese Hezbollah.

Out of the Syrian tragedy arose the remnants of "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia," trading under the new name of ISIS, with some tactical complicity of the Assad regime (including freeing jihadist prisoners, and stealth purchase of oil from fields ISIS took over). And as Iraq reverted to chaos, ISIS erupted back into northern Iraq, seizing Mosul, executing hundreds of captured soldiers, massacring Christian and Yazidi communities, filming its atrocities as recruitment videos and pronouncing its ambition for expanded conquest as the "Islamic State."

What next? Indeed, U.S. air power together with Kurdish forces and a partially reconstituted Iraqi army will blunt further ISIS territorial conquests. Its convoys caught in open

territory can be annihilated. To the extent its weapons are warehoused, they can be destroyed. It has no weapons industry of its own. The incipient genocidal extermination of non-Sunni communities can be mostly prevented. And the flow of foreign jihadist youth will slow down when and if Turkey tightens its borders and, especially, as the "Islamic State" no longer looks like the winning side.

The Kurdistan regional government and its peshmerga armed forces, whatever their flaws, are fighting for their own freedom as well as resisting the threat of ISIS. They have the right to all the assistance they need, wherever they can get it. Theirs are the most important "boots on the ground" in pushing back the ISIS knife from the throats of threatened populations.

All that's more or less the easy part. What happens next is a lot harder, as intelligence analyst George Friedman points out:

The Islamic State will disperse its forces, denying conventional aircraft a target. Attempting to defeat the Islamic State by distinguishing its supporters from other Sunni groups and killing them will founder at the first step...They are now part of the fabric of the Sunni community, and only the Sunni community can root them out. That's particularly true, obviously,

where ISIS is embedded in cities like Mosul and Fallujah in Iraq, or Raqqa in Syria and can't be bombed out.

## ISIS fighters in Mosul.

In short, if the new Iraqi government (still with key ministries still unfilled) looks like a reshuffle of the al-Maliki regime, and if the United States collaborates with the Syrian regime — whose military power, and atrocities against civilians, exceed those of the "Islamic State" by orders of magnitude — then the narrative of the Sunni jihadists will be confirmed, and their influence will persist and metastasize even if ISIS no longer looks like a conquering army.

There are plenty of lessons from recent experience for anyone who's paying attention. President Obama's great success in killing Osama bin Laden turned out to change nothing. If anything, creating a polio vaccination program as a CIA front in tracking down bin Laden gave the fundamentalist crazies in Pakistan a pretext for killing vaccination workers, posing a public health disaster.

Bush's war in Afghanistan, which Obama thought was the United States' "smart war," is ending about as badly as could have been imagined. His claims that U.S. drones have improved things in Yemen and Somalia are

flights of fantasy. And let's be honest: President Obama's image as a strong leader is hardly enhanced by the spectacle of Israel's Binyamin Netanyahu kicking him in the teeth, over and over and over again

The regional political and sectarian conflicts, which seem impossible to balance, are only the beginning of the intractable contradictions facing this new intervention and U.S. imperial policy globally. They extend further: Since the cooperation of Iran is now essential in restoring the Iraqi army, what does that mean for the U.S. attempt to undercut Assad, or for the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program? With Europe in turmoil over the Russian occupation-by-proxies in eastern Ukraine, and facing the threat of freezing in the dark this winter if Russian natural gas supplies are curtailed, how is the Obama administration going to "provide leadership" on multiple crises at once?

All this occurs at the moment when atmospheric carbon dioxide has reached the ominous level of 396 parts per million and the impacts of climate change ravaging the planet can only be made worse by war. The global terror of imperialism generates its ugly local and regional counterparts from Taliban to the "Islamic State." The terrorist forces arising in shattered societies can't be eradicated without uprooting the global system that inevitably breeds them.

# What explains the surge in support for independence?

**14 September 2014, by Alister Black, Dick Nichols**

DN: The latest polls for the referendum show the "No" case still ahead, but with the gap with the "Yes" vote narrowing and the number of "Don't knows" falling. Yet early August mass canvassing by the Radical Independence Campaign, with a very large sample of over 18,000, produced very different

numbers — "Yes leading No by 42% to 28%, but with 30% "Don't knows". A September 7 Sunday Times poll had the pro-independence vote winning 51% to 49%. What's your reading of the situation as voting day approaches?

AB: The gap is clearly narrowing and

each day we seem to be closer to a Yes vote. The Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) has been campaigning in the working-class areas, where support for Yes is strongest. We have been busy signing up hundreds for the voters' roll. Over the last few weeks we have seen enormous enthusiasm for Yes emerge



among the poorest and most excluded groups, who can see the opportunity for a more socially just society emerging from an independent Scotland.

Many Scots are beginning to feel a sense of agency and control over the future of their society for the first time, and it is a contagious feeling. After the Sunday Times poll showing the Yes case winning the No campaign, Better Together (BT), seem to be in a kind of paralysed shock. The offer of more powers to Scotland in the case of a No victory, offered by former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown on September 8, is too little, too late and largely an attempt to shore up the Labour Party No vote. I think for most people it just shows that sticking up for yourself gets results, and we might as well take all the powers. It's still very close but there are good reasons for the optimism in the Yes Scotland camp.

**DN : Just four weeks ago, the YouGov poll had the No case leading by 61% to 39% (after the undecided were excluded). Why has the gap between the two sides closed so much? If the Yes case eventually wins, what will have been the main reasons?**

AB: I think that what we have seen has been a combination of two things. First, the negative campaign run by Better Together has been challenged and exposed over the last few months. BT actually called this "project fear"! But their scaremongering about jobs, pensions, currency etc. has been comprehensively rebutted.

The turning point was probably the last leaders' debate (on August 25) when Alistair Darling, BT leader, senior Labour Party politician and former Chancellor of the Exchequer, conceded that Scotland could continue to use sterling as its currency. He also had little to offer when asked about new powers for Scotland in the event of a No vote.

Second, the Yes campaign has been a genuine mass grassroots campaign, reaching far beyond the governing Scottish National Party (SNP) and diehard nationalists. This campaign has mobilised in every community and

has comprehensively won the argument on the streets and doorsteps. It is this grassroots activism that has been able to counter the media, which BT have relied on to put its message over.

The most powerful arguments have been around social justice, defending the National Health Service (NHS) and scrapping Trident nuclear weapons. Ethnic and historical issues have been almost entirely absent from the campaign.

Alistair Darling was said to have won the first leaders' debate, but first minister Alex Salmond of the SNP the second. Why the turnaround?

In the second debate Salmond led on questions of social justice, defence of the NHS and scrapping Trident nuclear weapons. When Darling was challenged on what new job-creating powers Scotland would have in the event of a No vote he could only put forward the current scheme in which the unemployed work for free in shops, also known as slave labour. He also conceded crucial points on the currency. The "project fear" case dissolved before our eyes.

**DN: The voting age in the referendum is 16 and a recent TubeMogul survey suggests that a majority of voters between 16 and 19 will favour the No case (by 57% to 43%). Is this an accurate reflection of the attitudes of the young, and, if so, why?**

Young people have only known a time in which neoliberalism is the norm and they have been told this is the only way things can be. I think the independence campaign is beginning to show them that you can challenge power and you can present an optimistic vision of a better society. I believe that young people will begin to move in bigger numbers towards Yes in the last part of the campaign.

**DN: During my recent holidays in Scotland, I was struck by how much the referendum campaign seemed to have politicised people from all "walks of life". How deep has its impact been?**

AB: I think what we have seen is a democratic spirit in action. The campaign has seen an unprecedented

outbreak of discussion and debate around every aspect of life and that has been very inspiring for thousands, many taking part in politics for the first time. Everyone is talking about politics, about the future of their society, about their community when you go to the shops, when you go to work, when you walk down the street or read social media.

How decisive in winning will be the sentiment that, given North Sea oil, Scots don't have to be like England, dominated by neoliberalism, but can be like the Scandinavian countries, especially Norway, affording a decent welfare system and preserving the NHS from neoliberal "reform"?

It is certainly a key element and appeals to those who would like to see a more socialist or social-democratic society. Of course there are problems with this—the Scandinavian countries have not been immune from austerity and privatisation. Additionally, it is important to develop new, greener forms of energy, such as wind and wave power—both in plentiful supply in Scotland.

The left would also argue for the nationalisation of oil so that profits can be used for the benefit of all. The idea has also been raised that any new constitution should state that the natural resources of Scotland should be owned by the people.

**DN: In what parts of Scottish society and in what regions of the country is independence sentiment strongest? Why?**

AB: The campaign has been strongest among those who have suffered most from the last few decades of Thatcherism, the triumph of neoliberalism and the austerity of the last period. In working-class communities, where people have bitter memories of the miners' strike and the poll tax, support for independence has been high, and we have also seen thousands registering to vote. There are communities like this across Scotland. The sense is that the most alienated and disenfranchised sections of society are about to make their voices heard, and won't be staying silent in future.

**DN: How does Scottish big**

**business line up in the independence debate? What truth is there to the scare stories that Scottish banking and finance, especially the bailed-out Royal Bank of Scotland, will jump ship to London in case of a Yes win?**

AB: At the end of the day big business will behave in the same way they have always done. If they can make more money by moving, then they will move. The truth is that no one is exactly lining up to take over the risks associated with Royal Bank of Scotland and the rest. There are a lot of people employed in finance in Scotland, particularly in Edinburgh, and we will need to look at how to reduce reliance on this sector and shift jobs to more socially productive areas.

This week Michelle Mone, the boss of a clothing firm threatened to move her firm out of Scotland in the event of a Yes vote, what she didn't say was that she has already moved 1200 jobs to China, leaving just a handful in Scotland.

**DN: What has been the attitude of the Scottish trade unions, and their peak body, the Scottish Trade Union Congress?**

AB: The union leaders for the most part have done their best to stay "neutral" in the campaign, which translates as following Labour Party orders not to back independence. The unions held a series of consultations but have tended to either back the Labour Party position or say nothing. There have been exceptions such as postal workers in Edinburgh, and the rail workers' union, the Rail Maritime and Transport Union, whose members voted this week to back independence.

In 1968, famous Scottish miners' leader Mick McGahey said: "Scottish workers have more in common with London dockers, Durham miners and Sheffield engineers than they have ever had with Scottish barons and landlord traitors." How much has that sentiment changed, and why? Does the growing working-class support for an independent Scotland have any reflection inside the Labour Party?

Mick McGahey was quite right.

Furthermore, Scottish workers have more in common with workers in Ireland, France or India than their bosses. The idea that supporting Scottish statehood runs counter to international solidarity is entirely false.

The recent poll that saw Yes go ahead for the first time saw the biggest shift was of Labour voters moving to Yes, the number of Labour voters backing independence has doubled in a month and nearly a third of all Labour voters are now backing Yes. Individual labour councillors and former officials have also moved.

There is also a small but influential "Labour for Independence" group. In reality, independence could be good for the Scottish Labour Party if it shakes off the ties to the Westminster party that is so tainted with war and austerity.

**DN: The Radical Independence Campaign has played an important role in mobilising activists to build the Yes campaign. How do you see the contribution of RIC? If the Yes case wins, how much will RIC have been responsible?**

AB: The RIC is just one aspect of the campaign; there are many local groups and important sections of the campaign such as Women for Independence (one of whose principal organisers is former SSP Member of the Scottish Parliament Carolyn Leckie) and the artists' group, the National Collective.

However, the RIC has succeeded in mobilising many on the left and also many young people attracted by our political arguments for independence. The RIC has brought plenty of energy and has conducted mass canvassing in working-class areas that is too often forgotten. Above all the RIC has brought forward political arguments for the kind of Scotland we want to see.

**DN: What have been the main features of the RIC campaign?**

AB: The RIC is a political project as well as a campaigning group, so it has always made political debate and discussion the centre of its work. The

RIC has held two very successful conferences, with around 900 attending each time, a huge number for the Scottish left. These featured debate on our vision for an independent Scotland and the necessity of putting forward a radical perspective.

The RIC has mobilised thousands across the country and set up branches, not just in the big cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh, but in the smaller towns and rural areas as well. In Edinburgh we have been meeting twice a month and often have big turnouts.

We have had the strange experience (for the left) of turning people away from meetings due to lack of space, and raising money faster than we can spend it!

Anyone is welcome to put forward a topic for political discussion and we have had a wide variety of topics including anti-racism, feminism, secularism, Palestine, environmentalism and many more topics. The RIC has undertaken its own campaigning but also worked with the official Yes campaign.

**DN: Over the last year, two books have been published that put the radical case for independence: Yes: the Radical Case for Independence, by James Foley and Pete Ramand, and In Place of Fear 2: a Socialist Program for an Independent Scotland, by former left Labour then SNP MP Jim Sillars. Both books challenge the mainstream Yes case that independence means "change, but not too much". What impact have they had?**

AB: We have seen an explosion of new books examining different aspects of the independence debate, and the left has been to the fore. I think the battle for ideas has been key: neither of these books have mass readerships but they have helped arm activists with ideas to take to the doorsteps.

There are conservative and progressive arguments for Scottish independence. For example, Alex Salmond has tried to neutralise two points of attack by the No case – "the

currency issue and the monarchy”by saying Scotland will retain both pound sterling and Queen Elizabeth. It will also stay in NATO. How has the RIC handled these issues?

The RIC has of course been critical of these positions. Regarding the monarchy we argue for a republic”there will be much work to do after the vote around this question. Australian readers know better than most the implications of crown powers and their ability to remove elected leaders, as happened to Gough Whitlam.

On the issue of the currency, the left has largely argued for a new currency rather than the pound or the euro – without our own central bank we will have no control over interest rates etc. Colin Fox, co-convenor of the SSP and a member of the Yes Scotland advisory board, broke ranks to call for a separate currency.

Salmond (like Catalan premier Artur Mas) also presents an independent Scotland as a good citizen of the European Union and decries both Tory and United Kingdom Independence Party euroscepticism. How has the RIC addressed the issue of the European Union?

Europe is a difficult issue. Euroscepticism has become the ground of the far right and the UKIP. One of the problems faced by the independence campaign has been workers from Europe rejecting Yes because they are fearful of their right to stay if Scotland is not allowed into the EU, so the narrative from Yes supporters has tended to focus on the likelihood of admittance to the EU.

But of course there are enormous problems with the EU and EU membership limits our ability to

undertake progressive social change – the EU would not allow us to nationalise oil, communications or electricity, it would limit our budget spending. The general approach has been to say, stay in the EU but challenge it and call for a social Europe.

**DN: One of the strongest points of the Yes campaign is the savings to be gained from the removal of Trident nuclear submarines from their Scottish bases. However, what debate is there over defence policy for an independent Scotland?**

AB: The left has been critical of the SNP decision to reverse its policy of leaving NATO. This decision saw two SNP MSPs resign from the party, and both of those have participated in RIC and SSP meetings around Scotland. What political scenario would a Yes victory open up in Scotland? In the UK?

Make no mistake, a Yes vote would be a political earthquake in both Scotland and the UK, beginning with the two-year period before we conclude negotiations and officially leave. For Scotland we have a chance to build a modern, socially just society built on the principles of solidarity that uses its wealth to tackle poverty.

None of this would be given to us and would require the democratic involvement of all of those who have been campaigning for Yes over the last two years. In the UK we hope that Scotland will set a positive example and will demonstrate that it is possible to change things.

**DN: What are the likely repercussions, in Scotland and the UK, in the event of a No win?**

AB: The No campaign has been busy

making all sorts of promises of new powers for Scotland in the event of a No vote, but in reality they would look to cut spending and force an austerity agenda, which the Tory right and the UKIP have already demanded. The position of British PM David Cameron would be strengthened and we could see an earlier UK general election.

**SN: What lessons, if any, would a Yes victory have for the campaign for Catalonia’s right to decide?**

AB: It can only strengthen the demands for Catalonians to vote on statehood. The key lesson is the need to build a strong and diverse grassroots movement.

The RIC involves the Green Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, other left organisations and many unaffiliated activists. What do you think the experience of the RIC will mean for rebuilding the Scottish left?

The RIC experience has been a generally positive one, we have seen activists working together in a positive way and building trust. Regardless of the vote

I hope we will build on this to bring together a strong force for the left in Scottish politics.

That will be a process that might be difficult, but is achievable in some form. However, any new formation needs to learn the lessons of the SSP”to take women’s issues seriously. Crucially, it needs to be based on the vibrant, grassroots activists thrown up by the Yes movement and with a strong community involvement, and not just be a flag of convenience for those looking for a seat in parliament.

Source [Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal](#).

## The redeployment of French imperialism in Africa and the humanitarian daze of the left

# 12 September 2014, by Jean Batou

In Libya and the Ivory Coast, one could argue without difficulty that Nicolas Sarkozy harboured ulterior economic motives, but it seems less obvious on the part of François Hollande in Mali, and highly questionable in the CAR. Hence the appeal of some critical observers "to avoid any summary anti-imperialism" [53], which often comes down to pointing the finger at the unbridled greed of the rentiers of *Françafrique* [54]. In fact, although no serious observer can believe the humanitarian motives put forward by Paris, it seems clear that the sending of shock troops to prevent the definitive shipwreck of "failed states" such as the CAR is in the first place motivated by the need to maintain security in its "backyard", which is a condition for the credibility of France on the threshold of a new "scramble for Africa". [55]

## What French presence south of the Mediterranean?

As a recent report of the Senate would like us to believe, there is, on the one hand, "dynamic Africa (...), courted by emerging countries, which can be for us [meaning companies of the CAC 40] a tremendous reservoir of growth," and on the other "black holes" like the CAR, in which France, in conjunction with the USA and the European Union (EU), the Security Council of the UN, the African Union (AU) and regional organizations, is responsible for conducting police operations with the aim of avoiding contagion from infected areas that threaten the promising economic dynamics of the continent [56]. The public and private circles that today set the tone for France's African policy share this conception of the complementary roles, in a market that is increasingly competitive, of the big corporations and of a state with a diverse implantation and solid experience,

military in particular, on the continent, particularly because of its colonial and postcolonial history.

Sometimes the security options of the government may even push it to interfere with the economic strategy of French companies. For example, *Charlie-Hebdo* (in its issues of 4 and 11 February 2013) recently evoked an intervention of the Elysée, supported by King Mohammed VI, to persuade Vivendi not to sell Morocco Telecom to the Qatari company Ooredoo, which had been until then in the best position, and which was suspected of collusion with the Muslim fundamentalists in northern Mali. Since it seems that this subsidiary of the French group controlled the main operators in the Sahel, it seems to have had great importance for military intelligence, invested in Operation Serval. This approach turned out to be fruitful, since it was finally the UAE group Etisalat that won the deal. We can imagine that the Quai d'Orsay must have breathed a sigh of relief: the relations between Paris and Dubai, we read on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are in fact marked by "a strong convergence of views on regional questions": the two states "hold consultations at the highest level (...) very regularly" against a background of flourishing economic relations.

Conversely, it is common knowledge that the policy of Paris in Congo-Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Mali, Niger, the CAR, Senegal, Chad, etc., is inconceivable without the careful advice of the AREVA group, Bolloré, Bouygues, Total and others. It would be tedious to repeat here the incestuous triangular links forged by the French government with a certain number of companies and potentates in the *Françafrique* theatre, which have been denounced by François-Xavier Verschave in particular (*Françafrique*, 1999, *Noir Silence*, 2000) and by the association *Survie*. Despite the disappearance of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic for African and

Malagash Affairs of Jacques Foccart (1960-1974), which became the "Africa cell" of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac (1974-2007), successive advisors to Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande have continued to keep alive these special networks, with the help of some dubious personalities. Thus we have seen the UMP deputy and mayor of Levallois-Perret, Patrick Balkany, and the former honorary consul of France in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), George Forrest, "the king of Katanga" playing matchmakers in the acquisition by AREVA in June 2007, for 1.8 billion euros, of the majority of the shares in the uranium deposit of Bakouma (CAR) from the Canadian UraMin [74] (the CFA is a currency used by 135 million inhabitants in 14 countries) to other neighboring countries. Let us remember that it helps to improve the security of investors by depriving African countries of any monetary and fiscal sovereignty. It is starting from this platform that France has also been promoting, for twenty years, the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA), which includes 17 states, as well as an integrated market for insurance, which tends to prevent a state changing its laws independently. [75]

4. Maximum use of the action of public and private agents of "development aid" in order to assist the financing of French investments, but also to act upstream of tenders (technical cooperation).

5. Promotion of Francophonie by the development of the teaching of French in Africa and the enrolment of young Africans in elite French institutions of higher education: with 50,500 sub-Saharan students, mainly from Senegal, Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, French universities come out on top among those in OECD countries. Similarly, the training of primary school teachers for African schools should be a priority. Moreover, the spread of



French culture and the reach of its media, especially audiovisual (RFI, TV5 Monde Africa, Canal +, AITV/RFO) are "so many vectors of 'pre-sale' of French brands". [76] The numerous partnerships between French and African towns and cities also play a significant role in this, particularly in Mali.

6. Absorption of money transfers of African migrants working in France [77] (â~4.8 billion), of whom a growing number acquire French nationality, by French banks operating in Africa, which could benefit from this to cover commercial credits on the African continent.

7. Exploitation of the role that can be played by French people abroad, of whom 235,000 reside in Africa, half in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, half of them are no longer expatriates, but "mixed bi-nationals", which may give them a stronger role as a link between France and Africa.

8. Intensified contacts with African elites, including in civil society [78]: visa procedures made easy for businessmen, cultural figures, etc., with the risk of encouraging a greater brain drain; proliferation of exchange networks (partnerships of local authorities, voluntary cooperation reoriented to the economy, networks of former students and aspiring leaders, Franco-African business forum, etc.).

9. "Military contribution to the security of the continent": starting from existing points of support in the Sahara-Sahel band and on the two oceanic facades of the continent.

For the authors of the Védrine Report, "France realized belatedly that it did not have an integrated strategic vision of its interests in sub-Saharan Africa; many sectoral approaches exist but are scattered and incomplete (strategic vision of the White Paper on defence and national security, 'raw materials diplomacy', foreign trade strategy, priorities for the countries of the French Development Agency (AFD), role of Francophonie ... The initiatives taken recently to redefine the economic action of France with Africa must be deepened rapidly and in an operational and holistic

way."France" is "making it up as it goes along", whereas it must aim to have a "national strategy for economic reconquest on the continent". [79] In this sense, they called for intensified development and reflection by asking for a more sustained investment in academic and entrepreneurial think tanks: the Old Africa group at the Institut Montaigne, CAPAfrrique, Africa departments in the course of being established at the Lazard and Rothschild banks. This intellectual effort, based on the systematic collection of information, analysis and strategic discussion, etc., should be strongly encouraged by the creation of a Franco-African Foundation uniting the efforts of the public and private sectors.

## Role of the military factor

Since the aim of my contribution is to better understand the significance of the recent deployment of French forces in Ivory Coast, Libya, Mali and the CAR, I will focus particularly on the military aspect - not the least important - of the imperialist strategy of France in Africa. Let us recall at the outset that Paris has the following resources: more than 5,000 troops on the continent (the number of special forces is not known); a permanent presence in Ivory Coast, Chad, Senegal, Gabon, Djibouti and Reunion; defence partnerships with eight countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal and Togo); agreements for training African officers; a significant network of aides and advisers and those engaged in military cooperation. "The military intervention of France in Mali, notes the Védrine Report (...) reminded us that France remained a real power in Africa (...)" . The reporters of the Senate noted more soberly that "the example of Mali or the Central African Republic suggests that although France no longer holds the solution, it is perceived as a recourse" [80]. What is not said here by these officials is that the army has always enjoyed considerable autonomy of decision-making in Africa, in liaison with the Presidency of the Republic, which by its very nature escapes democratic

debate.

For its part, the latest White Paper on Defence (April 2013) considers that France will continue to act independently, perhaps even more often than in the past, and consequently the Law of Military Planning (2014-19) gives priority to external operations (Opex) and special forces as against pre-positioned forces [81]. This should not reassure those who expect Paris to conduct peacekeeping missions in its former colonies. As far as Opex are concerned, I will simply recall Force Licorne opening fire on an unarmed crowd on November 9, 2004 in Abidjan., which is estimated to have left sixty people dead and more than a thousand wounded, [100] So what real significance must we give to the exclusion of "the former colonial power" from such a plan? Because in fact, if it was necessary to give responsibility for this "peacekeeping force" to another mentor, it would inevitably be the United States or Britain, which are not very enthusiastic and which also have important interests in the region.

## Perils of the "new scramble for Africa"

So what should be done? First of all, take note of the fact that the position of the French and Western radical left can today only have a propagandistic character, and that it is unfortunately not able to save human lives in the present crisis. Next, understand that we are all the more "disarmed" in that we inherit a European workers' movement that largely capitulated in the face of the transformation of the Congo Basin into a huge labour camp over three quarters of a century of colonization, to a large extent continued during several decades of neocolonial domination. Operation Sangaris should incite us to re-read the testimony of Albert Londres on the construction of the Congo-Ocean Railway (1921-1934), built by the Batignolles building company of the Radical Socialist Jean-Victor Augagneur, for which "the negro replaced the machine, the truck, the

crane; why not explosives too? , and which cost about twenty thousand deaths. [101] It should especially make us pay tribute to the widespread peasant uprising of 1928-1932 against taxes and forced labour, which started in West Central Africa, the colonial repression of which was again responsible for thousands of victims. [102]

It is all the more essential to remember this history in that we are on the threshold of a second "scramble for Africa" (after the one in the late nineteenth century). In fact, despite the euphoric speeches of investors on the advent of an African century, the social and environmental impact of this treasure hunt could prepare future catastrophes of unparalleled proportions. Within the limits of this contribution, I will only mention here the main outlines:

1. A dependent growth, totally subordinated to foreign investment and world prices [103], driven by the export of raw materials and energy resources, but also by selling off farmland and the hydroelectric potential of the continent. Although Africa admittedly remains heavily exposed to the volatility of the prices of raw materials, it is unlikely that the tendency towards improved terms of trade will be reversed quickly, as it was in the 1980s and 1990s, given the scarcity of energy and mineral resources on a world scale and the still considerable proportion of deposits that have not yet been exploited, or even identified, on the continent. At the same time, this brutal "extractive" model, where profits are very unequally distributed, also causes an exponential increase in the pollution of air, soil and water, with disastrous health consequences.

2. A predatory accumulation, not only for the benefit of the imperialist bourgeoisie, but also of their African counterparts; such opportunities for enrichment lead to disputes by all possible means over the share of a growing rent. Jean Nanga emphasizes that some of its fractions do not hesitate to resort to predatory violence, mobilizing for that national, regional, ethnic and religious rivalries, to achieve their ends. [104] That is where we must look to find the motor

forces of the internal conflicts in Ivory Coast and Mozambique, but also of several situations of transnational war in Central Africa, self-maintained by the fraudulent exploitation of natural resources, in collaboration with powerful international interests. This can be done on a small scale in the CAR, by the smuggling of diamonds, gold and ivory [105] but also on a large scale in the DRC, where different military forces, backed up by the capitalist cliques of neighbouring countries (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, etc.), accumulate fortunes by selling coltan ore to the big multinational corporations of the information technology and communications (ICT) sector.

3. A brutal accentuation of uneven development, which is plunging 17 countries (in the regions of the Great Lakes, northern Nigeria, the DRC, the Sahel, etc.) into a state of advanced social and political decomposition. In these regions, populated by 200 million people, 8 out of 10 people are trying to survive on subsistence agriculture, and 5 out of 10 have to settle for less than \$1.25 a day. Meanwhile, across the continent, the absolute number of poor continues to grow (nearly 400 million Africans live on less than \$1.25 per capita) and so therefore does malnutrition, morbidity and mortality. Countries with rapid economic growth, such as Angola and Nigeria, are also particularly notable in this respect. Thus the human development indices adjusted for inequality (IHDI) are falling more and more behind global HDI and the "millennium goals" will be far from being achieved.

4. Rapid population increase - within 25 years, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso should go from 57 to 160 million people - that is putting increasing pressure on arable land and causes increased tension between farmers and herders. This can take on the appearance of an "ethnic conflict", like the one between the semi-nomadic pastoralist Gabra and the Borana peasants of northern Kenya. Similarly, rapid urbanization poses acute problems of housing and hygiene: more than 60 per cent of "city-dwellers" live in slums, 80 per cent have no access to drinking water and 90 per cent are not connected to

sewers. According to the African Development Bank (ADB), the investment capacities of public authorities are more than ten times lower than the minimum required to meet the basic needs of the 760 million urban that there are expected to be in 2030.

5. A massive rise in underemployment, particularly among young people. In the next 15 years, "330 million young Africans will enter the labour market (...). This is the present population of the United States". [106] The total active population should thus exceed one billion in 2040. At the same time, only a minority is in formal employment, especially among young people, 60 per cent are unemployed and almost three quarters live on less than \$2 a day. Under such conditions, African demography can turn into a nightmare, with masses of illiterate youth, camped in squalid shanty towns, mobilized by religious fundamentalists (Muslim or Pentecostal), and/or recruited into various armed movements in countries in crisis (child soldiers, etc.).

6. Increased migration pressure, mostly intra-African, which given the scarcity of available resources is highly likely to cause outbreaks of violence against "foreigners", as was the case, for example in 2008 in the Ivory Coast and in South Africa, but also in recent months the CAR. It should also result in increased flows of migrants to Europe, the United States, the Gulf, etc., but also to human tragedies associated with illegal immigration (smuggling networks, shipwrecks, detention camps, racist violence, super-exploitation, prostitution, etc.).

7. A particularly dramatic impact of global warming. The declining and increasingly erratic rainfall can only lead to a reduction of arable land (35 per cent with an increase in temperature of 4Â°) and decreased crop yields (-26 per cent in the Sahel regions between now and 2060) - the impact of these phenomena is already causing a worsening of malnutrition in Niger. According to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 600 million more people could be at risk of hunger by 2080, largely in sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, 250 million

Africans are living along coasts threatened by rising sea levels (between Abidjan and Lagos, 25 million people live below sea level, protected by increasingly threatened dunes). Still according to the IPCC, by 2050, the majority of the 50 million to one billion climate refugees should be mostly African. Finally, the dams of the continent will have significant overcapacity, as is already the case in Kenya.

8. A shortage of water due to global warming, desertification, over-exploitation of available resources (irrigation), deforestation and very fragile groundwater. So although Africa covers 22 per cent of the land mass of the world, it would have only 9 per cent of renewable water supplies. By 2020, according to the IPCC, between 75 and 250 million Africans should be subject to increased water stress. If we consider the Sahel region, which is particularly threatened, the surface of Lake Chad has already decreased by 90 per cent since 1960. In such circumstances, the sharing of water will become a burning political issue. [107]

9. Accelerated deforestation - 4 million hectares between 2000 and 2010, nearly one third of global deforestation according to the FAO - which reduces rainfall, increases runoff and soil erosion, leads to flooding and landslides, disturbs the water cycle (since tree roots facilitate infiltration and storage underground), worsens the pollution of rivers (reduced filtering and fixing of toxic substances), reduces biodiversity (destruction of many ecosystems, decrease in the level of ambient humidity) and accelerates global warming (20 per cent contribution to the increase in greenhouse gas emissions).

10. A collapse of fishery resources in a context where artisanal fishing is the object of increasingly brutal competition from the major industrial nations. Indeed, African states cruelly lack the political and technical (aircraft, ships, etc.) means to oppose the illegal exploitation of their waters. And as if that were not enough, Europe dumps increasing quantities of toxic waste off the African coast. It is, moreover, these developments that

largely explain the rise of piracy, especially off the coast of Somalia, but also the support it enjoys among coastal populations. Finally, this threat in turn justifies the increased military control of these maritime routes by the Western powers.

## New potential for resistance

Is Africa being handed over bound and gagged to this new imperialist offensive? This idea is what often leads to having an extremely pessimist vision of the continent. Some people argue today that African societies have been so much exploited and abused that the internal springs of their resistance have been broken, and that they no longer have the capacity to fight back, a posture that is the exact mirror image of the thirdworldism of the 1960s and 70s, which expected from the asymmetric struggles of the peoples of the South the redemption of western socialism. The reality is probably more complex, for three reasons:

1) The lasting economic growth of the continent, although it is highly polarized and unequal on the triple regional, social, and urban-rural levels, creates significant growth of commercial relations, of wage labour, and therefore of class polarization. Whether due to the exhaustion of profitable opportunities, to a minimum of caution by those at the top of society or to stubborn resistance by those below, there is however a slowing down of privatizations [113]; the crippling strike by public sector workers in Botswana for wage increases (2011); the mass struggles of the Nigerian workers' movement, which has conducted several general strikes, including one in January 2012 against the sharp rise in gasoline prices; the efforts of the unions in Zimbabwe to organize the informal sector; movements against the cost of living in many countries, which led in Sudan to the revolt last autumn, inspired also by the revolutions of the Arab region, targeting the authoritarian and corrupt Islamist regime of Omar al-Bashir, which was bloodily repressed, following on the militant protests in the spring against

the sale of farmland to Gulf investors ...

2) Half of Africa's population is under 25. This ought to make it possible, as the experts of the French Senate venture to say, to write a new page of this continent, which empowers its community traditions and continues to settle accounts with its colonial history. Moreover, they point out, urbanization generates "processes of individualization" that promote "new economic behaviour": the new generation born with television, the Internet and mobile phones "will not look at the world in the same way". Richard Benegas (political scientist at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) goes further: for him, it "seeks less to remake the world that to find its place in it (...) Bill Gates fascinates it more than does Che Guevara". [114]

On the other hand, Maurice Engelele, programme coordinator of the Institute of African Governance, draws an opposite conclusion based on the experience of the Arab region: "The reversal of the age pyramids, the high rate of school enrollment, coupled with the large number of unemployed or under-employed graduates and with increasing inequality, are generating socio-political movements." The average level of education has indeed increased significantly: 42 per cent of 20-24 year olds now have a secondary education; in 2030, they are predicted to be 59 per cent (or 137 million, to which must be added 12 million graduates of higher education). And this at a time when the dismantling of the public sector, imposed by the Structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 90s, has further aggravated the unemployment of young graduates [115]? The "movement "Enough is enough!" (YEM), which put contestation in the forefront of the Senegalese media scene in 2012, bears witness to these two contradictory developments. It is up to the revolutionary left to promote the second by contributing to the political radicalization of these movements.

3) The new "scramble for Africa" is explained by the returns on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which are



higher than elsewhere (9.3 per cent in 2011, against 7.2 per cent for the world as a whole [116]). For this reason, it leads to increased competition from a growing number of outside interests - of course the Western powers (USA, Canada, France, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, Australia, Israel, Korea ...) but also the emerging countries (China, India, Brazil, Turkey, the Gulf states, Malaysia, Russia, etc.). Not to mention North Africa and South Africa, which export and invest in the rest of the continent. In this more and more tense competitive environment, the Western powers, despite their own rivalries, point to the dramatic progress of China, which is winning an increasing number of tenders, such as the vast project of Nairobi Airport (where France had to admit defeat), the modernization of Ethiopia's telecommunications, the megaproject of the port of Bagamoyo (Tanzania), etc. The Middle Kingdom is also active in the media (newspapers, radio, satellite television), as well as in the building of schools and hospitals (sometimes carried out as aid). It is even beginning to delocalize some industrial activities.

China and the United States are engaged in a real "strategic game". The former offered a futuristic building, eighteen stories of glass and steel, to the AU for its headquarters in Addis Ababa, valued at \$200 million, and announced a plan to invest \$20 billion in 2013 -15, while the latter, in the aftermath of the "Doing Business in Africa" campaign, launched by Obama in November 2012, committed itself to spending \$7 billion over five years, which should attract \$9 billion of private capital, for electrification in sub-Saharan Africa. [117] After its failure in Mali, Washington is still looking for a country in which to establish the command of AFRICOM (perhaps Senegal?). The British are also on the way to increasing their influence in Africa: David Cameron has decided to designate "trade envoys" in Africa, vested with broad powers.

Seen from Africa, the growing class polarization, the accelerated social change and the strengthening of inter-imperialist competition may open the door to a balance of forces less

unfavourable than in the 1980s and 90s, which would make it possible to demand a higher share of the rents and an increase in national value added. But for whose benefit? On the one hand, the continuing upward movement of macroeconomic indicators in an ideological context marked by the growing influence of China is leading some sectors of the African bourgeoisies to look towards Beijing and its economic success, contributing to the questioning of the "dogma of economic disengagement of the state" [118], without considering, quite to the contrary, abandoning a productivist, authoritarian and highly unequal model. At the same time, the continent is going towards social explosions, whose outcome will depend on the capacity of the political and trade-union left and of social movements to defend their own perspectives, breaking with social-liberal illusions, perspectives which tend towards a break with capitalism. From this point of view, the wave of contestation that has shaken North Africa since the end of 2010, and which shows no lasting signs of exhaustion, but also the political radicalization of a powerful class-struggle trade union sector in South Africa, is good news.

## Break with neo-colonial paternalism

From this side of the Mediterranean, there will be no progress of internationalist solidarity with the popular struggles, the movements and the political forces that resist the social and ecological effects of imperialist domination in Africa, without a break from the history of the Western left, and therefore without a critical review of the complicity of the European Enlightenment with the slave trade, but especially of the workers' movement with colonialism, neo-colonialism and the racist immigration policies that accompany them. We never recall sufficiently that neither the Popular Front nor the National Council of the Resistance included in their programme the independence of the colonies. This historical review has nothing to do

with atonement for so-called Western guilt: the Western proletariat and the colonial peoples have in reality the same enemies.

To take just a few examples, let us recall that in the seventeenth century, the first plantation slaves in North America were, in greater numbers than the Africans, European victims of the criminal treatment of poverty at the time of primitive accumulation [119]; that the Versaillaise officers who massacred more than 20,000 Communards had learned "their trade" at the head of the "Bat d'Af " (French forces in Africa); that Nazi barbarism that was inspired by the colonial "heart of darkness" before developing its genocidal policies in Eastern Europe and Russia, as Simone Weil (the philosopher), Aimé Césaire and Hannah Arendt have shown convincingly; the paratroop officer Paul Aussaresses, specialist in torture and death squads in Algeria, transmitted his experience to the specialists of Fort Bragg in the USA, who would put it into practice in Vietnam (Operation Phoenix), as well as to those of the Manaus Centre (Brazil), which trained the secret police of the South American dictatorships; that structural adjustment programs were decided first in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the 1980s and 90s, before being "exported" to southern Europe today.

As concerns the circulation of imperialist practices between the North and the South, the recent history of France is instructive. After the Liberation, a number of cadres of the Vichy regime - of its police apparatus in particular - were transferred to Africa to continue their dirty work in the perspective of a controlled "decolonization". With poetic justice, in April 1961, the leaders of the French army in Algeria, organized in the OAS, tried a *pronunciamiento* (as de Gaulle put it) against the political authorities of the metropolis; six months later, on October 17, it was the police prefect of Paris, Maurice Papon, a war criminal under the Occupation, recycled by the Gaullists, who repressed a demonstration of the FLN in Paris, at the cost of at least several dozen deaths. Just recently, in a sign



of the continuity of the relationship between the far right and troops overseas, a group of paratroopers operating in the CAR could wear Nazi insignia on their uniforms without eliciting any reaction from their superiors before the scandal broke publicly. [120]

Over and above these necessary reminders, the left of the dominant countries must work to formulate an unambiguously anti-imperialist programme, even though it may seem still largely propagandist. In this sense, should we not defend more consistently the idea that, to save the vast majority of humanity from increasing misery, it is urgent to break with capitalism? In fact, the present crisis of globalization combines at least four dimensions that necessitate overall responses: first of all economic, since the relative accumulation of capital and its quest for increased profitability leads to the increasing export of capital ; which can go along with the acceptance of profits deferred over time [121]; social, mainly due to the return on a large scale of accumulation by dispossession, which leads to a massive increase of migration; ecological, due to the acceleration of global warming and the increasing shortage of natural resources, resulting from the runaway productivist model and its "extractive" component; lastly, political, given the accelerated loss of control of those below and the increased power of those at the top over the major economic and social choices of the planet, but also the growing rivalry between those at the top, which can fuel political and even military conflict.

How can we develop class responses to these four dimensions of the crisis, showing that the interests of the overwhelming majority of humanity - also essential to the maintenance of evolved forms of life - are antagonistic to those of the ruling classes, and that this antagonism takes place on a global scale? Such a programme is not conceivable without challenging private ownership of the means of production (natural resources and technical means), distribution and credit, especially because it allows a small minority to decide at its

discretion on how they are used. That is the main reason why the people of the world have a shared interest in breaking with capitalism and the imperialist domination that it supports. This thinking is certainly not new: all the more reason to be surprised that it is not usually invoked in current debates on neo-colonialism and unequal development, whereas it has recently found a renewed audience, on the left of political ecology, among authors who do not refer directly to ecosocialism [122]. In reality, the implosion of the USSR and the conversion of China to capitalism are largely responsible for this paradox.

Moreover, as several Marxist authors have noted since Rosa Luxemburg, with imperialism, the generalization of capitalist accumulation by the exploitation of wage labour is combined on a world scale with the pursuit of primitive accumulation, particularly by colonial and neo-colonial violence. More recently, since the mid-1970s, the crisis of "central" capitalism has also helped to the relaunching, on a larger scale, of what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession" at the expense of small producers, but also of wage-earners of the "periphery", by accelerating the privatization of natural resources (land, forests, rivers, coastal waters, underground resources, etc.) and public enterprises, especially in Africa. [123] Such a regime of accumulation has in turn fostered a massive increase in migration flows, insofar as it combines the uprooting of peoples living from subsistence agriculture and petty commodity production, with their accelerated migration, in particular through war, their crowding into vast slums and the employment of some of them in export-related sectors (agriculture, mining, industry, transportation, etc.).

From the perspective of Western anti-imperialists, our solidarity with these populations should begin by supporting their resistance to expropriation, too often directly linked to imperialist interests (land grabbing, hydroelectric projects, mineral exploration, wars for resources, etc.). It must continue with the denunciation of their working conditions in jobs that are for the most part informal, underpaid and dangerous, for

production, services and sales, often for the benefit of foreign employers. Of course, the expropriation of tens of millions of African smallholders does not lead to the creation of a comparable number of jobs, even precarious, prompting the explosive growth in the numbers of the proletariat "without warmth or hearth" who roam the countryside, offering their services to networks of smuggling, robbery or armed struggle, which sometimes take on the colours of an ethnic or sectarian creed, or who are crowded into shanty towns in search of some expedient to survive. The migration of some of them to another sub-Saharan country or even to North Africa, with the hope of reaching Europe, condemns them to suffer various forms of violence, including prolonged detention in countries bordering the Mediterranean, usually ordered by the EU, which deserve to be actively denounced.

The proliferation of tragedies that strike clandestine migrants, in particular off the coast of Lampedusa, is the direct result of actions taken by institutions such as Frontex, but also of the increasingly restrictive laws adopted by European states, with the backing of left parties. That is why positions that are taken at the end of the migratory chain against the most abject consequences of inhuman anti-migration policies, while encouraging the development and defending the inviolability of Fortress Europe, are at best ineffective. The criminalization of migrants, justified by the obsession with security and by racism is in fact the main form now taken by the war against "the plague of beggars", typical of the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, but also of periods of mass unemployment in Europe since the nineteenth century. It is only by supporting the struggle of migrants against their arbitrary detention and deportation, but also against the humiliations and the slave work that they are often compelled to do, and for the respect of their rights, that we will promote their association with trade-union organizations and social movements that are fighting against the dismantling of public services and social benefits, but also against property speculation and the

exploitation of labour in the countries of the North. To refuse to make this a priority is to turn our backs on the centrality of the anti-imperialist struggle for the reconstruction of a proletarian class consciousness in the dominant countries.

In conclusion, this article starts from the premise that it is pointless to distinguish between the economic interests of the big private groups and the political power of the French state in Africa. Indeed, in a context where competition between exporters and investors throughout the world continues to sharpen, it is clear that Paris is trying to play a more aggressive role by mobilizing all its traditional strengths in Africa. Thus, since the backyard in decline has too often been used to prop up not very competitive capital, *Françafrique* should be transformed into the rear

base of the CAC 40 companies in order to conquer new market shares in the "English-speaking" and "Portuguese-speaking" regions of the continent. It is therefore not a question of turning its back on the CFA zone, but of reinvesting its preferential rents in favour of a logic of expansion. In this context, the capacity of intervention of the French army in its former empire must be considered as a significant political asset, which may even give rise to significant economic returns, provided they apply it carefully, in a concerted international framework, in particular with the UN Security Council, the United States, the EU, the AU and the authorities of the region and the country concerned.

What I have called "the humanitarian daze" of the French left prevents it from seeing to what extent the "securing of fragile states" is now one

of the strategic tasks of imperialism, at a moment when the different imperialisms are jostling to bleed Africa white. After all, did not the colonization of the late nineteenth century also have the stated purpose of providing the "black continent" with a stable political order, "favourable to the security of business", based on untrammelled exploitation of the continent's resources? Similarly, far from saving lives threatened by the collapse of government, the large-scale police operations, currently conducted or sponsored by the Western powers, are only preparing the ground for a more implacable exploitation of the continent, whose human and environmental consequences could turn out to be even more deadly than the previous "scramble for Africa."

*January 15, 2014*

## **The Chinese CP, Japan and the South China Sea : Past & Present**

**11 September 2014, by Au Loong-Yu**

My debut in the social movement took place when I was 14, in 1971, and it was coincidentally in the campaign to defend the Diaoyu Islands [Senkaku Islands to the Japanese]. A raw sense of nationalism underpinned my involvement then and this unrefined state of awareness had been in the making since I was much younger. But it was not nurtured at my school. Under British colonial rule, the pathetically little amount of knowledge on China that I learned from my primary school virtually boiled down to merely the stories of two iconic individuals - that of Confucius and Sun Yat-sen. I was aware of Japan's invasions of mainland China and Hong Kong, and the sense of nationalism that they have fostered, but all these were sourced from the memories of the adults around me and word-of-mouth stories. Every now and then, my Dad would talk about "the

fall of Hong Kong" into Japanese hands and in particular a story that arose from that period - that "in reaction to a passerby failing to salute him, a Japanese soldier pulled out his bayonet in no time and plunged it into that person's back in a 'swish', killing him in one hit".

### **My history in defending Diaoyu**

The radicalised youth of that generation soon polarised into two major currents - the nationalists and left internationalists. Most of the radicalised youth identified with the former, and among this group, most would unconditionally support the "Guo Cui tendency" [translator: touted as representing the quintessence of the Chinese culture], a Chinese

Communist Party (CCP) front. The pro-Kuomintang (KMT) nationalists were very much on the fringe already by that time. The liberalism-inclined youth who had a strong sympathy for the battlers at the bottom of the social pyramid also constituted a distinct current, but they had by then avoided political actions against both the colonial government and the CCP.

Following a couple of years of soul searching and observations, I eventually arrived at a socialist position and subsequently became a member of a Trotskyist group. That was 1976 and nationalism was no longer appealing to me. Whenever I read about anti-Japanese resistance efforts under the Kuomintang, I couldn't help dissecting in my mind the whole conception of nationalism. A satirical folk rhyme during the Anti-Japanese Resistance era was spot on.

It said, "while those in the frontline are starving, some in the rear are gorging", referring to the KMT fat cats and laying bare the harsh reality behind the spin of a "homogeneous national community", when in fact social disparities remained as stark and polarised as ever. This can be expressed by the following old Chinese saying: a hierarchy of the colours of one's clothing - three grades - and the dishes one consumed - nine levels. In today's terms, this is the dichotomy and contradiction between the elite 1% versus the remaining 99%. However important the question of national independence is, resolving this question alone would not take one far. What independence would essentially mean in that case is that the privileged classes within the national group would be in a privileged position to oppress and exploit the fellow members of that national group, leaving the system of oppression and exploitation intact. This very much encapsulated the reality of China under the KMT.

While things were not as bad under Mao's China, one could not simply sweep the existence of social inequities in that period under the carpet. While social disparities in Mao's days were far fewer than in KMT China, this by no means suggests that the problem was insignificant during that era. Moreover, unless one adopts the Maoist approach of setting one's sight only on the economics but not the politics and turning a blind eye to the one-party dictatorship, which was virtually a one-person dictatorship, a gross violation of the most elemental of political equalities, should one not admit that stark polarisation between the overlord rulers and their subjects was still very much alive and kicking in Mao's new "Chinese nation"?

Nevertheless, I still supported the defence of Diaoyu Island. That support was not based on nationalism anymore but was anchored on internationalism. China at the time had not long ago emerged from its semi-colonial legacy in the wake of a revolution from below - driven by its toiling classes - whereas Japan was an imperialist country, which during the cold war sought to contain China hand in hand with the US. The CCP regime was

certainly not as socialist as it proclaimed to be (under its rule China was not a socialist country, not even a society in transition to socialism). But it was anti-imperialist, however limited that might be, and was a more progressive force compared to Japan. Anything that helps advance the territorial gains and power base of imperialism, such as Japan's occupation of the Diaoyu Islands would, should clearly be condemned. This was the very reason why I and other comrades continued to support the defence of Diaoyu. Another point of consideration was the disparity in the balance of forces between the two contending camps - that of the powerful Japanese-American alliance versus a weak China. The moral framework applicable to the relations between nations coincides with that which guides human relations on one issue - i.e., one should side with the weak to stand up to the bully.

Today, I no longer support the defence of Diaoyu. The twin considerations just outlined do not exist anymore. Not only is China today neither anti-capitalist nor anti-imperialist, it has in fact reverted back to capitalism - and is of a despicable variety. With the CCP as its nucleus, China's bureaucratic capital thrives and gorges at the cruel expense of the Chinese people. While pretending to defend China's national interest on the one hand, it had no qualms pulling the rug from under the rural population's livelihoods in order to gain entry into the World Trade Organisation, bankrupting the rural economy in the process and pushing the resulting marginalized 250 million destitute rural population into the cities as wage earners. Whenever these internal migrant workers sought to strike for their rights and exercise their freedom of association, the CCP gave them a big whack over their heads with its repressive state machine in order to help the private capitalists (which includes also a fair chunk of foreign capital) to sort them out in a bid to keep the wheels of the exploitative machine turning. In this process, had the CCP refused to tango with US imperialism, the global sweatshop on Chinese soil wouldn't have been possible. As it turned out, the CCP regime had no problem selling the country's impoverished

poor, figuratively speaking, and natural resources, for which they raked in and amassed huge foreign exchange earnings.

Gradually, China became not only the world's top goods exporters, it also started commanding a similar supremacy in capital exports. Before long, the "drama" of the rise of Chinese capital moved to scene two, in which it cast its economic tentacles around the globe as all multinational corporations do, targeting especially the underdeveloped countries, perpetuating economic colonialism. The toilers of these lands were exploited and their environments ravaged in its wake. In Peru, China's Shougang/Capital Steel Corporation has cracked down on its workforce there for their trade union activism, resulting in frequent strikes as workers refused to surrender to their management's attack. In Burma, the locals protested against Chinese mining firm Wanbao for polluting their local environment. In Greece, China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) wielded a big axe and sacked a good chunk of the workforce in Greece's biggest port after it acquired a slice of the port's ownership. To reward COSCO for this audacious move, the Greek government offered it an even bigger stake in the port. (This prompted the maritime workers' unions of 16 countries to issue a joint statement on March 16, 2014, condemning the Greek government's move).

When China first embarked on its journey to revert back to capitalism three decades ago, the Chinese and Japanese economies were more complementary to each other than competitive. With China's long climb up the technology ladder ever since and its metamorphosis into one of the world's biggest capital exporters, the two countries are now more like rivals than a complementary pair, especially in Asia. This dynamic frames the macro environment in which the two governments' contention for Diaoyu/Senkaku takes place. This contest is no less an extension of the hegemonic expansion of these two powers in Asia, which will bring nothing but harm to their toiling populations no matter which side grabs the upper hand.

Lastly, the century-long scenario of a weak China staring at a strong Japan has given way to a more even handed enmity between two powers. So in the current context, the need no longer exists for the people's movement to intervene to give the weaker party a hand to stand up to the bully.

The resistance against the Japanese invasion is still vivid in the Chinese people's living memory, as is evident in the anti-Japanese resistance content of the Chinese national anthem. Yet with China's rise as a major power, we should understand that it no longer risks falling victim to another invasion. China's own biggest enemies do not come from without anymore but are found in the twin evils of an utterly wicked bureaucratic dictatorship and bureaucratic capitalism. Similarly, if one says Chinese nationalism under Japanese occupation was progressive in its social content, Chinese nationalism today can only be reactionary in its social character and has nowhere to go but down the path of great Han chauvinism.

## The CCP's foreign policy after its reversion to capitalism

I do not defend Diaoyu anymore. By that I mean I would not support China as a country taking actions, let alone waging a war, to defend Diaoyu. I would not support the people taking actions to defend Diaoyu either. To do otherwise would only add fuel to the fire. This does not mean that I support Japan's continuing occupation of Diaoyu. A Japanese left writer who refused to support Japan's occupation of Diaoyu/Senkaku elaborated his position as follows: "We have always rejected the claim of Japan having sovereignty over 'Senkaku' and this is based on that fact that Japan's occupation of 'Senkaku' was inextricably linked to its colonisation of Taiwan which resulted from the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95. Even international law would not recognize such an act of war as legitimate." [124] Especially since Shinzo Abe came into power, his

administration has become the most rightwing of all Japanese governments in many years. His success in the militaristic push in allowing its armed forces to engage in "collective self defence" [in the name of defending its allies] illustrated the point brilliantly. We cannot allow this rightwing government to have its way on the Diaoyu/Senkaku issue.

In all fairness, one has to register that the Japanese government bears a greater responsibility in escalating the Diaoyu/Senkaku contest lately. The CCP's long-standing position on this issue has been to let the sleeping dog lie. But the Japanese government unilaterally breached this decades-long consensus by nationalizing the ownership of the islands.

While the CCP did not stir up the latest round of the row, one has no basis to have faith that it would resolve the disagreement in the best interests of the peoples in the upcoming tussles. Therefore, not only should the people in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan not continue their actions to defend Diaoyu, they should lose no time in forging an alliance with the Japanese people with the aim to build a peaceful people's movement across the two nations and join forces in opposing any militaristic actions that the two governments might undertake on the issue.

Two decades back, an anarchist cultural activist in Hong Kong once remarked that the Diaoyu Islands should belong to the fish ["yu" means fish in Chinese and the literally meaning of Diaoyutai, the Chinese name for the islands, is that it is a "fishing platform"]. If this proposition was not very convincing then, it should be a lot more persuasive now. Why not turn the Diaoyu Islands and their surrounds into a protected marine zone. We should under no circumstances consent to the rulers of the two countries degenerating into military confrontations over the islands, let alone starting a war in their name.

If one does not find the CCP's original position on the Diaoyu issue (to shelve the contention over the island's sovereignty) over the top, one has to admit it is much more arrogant over

the developments in the South China Sea. In the name of inheriting the "nine dash lines" rights of the Republic of China under the rule of KMT, it hugely expanded its claims of maritime territories, triggering objections from many countries. Unlike its policy towards Japan in which it proposed putting the contention on hold, the CCP has resorted more and more frequently to armed actions to assert its way in the South China Sea. I am not an expert on international law and would not be able to discuss the issue in that framework. Rather, I would like to have a closer look at the standard nationalist assertion, led by the CCP, that they "would not yield even an inch of the country's sacred territory". This is nonsense. The CCP has ironed out border issues time and again with its neighbours in its nearly seven decades in power. Has it always asserted adhering wholly and completely to the land inherited from the Qing Dynasty or the Republic of China? Obviously not. It certainly was not the case in its border deal with North Korea after the People's Republic of China was founded.

"In this period... the CCP central leadership has gradually laid down the guiding principles with which it would deal with the country's border issues. Firstly, it would uphold a peaceful foreign policy under which it would resolve border differences through negotiations and would not resort to armed actions to change the status quo. Secondly, the border negotiation archives from the late Qing Dynasty, the Beiyang government [translator: warlord government of northern China after 1911] and the KMT government could form the legal basis for future deliberations; three principles must be upheld in scrutinising the historical archives - one must acknowledge the historical facts; while not severing oneself from history, one must identify the trend of historical developments; one's approach to history must take full consideration into the circumstances of today and of the nation's current policies. Thirdly, with respect to China's border issues with its neighbouring countries, 'for those that had been sorted out in old agreements should be dealt with according to the general principles of international law'... But in its handling



of the Sino-Korean border question a couple of years later, China did not seem to have adhered to the general principles of international law, i.e. to embark on the border negotiations on the basis of the 1909 treaty. Instead, China gave up a big area in the source region of the Tumen River and agreed on a border more or less in accordance with North Korea's demands. This is how the Heavenly Lake, a 98 square kilometre chunk of land that was entirely China's originally, became 54.5% owned by Korea, with China's ownership shrinking to 45.5%. With respect to China's territories in the Tumen River source region, the land area that China gave up amounted to roughly 1200 square kilometres based on the concessions China made since the 1909 Kando Agreement to the 1962 Sino-Korean Border Treaty, and estimated by way of changes in the old and new maps [125]."

In China's Search for Security, Andrew Nathan & Andrew Scobell have pointed out that "not all of China's territory has been nonnegotiable. Over the years, Beijing has yielded 1.3 million square miles of claims to North Korea, Laos, Burma, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and other states in order to settle territorial disputes. [126]"

## The CCP's big-nation chauvinism

The CCP has never relied on just one principle (its proclaimed territories) to guide its negotiation over contested borders. Nor did it ever "yield not even an inch of its territory". Rather, it weighed the relations between itself and the contending nation, their relative balance of forces as well as "the party's fundamental guiding policies" at the time. First and foremost, China has been much more arrogant in its territorial contests in the South China Sea because the contesting parties in South East Asia are all small countries. But equally important is the fact that "the party's fundamental guiding policy" has undergone fundamental changes since China's reversion back to capitalism. Since the CCP came into power in

1949 until the early 1970s, revolutionary and anti-capitalist rhetoric was still the order of the day for the CCP and it sometimes even overdid it. Not only did it keep the CCP's chauvinism in check, it made the CCP even appear at times internationalist to an extent. When Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai met Asian leaders in that period, they would invariably apologize for the invasions of their land by Chinese dynasties of the past. This approach also applied to China's relations with North Korea. Mao said to the visiting Kim Il Sung in 1958:

"Historically, China has not treated Korea well and therefore our ancestors were indebted to your ancestors... Your ancestors said your border [with China] was along the Liao River. But you see, you have been pushed [translator: further east] to the Yalu River." [127]

Nowadays, the official media tirelessly puts out propaganda boasting about how "China has always been a peace-loving country throughout its ancient history and that it has never invaded other countries", or that "that piece of territory has always been China's from time immemorial". While Deng Xiaoping has laid down emphatically the foreign policy of "hiding one's talents and biding one's time", and had suggested to also shelve the contention of the South China sea disputes with neighbouring countries, now the Xi Jinping government, knowing full well China's increasing sway and appreciating the distraction that an external threat would play in deflecting mounting contradictions on the home front, has turned increasingly arrogant in its foreign policies, especially in relation to its small Asian neighbours.

Why was there such a change? The overhaul in the CCP's class character constituted a qualitative change that brought about a further qualitative transformation on the part of the CCP, both on the ideological plane and in the material arena. Foreign policies are likely to be an extension of a country's domestic politics, and domestic politics is little more than a tool of class interests. If even the class character of a regime has been turned around, domestic politics and foreign

policies can hardly stay the same. While China sought after "self reliance" during the Mao period, it submerged itself deep into global capitalism in the post-Deng era for a share of the riches. In order to prop up its role as the sweatshop of the world and for the sake of more foreign exchange, the country has become dependent on imports for half of its petroleum needs as well as for raw materials of all sorts while relying on exports to fuel half of its economic growth. China has even now become a major capital exporting nation. Economic expansion inevitably brings about political and military extension, and this logic is the fundamental reason why the CCP would inevitably become more and more plagued by big-nation chauvinism.

Rather than resorting to violence, a country should endeavour to establish its exact border through amicable and peaceful means, even more so when the borders at stake are remote islands hundreds and thousands of kilometres away from its principal shores. Obviously, a solution that involves some concessions is always a possibility. Concessions are even preferable when the contesting party is a country that is much smaller than your own. There is no such implicit notion as "conceding not even an inch of one's territory" or else what negotiation is there to have. If a country could sign away thousands of li (1 li = 0.5 kilometres) of its territories in the past and would now "concede not even an inch" of its land, it is only either because its rulers have undergone a qualitative change or it is putting on airs with its much smaller counterparts and believes it has the right to launch a military offensive or to "teach them a lesson". This is why Mao's China, notwithstanding its shortcomings, had earned the respect of the workers, peasants and anti-colonial movements in a whole variety of countries. Whereas today, placards from the common people protesting against capital from mainland China and calling for it to "go back to where it came from" are commonplace from Africa to Asia. What is even more worrying is the CCP's highhanded readiness to stomp out opposition of all stripes, especially that from among the toiling masses. That's why in the eyes of the workers in other countries,

they found it hard to differentiate between the CCP rulers and the Chinese people and fail to appreciate that they are not one and the same thing.

## May the Chinese and Japanese peoples join hands in launching a people's peace movement across the two nations

The Chinese nation under the rule of the CCP obviously is not a homogenous community with identical interests. This nation in fact comprises two opposing "national groups", that of the top 1% and the remaining 99%. The former "nation" is despotic, shameless and greedy, and could not care less for the interest of its own country. This is why many of the ruling strata probably have foreign bank accounts with fat balances as a stash away for their families and for their indulgence as and when they migrate overseas. The latter "nation" is oppressed, being trampled upon, exploited and fooled. A survey conducted by the NetEast.com website in 2006 found that 64% of Chinese interviewed would dearly wish they "would not be a Chinese again in their next life". Their top reason for this aversion is that "being a Chinese earns one very little respect". [128] We wish whenever the

people of other countries rise to protest the harm that Chinese capital has inflicted upon them, that they would take care not to afflict collateral damage on the innocent parties. A case in point was the blanket indiscriminate attacks on Chinese people in Vietnam in May this year.

Similarly, the Chinese people also need to realise that there exists actually two "Japans" – a "Japan" of the zaibatsu/financial magnates and bureaucrats and a "Japan" of the toiling masses. It is the former "Japan" that should really be held responsible for the wars of aggression and economic expansionism, whereas the other "Japan" has always warmed my heart. Many leftwing and progressive groups in Japan have for years strived hard to counter Japanese imperialism where they could, which has included the Japanese government's move to lift the ban on its military from engaging in so-called collective self-defence. In the days when we were still defending Diaoyu, we benefited for years from the solidarity support of Japan's Bridge magazine. Moreover, friends from the Japanese trade unions have also shown internationalism to me through their actions. In November 2010, I took part in the "Tokyo East Rights and Entitlements General Offensive" which the Zenrokyo/National Trade Unions Council put on in spring and autumn every year. One of the cases that the offensive featured was the wages in arrears and unpaid compensation of five Chinese trainees [translator: they were workers to all intents and purposes but in name]. A Zenrokyo delegation accompanied the trainees

to their employers to press for their demands. What follows was a report I wrote then of that event:

"Mr Hiroshi Nakajima of the Zentoitsu (All United) Workers' Union and Mr Kishimoto, the commander-in-chief of the "Tokyo East Rights and Entitlements General Offensive" (Tokyo East Union), accompanied those trainees and other workers to the employment agency. The boss refused to negotiate with them initially. Then the whole mob of us barged into the boss's office, forcing him to back down and start negotiating. When I bid farewell to the trainees upon my pending departure, I recalled in my chance encounter with some Chinese in Japan well more than a decade ago that they told me that only the left wing trade unions would stand up for them and be ready to extend a friendly helping hand against abuses from their bosses or the cops. The saying that "all men are brothers" (and sisters) is more relevant than ever to the labouring masses."

I have had the chance to talk to the friends from various labour movements in Europe, the US and beyond during my visits to those places in the past decade or so, and have time and again come across with situations in which the selfless spirit of internationalism came through. Karl Marx's adage that "Proletarians of the world unite!" hasn't passed its use-by date.

July 7, 2014

*Translated from the Chinese original by Eva To. Translation reviewed by the author.*

## August 1914 and World War I

10 September 2014, by **William Smaldone**

At the beginning of the 20th century the European socialist movement appeared to be an unstoppable force. The establishment of parliamentary institutions in most countries during the last third of the 19th century had

opened the door to the creation of new political organizations calling themselves "Socialist," "Social Democratic," or "Labor" parties, some of which soon had tens or even hundreds of thousands of dues-paying

members and millions of voters.

Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) was the quintessential model. Equipped with a theoretical and practical program largely grounded in

Marxist principles, the party called for the overthrow of the system of competitive capitalism based on private property and its replacement by a socialist order based on cooperation and public property.

In addition to its demands for immediate reforms in such spheres as social insurance, collective bargaining rights, education and workplace safety, it supported the democratization of political and economic life and called for the universal emancipation of workers, oppressed minorities and women. By 1913 the SPD had over one million members and the electoral support of one-third of the country's 12 million voters.

On the national level, Europe's socialist parties had the backing of an even more rapidly-growing trade union movement, while their commitment to workers' internationalism was symbolized by their membership in the Socialist International, founded in 1889, to link the theoretical and practical aims of member parties around the world. [129] It appeared to many workers "and even to many in the ruling classes" that history was on the side of socialism and it was only a matter of time before the growing labor movement would bring capitalism to its knees.

Yet this powerful movement rapidly splintered and never fully recovered its strength. The outbreak of the First World War revealed a number of ideological and political tensions that had long been present within socialism but had never seemed divisive enough to challenge its fundamental unity.

The war acted as the catalyst: it destroyed the International and precipitated 30 years of upheaval that included the Russian revolutions of 1917, the longterm division of the labor movement into competing social democratic and communist currents, and the rise of fascism. By the time of the latter's defeat in 1945, these developments had fundamentally altered what it meant to be a socialist.

If the two decades preceding the outbreak of war can be regarded as

socialism's halcyon days, its apparent strength was chimerical. During this time virtually all socialists believed that capitalism was obsolete and should (and inevitably would) be replaced by "socialism," but what that would look like remained vague and serious disagreements erupted about how to move toward it.

At the outset, the basic division in the movement was between reform-oriented socialists such as Edward Bernstein in Germany and Jean Jaurés in France, and more radical socialists such as August Bebel and Karl Kautsky in Germany, who believed that capitalist development paved the way for proletarian revolution.

Reformists argued that the movement should use the institutions of bourgeois democracy, such as parliament, to press for immediate reforms that over time would lead to socialist transformation. Indeed, some pushed for entering into coalition governments with moderate bourgeois parties to implement change.

Buttressed theoretically by Bernstein's "revisionist" challenge to some of Marx's fundamental assertions about the crisis-prone nature of capitalism and the inevitability of class struggle, this group also insisted that the movement openly recognize its reformist rather than its revolutionary character as a means of broadening its support to non-proletarian voters.

Over time the reform approach won a political base among many activists in the trade union and party organizations, who focused their activities on "bread and butter" issues and feared the repression that would follow violent political confrontation with the state. Bernstein's statement summed up what many felt:

"I freely admit that I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed 'the final goal of socialism.' This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me, the movement is everything."

The reformist approach encountered sharp opposition, however, from a solid majority of the movement's political leaders. The widely-respected Bebel, co-founder of the SPD, and

Kautsky, known as the "Pope" of socialism, did not deny the importance of reforms for improving workers' political and economic circumstances, but rather insisted on reaffirming the party's revolutionary identity.

They had the strong support of key figures such as Victor Adler in Austria-Hungary, the Polish revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, and Russia's V.I. Lenin among many others. These "radical" leaders not only repeatedly condemned "revisionism" at their own national party congresses and at the meetings of the International, but also produced an array of articles and books seeking to undercut Bernstein's theoretical claims and to reaffirm the predominance of Marxist theory within the movement. [130]

In practical terms, however, these often-acrimonious debates had little concrete impact on the day-to-day operations of the movement. Wherever the basic civil rights of bourgeois democracy and parliamentary institutions existed, even in pseudo-autocratic Germany where the Emperor sharply curtailed parliamentary power, socialist activity largely focused on expanding the parties' electoral strength, building the trade unions, and pressing for political and economic reforms.

Most socialists agreed with Kautsky that to prepare the masses for the coming revolution required raising their political consciousness, a task for which the party, the unions, and their myriad ancillary organizations were essential instruments. Hence the focus was on institution building and electioneering rather than on radical political action. It seemed imperative that the movements protect themselves by avoiding large-scale political confrontations with the state, while preserving their revolutionary purity by remaining in the parliamentary opposition rather than entering coalition governments with bourgeois parties.

Among the most controversial issues dividing socialists in the decade prior to the outbreak of the war was the use of the political mass strike. Some reformers, such as Bernstein, actually supported the mass-strike as a way to win concrete reforms, such as



expanded suffrage. Others, such as the Austro-German radical theorist Rudolf Hilferding and his mentor Kautsky, argued that the political mass strike was a weapon that should be reserved for the final confrontation with the capitalists who, fearing socialist parliamentary gains, would attempt to roll back workers' rights and thus precipitate a violent confrontation.

To use the political strike prematurely, Hilferding and Kautsky asserted, would only invite massive state repression of the movement's organizations, so carefully built up in Germany after the lifting of draconian anti-Socialist laws in the early 1890s.

A third current also emerged, however, one that led to new complications in inner-party politics. After establishing herself as a major opponent of revisionism with the publication of *Reform or Revolution* in 1900, in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1905 Rosa Luxemburg also became increasingly critical of the party leadership's "passive" electoral strategy.

A participant in the revolution in Poland, Luxemburg had witnessed effective popular mobilization that included the use of mass strikes and now stressed their importance in educating workers for revolution. Importantly, she rejected the strait-jacketed separation of economic from political demands and the notion that the use of mass strikes was to be decided by the top-down tutelage of party officials. She sought to encourage workers to take action, to learn from their mistakes, and thus gain confidence. [131]

Many trade union leaders, such as the head of Germany's main trade union federation, Carl Legien, regarded the mass strike as an impractical, adventurist tactic. They resented the political debates on the issue as meddling in their affairs and, at the SPD's Mannheim Congress of 1906, managed to take the use of the mass strike off the agenda. This effort largely succeeded because a majority of the party leaders, including Bebel, came to share their feeling that the use of the mass-strike, especially in the sense promoted by Luxemburg,

could get out of control.

Although individuals often crossed factional lines depending on the issue, the mass-strike debate revealed that three basic divisions had emerged within the German party. On the right, revisionism grew increasingly influential among a new generation of reform-oriented party leaders charged with overseeing an ever-growing and more complex set of institutions.

On the left arose a small group of leaders, such as Luxemburg and the especially sharp critic of German militarism, Karl Liebknecht, who aimed to steer the movement along a more radical course. It was the so-called "Marxist Center," however, led by Bebel, Kautsky and Hilferding, who commanded a majority of party support by holding high the banner of theoretical "orthodoxy" and the party's radical identity, but without actually challenging its reformist practice.

These fissures within German Social Democracy replicated themselves to various degrees in most European countries, but it is important to bear in mind that, despite the vitriolic and sometimes intensely personal conflicts that occurred, international socialism prior to 1914 was by-and-large a tolerant movement. The debates over revisionism, for example, usually fought out in the party press and at party congresses, resulted in virtually no expulsions of defeated exponents.

Even the much-criticized Bernstein remained a respected comrade. He had helped lead the party from exile during the period of the anti-socialist laws (1878-1890), had known Marx and Engels personally, and co-authored, with Kautsky, his one-time close friend, the SPD's model Erfurt Program of 1891. Expulsion was never really a serious option and the same was true for others, like Rosa Luxemburg, who raised the ire of the party executive.

It is also true that, for most socialist leaders of this period, quitting the party was never a serious choice. The party was the movement's vehicle for changing the world and it was their political home. For activists at all levels and in most countries,

leadership often came with substantial personal risk. To voluntarily leave was tantamount to quitting one's post in the struggle, abandoning one's belief system, and turning one's back on the most important socialist organization with organic ties to the masses.

Although many socialists expected the rivalries among the imperialist powers eventually to result in a major conflagration, the events of the summer of 1914 caught them off guard. Many were on vacation in the weeks following the assassination of Austria-Hungary's heir to the throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, by a Serb nationalist on 22 June. As tensions in Europe rose, they responded as they always had when their governments threatened war: they mobilized mass demonstrations in protest.

In this case, though, the leaders of Europe's rival political blocs—the Triple Entente consisting of France, England, and Russia and the Triple Alliance linking Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy (which later dropped out)—were unable or unwilling to confine the conflict to the Balkans. In August they opted instead for all-out war.

Virtually all of Europe's socialist parties had to make a choice: they could stand on the long-established principle of socialist internationalism and reject their respective country's call to the colors or they could join in the national struggle as patriotic citizens. That a strong majority of socialist leaders across Europe chose the latter course ultimately shattered the movement and led to its permanent division.

The question is why they made that choice. Of course the answer is complex.

For the majority of socialists, capitalism and war were inextricably intertwined and some theorists, such as Hilferding, had written extensively linking the rise of finance capital to the aggressive colonial rivalries of the great powers, to the arms race on land and sea, and to the emergence of the alliance system that divided Europe into two armed camps.



Hilferding, like Lenin, believed that war could serve as a catalyst for proletarian revolution, but virtually no socialists wanted to promote such a scenario. On the contrary, most believed it was the labor movement's duty to combat militarism and to prevent the outbreak of war. In 1907 the International's Stuttgart Congress unanimously accepted a resolution, written by a subcommittee that included Bebel, Jaurés and Luxemburg, among others, which read as follows:

"If a war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved, supported by the coordinating activity of the International Socialist Bureau, to exert every effort in order to prevent its outbreak. They must employ the means they consider most effective, which naturally vary according to the sharpening of the class struggle and the general political situation.

"In case war should break out anyway, it is their duty to intervene for its speedy termination and to strive with all their power to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule." [132]

The language of this statement was bold but served primarily to paper over sharp disagreement among the committee members about how to respond to the outbreak of hostilities (e.g. with mass strikes, demonstrations, etc.). Moreover, their often heated debates revealed that, contrary to Marx and Engels's famous pronouncement in The Communist Manifesto that "proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains," many socialists identified strongly with their respective countries and saw no contradiction between their commitment to international working-class solidarity and their nation's right to self-defense.

This commonly-held feeling meant that, rather than respond as one to any hostilities, their actions would depend on the degree to which they perceived their own country to be threatened by foreign aggression.

While the weaknesses of the International's position would become clear in 1914, after Stuttgart, however, the movement forged an impressive "demonstration political culture" as it mobilized large numbers of workers against repeated threats to peace. [133] Socialist antiwar protests culminated in November of 1912 as the International responded to the start of the First Balkan War in which Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro attacked and defeated the Ottoman Empire with a Europe-wide series of antiwar demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands of participants.

The penultimate event of the protests took place at the International's extraordinary Basel Congress on 25 November, at which tens of thousands of demonstrators welcomed delegations from across Europe. Asserting that "The ruling class' fear of a proletarian revolution resulting from a world war has proved to be an essential guarantee of peace," the Congress left many feeling confident. As Jaurés put it to a friend, "Don't worry, the Socialists will do their duty. Four million German socialists will rise like one man and execute the Kaiser if he wants to start a war." [134]

As the major European states moved toward war, however, it was Jaurés who, on 31 July 1914 was shot down by a nationalist fanatic, while Kaiser Wilhelm II remained unscathed. The International Socialist Bureau (ISB), headquartered in Brussels, attempted once again to mobilize demonstrations against the impending war. It tried to move its planned congress from Vienna to Paris and vainly called for international arbitration.

All eyes were on Germany in late July, as tens of thousands of workers demonstrated for peace in Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig and elsewhere, but by the first week of August, events and pro-war sentiment overtook the socialists.

Recent studies have shown that Europe's workers did not share the enthusiasm for war so widespread among the middle classes, but, impressed by the growing chauvinism in the streets and fearful of opposing

what the government called a "defensive" war against Russian aggression, the German socialist leaders capitulated. On 4 August, after a heated debate revealed a 78-14 majority in their parliamentary delegation, the SPD's representatives, including Karl Liebknecht, adhered to party discipline in the Reichstag and voted unanimously in favor of granting the government war credits.

A number of factors shaped this fateful decision. As we've noted, many party and trade union leaders, for example, feared that confronting the state would lead to mass repression that would destroy their organizations and roll back the accomplishments of the past 20 years.

Most of the new generation of social democratic leaders had risen through the movement's institutions as administrators, journalists, organizers and parliamentarians. A substantial part of this group had grown comfortable working within the system and regarded radical action, like the mass strike, as foolhardy.

Patriotic and nationalist sentiments were also important. Despite their second class status under the German monarchy, most German socialists, like their counterparts virtually everywhere, were proud of many of their nation's achievements, wanted to prove their worth as citizens, and were willing to defend their country against attack.

Just as their French comrades reveled in their revolutionary republican history and feared the threat of Germany's autocratic regime, many German socialists, echoing Marx and Engels' statements many decades earlier in a different period (when Czarist Russia was the bulwark against democratic revolutions sweeping Europe), felt it was their duty to fight against Russia, Europe's most reactionary power.

For many revisionists, such as the German parliamentarian Edward David, the war represented an opportunity. In return for their support of the wartime social truce ("Burgfrieden") and socialist sacrifices at the front, they expected sweeping changes that would democratize the

franchise in Prussia, introduce wide-ranging social reforms, and grant the unions collective bargaining rights.

Others, such as the leading revisionist journalist Josef Bloc, reveled in the freedom to promote national, rather than international, aims. They did not flinch at Germany's attack on neutral Belgium nor did they alter their views when their country's aggressive and annexationist war aims became increasingly clear.

For the reasons outlined above, if the SPD had voted against war credits on 4 August, it is unlikely that many other socialist parties would have followed suit. As it was, only the tiny Serb party and the Russian Socialists (Mensheviks and Bolsheviks) voted "no" in their respective parliaments.

Yet the SPD's action shocked the European socialist movement. Many looked to it as the International's strongest and most influential party to set an example, and the party's failure to say no to the war undercut its credibility. To a minority of socialists, both inside and outside of Germany, the decision was a "betrayal" and marked a split in the labor movement.

From exile in Galicia, Lenin summed up such feelings most pointedly. On 5 August, after learning of the SPD's vote, he remarked, "From today I cease to be a social democrat and have become a communist." [135] For some like him it was now imperative for socialists to distance themselves from the "chauvinists" supporting the war and to build a movement committed to revolutionary action.

It soon was very clear that the International would play no role in promoting such a movement. The war destroyed any possibility of cooperation among the parties of the warring blocs. French, English and Belgian socialists felt themselves to be part of a struggle to defend democracy against Prussian tyranny. They entered into coalition governments (in France, it took the form of L'union Sacree, "sacred union") to postpone class struggle and strengthen the war effort, and condemned their former comrades in Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The German, Austrian and Hungarian socialists, for their part, were silent about their countries' aggressive actions and adopted a rhetoric stressing the centrality of self-determination and national independence. All mediation efforts by the American and Italian parties failed. The International was effectively dead.

It was not long, however, before rising opposition to the war led a growing minority of socialists to call for the radical renewal of the workers' movement and the creation of a new international. As the war unfolded few major divisions developed within the socialist parties in the West, but in Germany and Russia matters were very different.

After 4 August, the SPD and the trade unions joined a government-sponsored "civil peace" that set aside class struggle in the name of national unity. This unity quickly began to erode, however, as casualty lists grew and it became clear that the government's claim to be fighting a defensive war was fraudulent.

Writing from prison in 1915, Rosa Luxemburg attacked the SPD leadership for abandoning its principles and transforming the party from an instrument of proletarian revolution into "the shield bearer for imperialism in the present war." [136] She joined with other members of the party's radical left, such as Liebknecht, the socialist feminist Clara Zetkin and journalist Franz Mehring, to systematically agitate against the war.

Closed out of the party press, they published an underground circular that came to be known as "Spartacus Letters" and, in 1916 founded a new journal, *The International*, which aimed, as the Russian revolutionary Yuri Pyatakov put it, to serve "as a mighty voice of protest and revolt." [137]

Meanwhile opposition grew at all levels of Social Democracy. In December of 1914 Liebknecht became the first parliamentary delegate to vote "no," but one year later over one-third of the Socialists refused to vote for war credits.

In June 1915, over 1,000 party and trade union officials sent a petition to the SPD's Executive Committee in which they criticized the "imperialist war" and called for a change of policy. They were joined by leaders of the party center, such as Kautsky, Hilferding, and co-chair Hugo Haase, and even some revisionists, such as Bernstein, who criticized government repression and the "civil peace." Stopping short of outright opposition to the war, they called for a negotiated peace without annexations.

The majority of the SPD leaders, however, resolutely opposed all such demands. Led by co-chair Friedrich Ebert, they were determined to continue their policy and maintain discipline at all costs. [138] They postponed holding a party congress until the end of the war, discouraged local meetings, and purged the party press of opposition voices. In January of 1917, after the radicals, now known as the Spartacus group, and center left opposition forces met to discuss strategy, the SPD Executive committee expelled them from the party en bloc.

The dissidents, however, quickly regrouped. In March they founded the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), a rather diverse group of reformists, centrists and left radicals united by their opposition to the war. This schism, long in the making and the harbinger of more to come, would have a profound effect on the future of Germany's labor movement, which remained divided for the rest of the century.

Outside Germany, too, antiwar sentiment in the labor movement grew. In September of 1915 a group of 38 delegates assembled in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, to organize international action against the war. Coming from Russia, Germany, Bulgaria, Italy, Switzerland, Romania, France, Sweden and Holland, a majority of the participants aimed to restore the unity of the International, called for a peace based on the principle of national self-determination, and rejected annexations and war indemnities.

For Lenin and a small group of supporters, however, these demands

did not go far enough. Lenin argued, instead, that socialists should transform the imperialist war into a civil war against capitalism and for socialism. He asserted that revolutionaries must separate themselves from the treacherous opportunists on the socialist right wing and from the vacillating “social pacifists” of the center, such as Kautsky and Haase, who focused on ending the war rather than on making revolution.

Lenin insisted that the time had come to found a revolutionary “Third International.” This perspective won the support of only seven delegates at Zimmerwald, but as the war continued, discontent and radical sentiment intensified.

As casualties mounted, food and basic necessities ran short, and working conditions declined, workers in all countries expressed their anger in large-scale strikes and demonstrations. In Berlin, for example, 300,000 metalworkers struck in April of 1916, and in January of 1918 four million German, Austrian and Hungarian workers downed tools in protest against wartime conditions.

Against this background, in April 1916 a second international conference of antiwar socialists convened in Kienthal, Switzerland. Similar in size and makeup to the earlier meeting, this time the group struck a more radical tone. Indeed, a majority still rejected Lenin’s standpoint, but now they sharply criticized the majority socialists’ support for the war and the International’s passivity.

Lenin won only a few more backers at Kienthal, but attitudes seemed to be shifting his way. No one could have predicted, however, that seventeen months later his party would be in power in Russia and that much of

Europe’s old order would stand on the brink of destruction.

If the events of August 1914 brought the fissures within Social Democracy to the surface and paved the way for the fracturing of the labor movement, the revolutionary upheavals of 1917-1920 deepened those divisions and made them permanent. The war created the pre-conditions for the destruction of the Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, facilitated the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia, and placed socialist revolution on the international agenda across much of the continent.

As the Entente powers imposed peace on their defeated enemies, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces in much of central and southern Europe fought for power in the streets. Choosing sides was the order of the day. In many of these struggles “Social Democrats,” “Independent Socialists,” and “Communists,” most of whom were formerly comrades, were often on opposite sides of the barricades.

The war created an unbridgeable chasm between those willing to work within the system and those set on overthrowing it. The difficulty of striking a compromise was best illustrated by the heterogeneous makeup of the USPD, which like the pre-war SPD contained reformist, centrist and revolutionary elements, united against the war.

In November of 1918, after the German Empire collapsed and the war ended, the USPD found it difficult to form a coherent program. Most of the reformists quickly returned to the SPD and the left wing broke away to form the new German Communist Party. After drifting awhile, most of the party’s centrist elements also returned

to the SPD.

Thus, by 1922 the fundamental rift on the German left was between a Social Democratic Party that supported a bourgeois republic and a Communist Party dedicated to its overthrow. This division was largely replicated on a world scale, as most socialist movements split along reform-oriented social democratic and revolutionary communist lines. It was the result of internal tensions that had long existed within the labor movement, as well as the actions of the Bolshevik-led Third International, founded in 1919 to accomplish the goals Lenin had outlined at Zimmerwald and Kienthal.

Basing its structure on the democratic-centralist model of the Bolshevik Party, Lenin hoped to build an institution that could enforce discipline on member organizations and, thus, promote revolution around the world. Splitting the old Socialist Parties by excluding those regarded as counterrevolutionaries and requiring new Communist Parties to adopt democratic-centralist organizational norms was at the core of that project, with longterm consequences from which the labor movement is only now just recovering.

Exacerbated in the revolutionary upheavals spawned by the war and later deepened by the emergence of Stalinism, the rift smoothed fascism’s path to power in Italy, Germany and elsewhere as the polarized forces of labor proved too weak to halt the march of counterrevolution.

The victory of liberal and communist armies in 1945 did little to overcome the split. Only since the end of the Cold War has overcoming the division become a real, though still unrealized, possibility.

[Against the Current](#)

## The fight for socialism in Slovenia: an interview with Anej Korsika



## 9 September 2014, by **Anej Korsika** , **James Robertson**

**JR: Let's start with a brief history of the Initiative for Democratic Socialism (IDS) and its role in the formation of the Združena leвица (UL, United Left) earlier this year. What are the origins of IDS?**

AK: The Initiative for Democratic Socialism, to use the old cliché, has a short history and a long past. Officially, the party was founded on the 8th of March this year. However when one wants to grasp the gradual formation of the party, one needs to take into consideration a much longer timeline. Before Slovenia entered NATO in 2004, there was a strong civil initiative that opposed joining such a military organization. There was also opposition to the support of the invasion of Iraq (Slovenia was among the countries that signed the disgraceful Vilnius letter). There were domestic issues that mobilized civil society, such as the case of the erased and migrant workers. These and many other "anomalies" depicted a more sinister picture of the so-called "success story" that domestic and foreign politicians liked to call Slovenia. Apart from such initiatives, there were also a couple of student associations and progressive professors that encouraged critical thinking. The Institute for Labour Studies (former Workers' and Punks' University) played a very important role here. It was one of a handful of places where one could seriously engage with critical political economy and conceptually equip oneself to systematically and thoroughly understand the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

This all illustrates that there was no lack of political activism and theoretical production; what was lacking from the picture was a well organized and ideologically consistent political subject that would not have to be reinvented for each new occasion and social problem that we faced. If it were not for the crisis of 2008, which materially challenged the neoliberal orthodoxy and gave ground and breathing space for a wider

articulation of Marxist ideas and socialist policies, one could imagine such a state lasting indefinitely. Although already with the collapse of Lehman Brothers capitalism was proved a disastrous and economically bankrupt system, it is obvious that capitalism is still very much alive politically and will become politically bankrupt only when forces that organize to defeat it are mature and strong enough. The series of protests that swept through Slovenia in 2012/13 were a direct response to the ever more immiserated conditions of the masses, which were threatened with yet further cuts and austerity measures. They accelerated the processes of forming the party, along with the awareness that such an organizational form is absolutely essential if one wants to seriously challenge the ruling class. The formation of IDS thus provided exactly what was lacking from all the political activism and theoretical endeavours, a stable organizational platform that is here to stay.

**JR: Despite having only been formed in April, the UL has already had unexpected successes in both the European and Slovene elections, (5.9% and 6% respectively). Could you tell us a bit about how this played out - the strategy you pursued in campaigning, the key turning points of the campaign and why you think the UL was able to achieve such results in so short a time?**

AK: UL is a coalition of three parties (Democratic Labour Party, Initiative for Democratic Socialism, Party for the Sustainable Development of Slovenia) as well as the fourth group which includes representatives and organizations of civil society. As such it is a unique political formation, both in the sense of the diversity of its groups as well as in its political program - democratic, ecological socialism. UL was the only participant of the European elections that provided a rational and critical stance

towards the European Union. We emphasized the disastrous and capital-driven austerity measures that are a direct outcome of our being a member of the EU. We argued that the actually existing EU is by its very structure an undemocratic organization, explicitly established to serve the interests of large European capital and oligarchies. Its historical development confirms such judgement since one can see a clear trajectory of this political project as becoming ever more calibrated with the interests of capital over time. These contradictions that have accumulated during the past decades have erupted and become very visible with the crisis. The contradiction between European south and north, core and periphery is, at the end of the day, the contradiction between labour and capital. This disillusionment with the EU project is now clearly visible in Slovenia: ten years ago 90% of people voted in favour of entering the Union but recent polls show that less than 30% of Slovenians still trust the EU. Being a new and well articulated political force and the sole critic of EU policies, we managed to address issues that people have started to feel in their everyday life and that other parties have ignored. Our past work in the above mentioned Workers' and Punks University, especially the May Day School: The Future of European Integration: Left Perspectives and the annual series of lectures devoted to the crisis of European integrations, has proven to be especially valuable in this sense. Despite refusing this type of European integration, we never held the Eurosceptic position, and we strongly believe that international cooperation and integration is crucial. Instead of advocating the EU, we argued that we should start building different political foundations, such as would enable us to build a Socialist Europe.

All this proved to be a good prospect for the early parliamentary elections that happened less than two months after the European elections. These elections were organizationally,



financially and in all other aspects much more demanding. With very little experience, an extremely short timeline and little to no financial sources, we faced a very difficult job. Hundreds of hours of unpaid labour, good organization, a consistent and well-communicated program, gave us the ability to achieve a much greater votes to financing ratio than all the other parties. Again our distinguishing figure was a clear stance against any policies that would benefit capital and further imiserate workers. We have been the only political group that has categorically opposed privatization and advocated for alternative socialist policies. Instead of further tax cuts for the rich, we have proposed higher taxation for capital, the 1:5 ratio between the lowest and the highest wage, the complete stop to all privatizations etc. These were policies that clearly separated us from other "leftist" parties, namely the Social Democrats. Returning socialist policies back to the agenda was our explicit goal, since these policies can only be implemented with the broad support of the people. Therefore it is even more encouraging that the young (i.e. people from 18 to 24) have voted for UL and provided more than 14% of all the votes UL received. Although this might seem a modest percentage, one needs to bear in mind that other parties only got a percent or two out of this population and that many of those that voted for UL have abstained from voting altogether in earlier elections.

**JR: Your campaign was marked by a turn towards grassroots movements, local activist groups and communities. Could you explain a little what the relationship between the formal political interventions of UL and the movements on the ground looks like? How do you envision this relationship developing in the future?**

AK: A rich and well developed civil society with many political initiatives has been continuously present in Slovenia and fought important campaigns like the above mentioned anti-Nato campaign, the campaign for immigrant and precarious workers, the occupation of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana and the

fight against the cutting of scholarships. However the anti-party sentiment was very wide-spread and although many of these very important campaigns did a lot of good, they faced structural problems that are very difficult to overcome at the level of a very loose organisation. Such initiatives and student organizations commonly suffer from a lack of continuity, as generations flux, each has its specificities, some are more engaged, others have worse conditions to work in and are therefore less active. Many of us have spent quite a couple of years in such campaigns, they have had an important role in forming us, but at a certain point we started to realize that in order to have a long-term effect on the course of the development of society, different organizational approaches need to be considered. It was in 2012 that the circle around the former Workers' and Punks' University started to seriously discuss how to enter political struggle on both a higher as well as deeper level. We became painfully aware that student struggles, crucial and necessary as they are, are just a part of a much bigger picture. One could say that we began a slow transition from struggle at the university, to universal struggle. These processes were accelerated by the winter of 2012 and spring of 2013, with the so-called Zombie Uprising.

I wanted to emphasize that the IDS was well rooted in grassroots movements and will always be defined by those formative years. Because of these experiences we had no trouble understanding the still widespread (but to a lesser and lesser extent) anti-party sentiment. IDS and UL have proven to be a different type of party; if all the other parties have always knelt before the interests of capital, UL has written on its banner an uncompromising struggle against capital. It was such a prehistory, such an organizational development and ideological platform that attracted and gave breathing space for numerous grassroots movements and active individuals to join forces under the same banner. It is yet to be seen how this unique relationship will develop in the future, as it is a process through which we are all learning and trying to find common solutions. However one thing remains clear: democratic

ecological socialism, the ideology of UL, can be achieved only through massive popular support and even more importantly, through massive popular participation.

**JR: The elections of 13 July were the first to take place since mass protests shook Slovenia during the winter of 2012-13. In what way did these events shape the current political landscape of the country? Would it be fair to say that the two key shifts within these elections - the victory of Miro Cerar and the unexpected and significant gains of UL - have their roots in a common crisis of the Slovene political class?**

AK: Let me answer like the old Radio Yerevan jokes: in principle yes, but... Yes, in principle both Miro Cerar and UL are rooted in the common crisis, but our understanding of the crisis and what should be done about it is completely opposed. We have already talked about the the historical trajectory of UL and its numerous building blocs, so let us now focus on the genesis of the phenomenon called the Party of Miro Cerar. From the ideological point of view Cerar's party program reads like a bad recycling of the "economic original sin", something Marx writes about at the end of the first volume of Capital, in the chapter on primitive accumulation. Here Marx mocks the classics of political economy for their understanding of the underlying causes of poverty and wealth and gross inequalities, phenomena whose scope and depth have surpassed those of Marx's time. If the theological sin tells us why man is "condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow", the economic original sin reveals to us why some need not suffer and can enjoy living on the fruits of others' labour. According to this theory, in prehistory there were two kinds of people, those that toiled and were hard working and are today's elite and those that have been reckless and lazy and are today's working class. The point being that the origin of inequality was seen to be a free and conscious ethical decision of each individual and, if they knew what would be the consequences of their decision to work or not to work, they could only blame themselves for

their current suffering and hardships. Of course, this is a delirious projection that has nothing to do with reality as such, but mistaken as it is, it still provides the ideological bedrock of neoliberalism. Miro Cerar always presented himself, his policies and ultimately his party as one based on sound ethical principles, objectivity, ideological neutrality etc.

However this is far from the truth. In an article he published last year *“Why Capitalism?”* Cerar argued that: *“Now we are already well aware that we have caused the Slovenian financial, economic and social crisis mostly by ourselves with our unethical snapping for material goods and superficial splendor of all kinds”*. It goes without saying that Cerar’s government will continue with the privatization process, austerity measures and all other policies dictated by Brussels. So, yes, indeed, we both have our roots in the protest movement, but the Party of Miro Cerar represents the continuation of the policies against which the protest movement as such has been organized. UL on the other hand, is, for the first time after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a voice of progressive socialist policies that aims at radically transforming capitalist society and ultimately wants to abolish it.

**JR: I want to ask you to delve into the UL’s political strategy a bit more, in particular your perspective on the European Union. In an interview published in Pogledi earlier this year, you argued that for the IDS:**

The key concern is the establishment of a movement on a European scale. While Slovenia and other countries in the European periphery, such as Greece and Portugal, are too small to change the system by themselves, if they combine in an allied bloc they can become much more powerful and better able to not only articulate but also implement different policies.

Since that interview we have witnessed another round of elections to the European parliament. While there were significant gains for the far left in some countries – in particular, Greece, Spain, Slovenia – elsewhere real support was given to far right

parties, many of whom rode to victory on a wave of Euroscepticism – the FN in France, UKIP in the UK, Jobbik in Hungary, Golden Dawn in Greece. Looking back now, has the organization reconsidered its focus on a European strategy? How would you reply to Costas Lapavistas’ recent call for a *“Euroscepticism of the left”*, for example?

AK: I don’t think we need to reconsider our international strategy; it is one based on adamant internationalism and a strong belief that socialism is a world process that cannot (could history be more obvious on this point?) be achieved in one country. The dilemma of being part of the European Union or leaving it altogether is a false one and perhaps one that can excite certain professors but doesn’t really have much to do with the political reality we are currently facing. Euroscepticism is not the right answer. We have to be much more radical on this point: our standpoint is that we reject the actually existing European Union altogether. We must not have any illusions about the EU being a project that derailed with the crisis. On the contrary, it is a consistent political project of European capital that has shown its true face with the onset of the crisis. All of the processes that have culminated in the crisis have been maturing for several decades, actually from the very beginning of the EU. One just needs to study the trajectory of the most important treaties (Rome, Schengen, Maastricht treaties) the EU has consistently implemented to further capital liberalization and deregulation, privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state. Treaties like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are just the next logical step in completely destroying everything that is left of the welfare state. If TTIP would be implemented, international corporations would gain absolute supremacy over nation states in judicial terms and the latter would lose any meaningful sovereignty whatsoever.

For example, the so-called *“Investor-State Dispute Settlement”*, a part of the TTIP, would allow corporations to sue governments for any national policies (or EU policies

for that matter) that would potentially limit corporations’ future profits. This means that if a country wants to provide its citizens with universal health care, a corporation that sells private health insurances can sue the government for the loss of potential profit. This is exactly what the Dutch firm Achmea did in 2013 when it filed a case against the Slovak government that tried to set up a public insurance scheme. The reality we are facing is one of capital being internationally and immensely powerful and well organized. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, the World Trade Organization etc. are a more efficient *“Capitalist International”* than anything the workers of the world have ever had to face. To make things worse the working class was never so weak, both nationally and even more so internationally. There is nothing that could effectively challenge the rule of the IMF, there is no international organized political force of which the capitalist class could be afraid. Capitalists perhaps never had it better. If we accept it or not, internationalism already is our reality, it only remains for one to decide whether one wants to challenge the international rule of capital or one opts for the defeatist scenario/illusion of going back to the sovereignty of the nation state. At its very core this is actually a pre-modern conception of political reality, a wish to return to relations that have long past been smashed by the bourgeoisie.

So facing reality with sober eyes is now more important than ever and building a European movement definitely remains a key task. The international socialist movement is the only way to effectively combat capitalist oppression and hegemony, to ultimately abolish it. An essential part of such a movement is a well organized socialist party, one that differs from bourgeois parties in a clear understanding that the parliamentary arena (whether national or European) is an important part of the struggle but only a part. On this issue we should learn from the brilliant Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, where Lenin is very clear that bourgeois institutions such as parliament should be used for the development of socialist hegemony,

until this hegemony is strong enough to abolish the parliament. As we said, this struggle only represents a small portion of the struggles, ultimately the class struggle, at the forefront of which must be the socialist party. Boris Kidrič, an important Slovenian Marxist revolutionary and a leader of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian People during the Nazi and fascist occupation of 1941-45, can also provide a valuable insight on the essentiality of building socialist hegemony. During the WW II he argued for the doctrine of "building a state within a state" and this is exactly what Slovenian partisans did on the territories they controlled. They established all kinds of institutions and infrastructure, in the midst of heavy fighting they organized elementary and high schools, even scientific institutes, a monetary institute that issued its own currency. It was something specific and it definitely provided a well prepared and organized takeover of the power from the old monarchist forces, once the war ended.

On the international level Yugoslav and other communist parties were united in the Third International, the Communist International, i.e. Comintern. Especially in Lenin's time, but also later on, this was probably the most powerful and effective international organization communists and the working class ever had. Comintern, established in 1919, was built in much more difficult circumstances and much further ahead of the organizations of international capital, which only really started to develop after WWII. Facing the current historical situation one can only conclude, as we did above already, that the working class is currently, both organizationally as well as ideologically on a much lower level than the previous levels it has historically achieved. This is not a moral judgment of any kind, I do believe it is the current state of affairs, whether we like it or not. To rise to the level required by the historical task that is ahead of us, we need to understand all the shortcomings of the contemporary socialist left and realize that there is still a long road ahead of us. This road will include many defeats and we need to be conscious of them as an essential

and valuable part of winning the class war as such. In order to do that we should learn from the history of struggles our comrades already fought in the last two centuries. Perhaps we can then realize that there is not so much new under the sun, after all. Perhaps to genuinely move on, we should learn to reinvent organizations and ideology that already existed. Through rediscovering and reinventing it, we will inevitably also transform it.

**JR: Given the numerous successes of the far right across Europe in May, it is curious that an equivalent group has not emerged in Slovenia. Indeed, in comparison with neighboring Austria, Italy or Hungary, the country appears to be relatively free from the growth of populist right wing parties. On this, I have two questions: First, how do you explain the apparent weakness in the far right in Slovenia today? Second, how do you see UL's role at a European level in challenging the rise of far right movements? Can the structures of the EU serve an anti-fascist strategy, and if so, how?**

AK: I would be wary of depicting Slovenia as relatively free from the populist right wing parties. Perhaps, at first glance one could conclude that such a party really doesn't exist but a closer look is much less encouraging. The biggest right-wing Slovenian party - the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) has successfully absorbed certain elements of extreme right-wing rhetoric and policies. So it would be mistaken to see the position of the extreme right-wing as a structurally empty one; it was just taken over by a party that officially isn't an extremist right-wing party. However it is very aggressive in promoting historical revisionism and justifying the collaboration with the occupiers of WWII as a kind of patriotic deed against the aggression of the communist partisans. The official Roman Catholic Church is very supportive of these policies and the party as such, as parts of Slovenian Catholic Church also collaborated with the Nazis. However one needs to bear in mind that there were many Christians among the partisans and that in the portion of Slovenia

occupied by fascist Italy, the church played a very progressive role and was very supportive of the partisan struggle. Because of that, the SDS and the Church are not hugely successful in their anti-partisan, pro-collaborationist historical revisionism. People are fed up with these debates - how could they not be if their own material existence is what they have to think about everyday? UL categorically rejects any historical revisionism, both the conservative-clerical project we just talked about, as well as the liberal-social democrat one. If the former completely rejects any positive role of the partisan struggle and depicts it as the true enemy of the nation, the latter perceives it as a kind of cultural heritage- yes, there was war and occupation and of course, we took the arms, fought and liberated the country! This perspective is on purpose devoid of any meaningful ideological substance. UL is the only political force that affirmatively speaks of the revolutionary dimension of national liberation struggle, that is, the most important dimension.

I see the role of UL in challenging the rise of fascism on the European level exactly in line with the strategy we talked about above: that is, in building the UL as a strong, well organized force to support the spread of socialist hegemony, both on a national as well as an international level. This is the only way to effectively combat the global domination and hegemony of capital. Apart from using the actually existing political organization of Europe, i.e. the EU, I don't see it as being a positive factor in combating fascism. On the contrary, I strongly believe the EU and its crisis policies are the most crucial objective factor contributing to the creation of fertile political grounds for the growth of extreme right and fascist parties. Again, Golden Dawn, UKIP, FN, Jobbik are not some kind of external anomaly but a direct consequence of austerity policies forced by the troika. European bureaucrats in Brussels offices and fascist thugs on the streets of Athens, Budapest, Paris etc. are intimately related, they presuppose one another. Without the objective consequences caused by EU policies, the subjective fascist forces could not thrive as they do. Ultimately fascist parties and

movements are more acceptable for European capital since they direct all their hostility towards already weak and marginalized groups (immigrants, the LGBT community, communists, anarchists etc.). From a general perspective, these groups are already sanctioned by the official EU policies (Schengen border system was implemented to stop immigration). Perhaps most importantly, proponents of fascist policies are not challenging the class division of society, on the contrary, they are reaffirming it. Historically speaking fascism always presented a continuation of the policies of liberal capitalism by different means.

JR: Finally, the successes of UL mean that for the first time since the breakup of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, an explicitly socialist group is represented in the Slovene parliament. Given the history of socialism in south east Europe and its close association with ideas of regional unity – whether Yugoslavism or Balkan Federation – I am curious about the regional perspective of UL. Certainly, in the past two years we have seen a great deal of grassroots political activity in the region – from the protests in Bulgaria and Slovenia in 2012-2013, the uprisings that took place in Bosnia earlier this year, and the ongoing resistance to austerity in Greece. Is there a distinctly regional perspective that the UL can bring to Slovene politics today? If so, does this stand in tension with UL's orientation towards the EU, given that many countries of the region remain outside Europe's borders?

AK: The success of UL have certainly had a very positive effect on the progressive forces in the region. However, one must bear in mind that the Balkan Peninsula, despite or perhaps exactly because of its common history, is currently an extremely heterogeneous political region. Countries like Hungary and Macedonia practically already have autocratic governments with obvious elements of fascism and the situation for progressive socialist forces is perhaps the most difficult there. In

Romania and Bulgaria such forces are very limited and marginalized, further constrained by electoral laws. They are especially harsh in Romania where a new political party can be registered only if it is founded by 25000 members residing in 22 Romanian counties out of 42. To further restrain the creation of new parties, the laws state that if a party would wish to run candidates for all the mandates, i.e. both houses of parliament, it would have to pay 300,000 euros (700 euros for each candidate), and I believe this was further constrained in recent years. In comparison, in Slovenia you only need 200 signatures and don't have to pay a deposit in order to establish a party.

You mentioned a series of protests that happened in Slovenia, Bulgaria and Bosnia. We can agree that these protests all had a common denominator in, broadly speaking, the increasingly worsening living conditions of working class people. However how this dissent was articulated took on very different forms. In Slovenia one of the main motifs of the protest movement was the fight against corruption. An important qualitative step forward was achieved through understanding the protestors' belief that 'they' (left-wing and right-wing parties and politicians are 'all the same.' What we tried to further articulate is that 'yes, they are all the same, they are all willing servants of capital.' In Bosnia the protests, and, later on, the plenums, were perhaps the most important achievement of civil society ever since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. For the first time in more than twenty years people started to talk about class instead of ethnic divisions. In Bulgaria, the protest movement was largely characterized by a mistaken belief that the EU can bring about the desired changes. Without going into too much detail or making claims as to how representative these protests actually were, it is clear that socialist forces have immense ideological work ahead of them. As we already said, it is easier said than done with draconian electoral legislature. Although the Balkan Peninsula is clearly very

heterogeneous both on the level of different states as well as on the level of the different development of socialist forces, there is a clear and strong need for regional cooperation. In UL we will do everything in our power to provide all the support we can for our comrades in other Balkan countries.

Of course Greece does appear to be a very positive case with the outstanding prospect of Syriza gaining power in the foreseeable future. A lot of the hopes of Greek comrades, as well as other socialists around Europe, are invested in the possible electoral victory of Syriza. I am afraid that actually too much and too unrealistic a hope is invested in Syriza and that some kind of a miracle is expected from them. The danger of deformation and disillusionment is quite acute. Syriza should be supported in any way possible; it is the only progressive and organized political force that can actually challenge the situation in Greece. However, we should also be very sober about the current limitations of this project and very conscious of the fact that if Syriza wins, the international organizations of capital, first and foremost the troika, will do everything in their power to smash any resistance to the vital interests of capital. To organize effective resistance, socialist forces will have to become much stronger and ultimately much more militant, each and every concession that the working class achieved (the 8 hour workday, retirement, universal health care, universal system of education) and which are all now being dismantled, were achieved through long, intensive and more often than not, bloody struggles. All this might seem a bit exaggerated at the moment. In principle we are all against violence but standing up against the oppressor that systematically violates your rights, exploits you to augment his wealth, is a just and a necessary fight. The sooner the contemporary left comes to terms with this fact, both ideologically as well as organizationally, the better.

[LeftEast](#)



# Is Water a Human Right in Detroit?

8 September 2014, by **Dianne Feeley**

Previously the Mayor commented that the water issue had been badly mishandled. As criticism of the turnoffs mounted, Orr turned the department over to the Mayor as if it was a hot potato.

This March the water department had ordered an aggressive campaign to shut off service to residents who owed \$150 or were more than 60 days behind on paying their bills. Since the DWSD laid off thousands of workers, it was in no shape to organize the campaign but signed a two-year, \$5.6 million contract with Homrich Inc. to turn off “on or on” city water.

While almost 40% of city residents meet the official designation for living in poverty and 30% are unemployed, over the last decade water bills increased by nearly 120%. The City Council recently raised the rate another 8.7% starting this July. Nonetheless the water department set a goal of shutting off 3,000 residential customers each week.

By mid-July 17,000 households had been disconnected, affecting approximately 46,000 people. And when a household lacks running water, Child Protective Services can move in and remove the children.

Of those disconnected, DWSD boasted that approximately 55% were reconnected within 24 hours. But it also warned those disconnected that they would be treated harshly if they “illegally” reconnected their water. The first offense was to be a \$250 fine, rising by the third offense to \$660.

The People’s Water Board, a coalition of organizations that has tracked the DWSD’s policies over the years, publicized Orr’s directives and subsequent water shutoffs. They set up water stations in neighborhoods and a hot line for people to call. They organized pickets at the water department and contacted both the

media and organizations in other cities. They wrote to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to president Barack Obama and to secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell at the U.S. Department of Public Services.

Several organizations, including Detroit Eviction Defense, fanned out into neighborhoods to give residents information about how to get water with or without being reconnected.

By June 25 the UN High Commission issued a press release stating that human rights law requires governments to take urgent measures “including financial assistance” to ensure access to essential water and sanitation. “The households which suffered unjustified disconnections must be immediately reconnected.”

Although DWSD’s website had information about how to dispute a shutoff (some had received an incorrect bill or never gotten a final notice), calling the department meant a 20-45-minute wait. Although at least 10% of the city’s residents have difficulty reading English, information was only in English. Predictably, there were long lines at DWSD offices. At a City Council meeting a department representative admitted they had not hired any additional staff to process disputes or restore service. (The water department, notorious for generating incorrect bills also has a habit of letting water continue to run in abandoned buildings.)

By June 24, stung by criticism, the department officials issued a press release responding to “misinformation.” The release pointed out that there were currently 17,000 customers enrolled in a payment plan program “designed to fit each customer’s financial situation and ability to pay” and announced it would launch a new assistance program for poor people starting in July.

That water affordability program, capped at one million dollars, had nine qualifications, five categories of documentation and was available in English only. Funds were exhausted within the month. (This program is funded by a voluntary fifty-cent per month contribution from customers.)

After much public criticism that past-due commercial accounts did not face shutoffs, on July 9 DWSD informed the press that it was sending notices to more than 200 businesses owing a total of \$33.8 million. On their list were two hospitals, a downtown Doubletree hotel, the Detroit Athletic Club and a Midtown Property Group.

## Responses to the Shutoffs

On two mornings over the next couple weeks a group of activists blocked Homrich’s yards, preventing trucks from leaving. Each time, after a whole morning went by, they were arrested. Unable to arrest Baxter Jones, an activist confined to a wheel chair, the first week, the police ordered a special van to carry him away the second time. But when the group appeared in court, they found the charges dismissed.

With the Netroots Nation national conference in town, the National Nurses United planned a march through downtown and raised the demands to “Turn on the Water! Tax Wall Street!” They marched in green Robin Hood hunting hats and declared a public health emergency in a city with what were, by then, 4,500 shutoffs.

The enthusiastic July 18 march and rally of more than 1,000 was a challenge to governor Rick Snyder and Kevyn Orr. Snyder responded by maintaining a health disaster hadn’t happened yet.

Response from Canadians living just across the Detroit was immediate — they organized a caravan to bring 750 gallons of water across the river. Maude Barlow, an expert on water issues, and Paul Moist, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, spoke at the welcoming rally. This set the model for other water caravans. The next came from Native People living in the Northwest Territory.

Meanwhile, at the American Postal Workers Union national conference in Chicago, delegates passed a resolution calling for a restoration of all city water and sewage services. Academic workers at the University of California, UAW Local 2865, wrote in support of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' censure of the mass shutoffs, pointing out how this was linked to the city's bankruptcy proceedings and foreclosure crisis, and expressed solidarity with community activists and union members "who daily resist the logic of privatization."

By a mid-July city bankruptcy hearing Judge Steven Rhodes summoned a representative of DWSD. Darryl Latimer, deputy director, had to hear Rhodes tell him that the shutoffs have caused "not only a lot of anger in the city and also a lot of hardship."

Latimer was ordered to report back to Rhodes' court the following Monday with an update. The Judge maintained that there must be "a much more aggressive plan" to make sure residents received final notices and knew about financial help. He asked Latimer, "Are you willing to do that?"

That next Monday, July 21, the water department announced a 15-day suspension of shutoffs. However DWSD turned its attention to examining the accounts of those who have not sought to have their water restored — not because they were worried about a growing public health hazard, but because they are obsessed with the idea that someone might have restored their own water "illegally."

At the same time, the local press interviewed residents whose water was still off: a single mother who was forgoing having her water turned on

in order to pay for gas and get to her new job while her daughter was staying with a relative; an older African American living on Social Security disability, who took a daily walk to fill a bucket of water, courtesy of a neighbor, with his cane in one hand, the heavy bucket in the other.

## The History Behind the Shutoffs

The Detroit Water and Sewage Department has existed for more than 100 years and serves not only city residents but 40% of all those living in Southeast Michigan — supplying drinking water to Detroit and 127 other communities and sewage services to 76. For 20 years it had been under federal court supervision to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act. That supervision ended a little more than a year ago.

Two years ago DWSD paid EMA, a St. Paul, MN-based consulting firm, \$175,000 to study how the department could improve its operations. The report proposed reducing the work force by 81%, from 1,978 to 374 over a five-year period, adding 361 contract workers. While EMA saw the unionized public employees as having "inflexible job descriptions, multiple reporting levels and a lack of training," the reality is that workers with experience are capable of handling the various problems that develop in a way that contract workers simply can't.

EMS maintained reorganization — and outsourcing of some operations such as billing — would allow the department to save \$900 million over a decade.

The big problem facing DWSD isn't so much the fault of poor people being unable to pay a rate far beyond their means, but the department's disastrous interest rate swaps. Currently it is forced to pay a greater portion of its annual budget to meet debt payments (nearly \$430 million) than to operate its system (\$380.6 million.)

A second factor impacting water rates is that the federal government has reduced its financial allocation for infrastructural improvements at the same time Michigan has reduced what money cities, towns and counties receive in revenue sharing.

While the Environmental Protection Agency recommends that such water rates not exceed 2.5% of the median income in an area, many Detroit households are billed about 20% of their income for water and sewage rates. The average monthly bill is \$70-80 a month.

Back in 2005 the Michigan Poverty Law Program, Michigan Legal Services and Michigan Welfare Rights Organization supported the water affordability plan developed by Roger Colton, a consultant working with municipalities to develop low-income programs. A 44-page plan was presented to the Detroit City Council on April 11, 2006.

Initially to be funded at \$5 million annually through a check-off program for commercial and residential accounts, it would specifically exempt those making "reasonable progress" on back bills from having their water turned off. The program would also explore methods for additional funding from the State Emergency Relief Program for previous arrears. Only a truncated version was passed; it was not even in place when the shutoffs were announced.

## What's Next?

Why are the shutoffs happening now, when the city is undergoing bankruptcy? The Emergency Manager wants to decouple the department from the city and regionalize it. To do that, he needs to take a hard line against "deadbeats" (a code word for poor Blacks), thus convincing three county boards it will be an attractive deal.

By mid-August the media revealed that such a regional authority is being finalized. The proposal will require state assistance to refinance the department's debt, to cut the 5-6% annual interest rate to roughly half. Presumably the state wouldn't think of

intervening to provide aid to the city!

By mid-August the Mayor and the water department came up with a plan – again, only available in English. They will waive turn-on fees and late payment penalties, cut red tape, improve notification for those in danger of shutoff, increase staffing and hold a “Water Fair” to “give customers one last opportunity to connect with all of the DWSD and community resources available before the moratorium ends August 25.

What the plan does not address is how people on a limited income can access the water and sewage they need.

The August 11 storm in Metro Detroit showed how close we are to disaster. A nine-hour storm dumped 4.57 inches, overwhelming the drainage

systems, flooding basements, streets and highways (I-10, I-75, I-94, I-96 and I-696), overturning cars and leaving thousands without power.

In some areas sewage and drainage systems are combined. These need to be kept separate, or every time there is a heavy rain, sewage will overflow.

A 2001 Southeast Michigan Council of Governments report estimated that sewage infrastructure needed to be upgraded to a tune of \$14-26 billion. Meanwhile photographs reveal the contents of basements sitting on curbs awaiting garbage pickup. Headlines scream of mold growing in basements, and predict that roads and embankments will weaken from being waterlogged.

The answer cannot be found in the austerity measures being imposed by Detroit’s bankruptcy. In fact, it can’t even be found in a generous water affordability plan that is certainly necessary. The issue is much broader, as the storm brought home. It requires an acknowledgement that access to water and sanitation facilities is a human right and a precious asset.

An equitable program requires an end to shutoffs and adoption of a process that protects, not penalizes, low-income residents. It means a commitment on the part of the state and federal governments to update infrastructure and insure public health standards for all residents. Only in this way can we guarantee a sustainable life in our cities and on this planet.

[September/October 2014, ATC 172](#)

## Gaza and the impact in the region

7 September 2014, by **Gilbert Achcar**

**Amandla!: What in your view are the factors that gave rise to the latest assault on Gaza and why did it happen at this time? Why has it taken such an exceptionally brutal form?**

Gilbert Achcar: The escalation in brutality is not new: it goes along with the long drift of the Israeli society and polity to the far right. The Likud, the main force in the Zionist far right, came to power in 1977, and led a few years later, in 1982, the criminal invasion of Lebanon that culminated with the Sabra and Shatila massacre – the most murderous of Israel’s wars until that year. A threshold in horror and brutality against civilian populations was crossed at that time. But that was superseded in intensity of destruction and violence by the 2006 Israeli onslaught on Lebanon. And then you had the onslaught on Gaza in December 2008 – January 2009 that was equally brutal, and still more murderous on civilians given the density of population in Gaza and their inability to flee out of the strip.

The most recent onslaught on Gaza neatly fits in this evolving pattern of ever increasing brutality and violence, as well as increasing Israeli disregard of global public opinion. Prior attempts to preserve a “peace-seeking” image of Israel are old story; the Israeli governments now feel authorised to speak the language of brutal force in the age of the so-called War on Terror. This post-9/11 US-sponsored perspective gave a green light for naked Israeli state terrorism and state brutality in the name of fighting terror.

As for the actual reason of the current onslaught on Gaza, it is the Netanyahu government’s exasperation about the reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, as well as the fact that this reconciliation was actually welcomed, albeit not very explicitly, by Western governments, including Washington. The Israeli government’s exasperation is not because Hamas is “radicalising” in any way, but on the contrary because – due to the Egyptian turn of events since 2013 – it had to water

down its general political line and make a lot of concessions on the way to its reconciliation with the West Bank Palestinian Authority (PA). The truth is that the Israeli government feels much more comfortable with a divided Palestinian landscape and a Hamas that is easy to demonise than with a unified Palestinian landscape and a more moderate Hamas. Ever since the 1993 Oslo agreement, the actual game of the Israeli far right in government has always been to weaken the “moderate” Palestinians, from Arafat to Abbas, and push towards a radicalisation benefitting Hamas – the latter being their “preferred enemy” as long as it can easily be demonised, since it makes their relation with the US and Europe much more consensual and reduces Western pressure on them. Remember that the most brutal Israeli onslaught on Hamas/Gaza came after the Islamic movement’s shift away from suicide attacks into political action, including its participation in the 2006 elections after having rejected such elections

for many years as illegitimate in contrast to armed struggle.

**A!: What would the objectives have been because the brutality of the assault surely would have driven all Palestinians closer together?**

GA: Its goal has been to provoke a renewed radicalisation of Hamas, driving a wedge anew between the Islamic movement and the PA. Indeed the gap between the two initially increased with the onslaught – and in that regard the onslaught seemed to be achieving its goal for a while. But the resentment it created among all Palestinians is such that the PA had to express solidarity with Hamas-led Gaza. The Israeli government doesn't give a damn about the feelings of the Palestinian people. It essentially wanted to torpedo the drive towards peace initiatives on the Palestinian side: the calculation was that, faced with such Israeli brutality, Hamas would deem that they can no longer move ahead with moderation and compromise, as they had been doing just before the recent onslaught. Ironically, the Israeli government fears Palestinian peace initiatives much more than they fear rockets launched from Gaza: what they resent most are any Palestinian moves that may be welcomed by Western governments and backed by Washington, albeit tepidly.

For their purpose, they can seize any pretext, as they did in the present case with the three Israeli teenagers abducted and assassinated in the West Bank. They immediately accused Hamas without any evidence, exactly like the Bush administration accused Iraq of standing behind 9/11 in 2001: a pretext for premeditated goals. They seized the triple assassination as an opportunity to re-arrest a large number of those Palestinian political prisoners who had been released in exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit held as POW in Gaza. This was obviously a premeditated arrest campaign: the Israeli government had released these men very reluctantly and was waiting for the first pretext to re-arrest them in order to tell the Palestinians that whatever they do in this respect is in vain because Israel will end up withdrawing any concession it might have made under

pressure.

So this is how it started. And then the Netanyahu government switched to the pretext of the rocket launchings, after having purposely exacerbated the tensions through their very brutal behaviour in the West Bank under the pretext of searching for the teenagers. This brutality led naturally to Palestinian reactions of anger. Israel seized the latter in turn as a pretext to launch its brutal, completely "disproportionate" onslaught without any kind of moral inhibition – aside from utterly hypocritical 6-minute warnings before destroying civilian buildings over their inhabitants in the middle of the night!

**A!: Did Israel achieve any of its objectives with this assault? Is it stronger or is it weaker coming out of this? How about the Israeli military casualties?**

GA: The Israelis suffered casualties because they had to show that they were willing to go inside Gaza in order to restore their "credibility" as a military power. Limiting themselves to striking from a distance would have been seen as a sign of weakness: everybody knows that there's no match between the hand-made rockets that come out of Gaza and Israel's formidable firepower. The Israeli government needed then to restore lost "credibility" by involving troops on the ground, but this comes at a high price because you can't engage troops in a hostile urban setting without incurring casualties.

The worst thing for the Israeli side actually, far worse than suffering casualties, is having soldiers taken as POWs (what they call "hostages"). So they have devised a new strategy in order to minimize that risk: every time an Israeli soldier is under threat of falling prisoner, they attack full force, with a high risk of killing the soldier. Thus, they prefer to kill their own soldiers than to see them taken as prisoners for a later exchange with Palestinian political prisoners. Israel's is the politics of naked force. It has no desire for peace whatsoever. They just want to crush the Palestinians with their military superiority, they want to terrorise them: they behave as a terroristic state in the whole and full

meaning of the term. They only believe in military dominance, full military supremacy.

**A!: In this assault, the Israelis were fairly successful in terrorising people, but they didn't subdue anybody, and they provoked huge international outcry. So can we say that this mission has backfired?**

GA: Not in the minds of the far-right power block presently ruling Israel. This could have been seen as a major problem by the old generation of Zionists. But what you have unfolding under the guise of the War on Terror is the notion that fighting a horrible enemy justifies resorting to all kinds of horrible means. And the present Israeli far-right government is the most extreme embodiment of this logic.

They simply don't care about world public opinion in general. What they of course would care about is the US public opinion inasmuch as it affects the US government's behaviour, but in that respect, Netanyahu has been openly behaving as a shrewd player in US politics, very directly trying to exploit the political divisions within the U.S., cozying up to the Republican right, etc. And he has been quite effective at this game, all the easier in that Obama is the ultimate wimp indeed, especially in relation to Israel. And Hilary Clinton – who will most likely be the Democratic candidate in 2016 with a high chance of becoming the next president – has recently fully endorsed Netanyahu's policy. This is what counts for Netanyahu. He doesn't care about public opinion, petitions of intellectuals, and the like.

**A!: It seems that the more brutal, the more hard-core and more right-wing the government behaves, the stronger is the support of the Israeli people. It looks like there's virtually no voice of opposition.**

GA: Yes, indeed, this is also an appalling side of the story. It's again the War on Terror neurosis, in this case the demonization of Hamas and the inept argument of the rockets from Gaza. Many of those Israelis who would have marched in anti-war



demonstrations in 1982 now support the war waged by their government in the name of opposing "terror". The Hamas factor is quite important in that regard. Sharon did everything he could to weaken, discredit, destroy Yasser Arafat, enabling Hamas to build up support among the Palestinians. He provoked the Palestinians deliberately and repeatedly, knowing that this would lead to reactions especially from groups like Hamas. Then he would each time seize this as a pretext to escalate the oppression of the Palestinians and fuel the cycle of violence that benefited both Hamas on the Palestinian side, and himself, Ariel Sharon, on the Israeli side. These dialectics of extremes promoted by the Israeli far right have been continuous. Abbas went very far in capitulating to US/Israeli conditions, yet the Israelis keep discrediting him because, as already mentioned, this Israeli government doesn't want any "peace partner"; they simply don't want peace!

**Al!: What impact has the conflict in Israel/Palestine had generally on the political situation in the Middle East?**

GA: Basically it is one factor among others of radicalisation in the Arab world. Popular resentment is building up rapidly in the face of the unfolding of multiple tragedies, especially the tragedy in Syria that dwarfs all others. The truth is that even during the onslaught on Gaza, there were more people killed every day in Syria than in Gaza. And the fact that this was allowed to go on created such deep resentment among Syrians that it greatly facilitated the resistible rise of ISIS - an ultra-fundamentalist fanatical organisation compared to which Al-Qaeda's local branch now looks moderate!

**Al!: Are this resentment and radicalisation always going to lead to the rise of religious fundamentalists rather than more secular democratic forces coming to the fore?**

GA: Radicalisation and resentment do not lead in and of themselves to the development of this or that force; it all depends on the existing subjective

factors that can interact with the objective factors of radicalisation. This region embarked in 2011 on what I call a long-term revolutionary process, one that will carry on for decades. A revolutionary process is never linear: it's not one victory after the other until you see the red flag flying over some palace. It can get very nasty, and go through terrible counter-revolutionary moments. The dominant trend in the Arab region is counter-revolutionary at present, especially with the developments in Syria (the resilience of the Assad regime) and in Egypt (Sisi), and the spread of ISIS. But that's only one phase in a long-term process.

This phase has been enabled by the failure of potential left-wing forces in the region to act independently in building an alternative to both the old regimes and the Islamic forces. The old regimes and the Islamic fundamentalist opposition are both deeply counter-revolutionary forces. If there's no emergence of a third pole, a progressive popular force able to constitute an alternative, we will remain stuck with this binary and with the dialectics of moving to the extreme on both sides. The old regime gets nastier (Sisi is actually nastier than Mubarak) and the Islamic fundamentalist opposition gets nastier (ISIS is definitely much nastier than anything the Muslim Brotherhood represented). So what you have basically is a dialectics-of-extremes type of radicalisation on both sides of a counter-revolutionary binary in the absence of a progressive popular alternative.

**Al!: Wasn't there an alternative when the masses of people in Tunisia and in Egypt came onto the street in a democratic, secular movement? Has that been preserved anywhere?**

GA: The potential is still there - not just a theoretical potential, but an actual potential. It's uneven from country to country, to be sure. In Tunisia, it is embodied in the trade union centre, the UGTT, which is by far the most important organised social and political force in the country. The problem there is one of strategy.

The same goes for Egypt: there is a big, important potential of which we had a glimpse in 2012 when the left-nationalist Nasserist candidate came third in the presidential election, with close to five million votes. This showed a huge potential, quite comparable in size to both camps of the counter-revolution represented by the old regime on the one hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. And yet this opportunity was squandered by the Egyptian left-Nasserists when they shifted from their 2011 alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood to an alliance with Sisi in 2013. But the potential is still there, and the youth is still radicalised; it did not vote for Sisi, and this is crucial. Participation in the last presidential election was so low that they needed to prolong it by one more day in order to mobilize potential electors in their effort to give some credibility to Sisi's grotesque 95%.

In Syria, the Local Co-ordination Committees that led the uprising in its first phase represented a very important progressive potential; but this was dissipated when these same committees recognized the so-called National Council, established in Istanbul and dominated by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood from within, and Qatar and Turkey from without. Since then, the Syrian situation has been caught between an inefficient and corrupt official opposition and a very brutal regime: this led to the emergence of a more radical Islamic opposition represented by a myriad of groups, the most important of which is now ISIS.

Thus, the aspirations of the Syrian revolution have been crushed between these two counter-revolutionary poles - the regime on the one hand, and the fanatical Islamic fundamentalists on the other. But the potential is still there, with tens of thousands of people, especially young people, opposing the regime from a progressive perspective. The regime arrested thousands of those young progressives who were organising the uprising in its initial phase while at the same time releasing Jihadists from jail. The Syrian regime itself fostered by every possible means the emergence and prevalence of the hard-line Islamic tendency among the

opposition. This suits the regime, exactly as Islamic radicalisation among Palestinians suits the Israeli far-right. They are both playing the same game of enhancing their "preferred enemies".

**Al: And is a side getting the upper hand in the conflict now?**

GA: Two years ago Assad was on the verge of defeat, and that's when Iran decided to move beyond material support and intervene massively on the ground by sending troops to shore up the regime. Because of the language factor, they sent Arab troops from Iran's regional sectarian satellites: Hezbollah from Lebanon, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq from Iraq. These forces helped the regime in launching a successful counter-offensive and regaining a lot of the ground that it had lost heretofore. However, the ISIS phenomenon is creating constraints on Iran and its allies who must fight on two fronts now, in both Syria and Iraq. In addition to fighting the mainstream Syrian opposition, they have now to counter ISIS's spread into Iraq, which is a major stronghold of Iranian influence in the region. The scattering of Iran-backed forces led to signs of exhaustion appearing within the Syrian regime, whose own sectarian reliable military basis is relatively thin.

So despite all appearances, the Syrian regime is presently encountering difficulties again, but it is more than ever invoking the WOT argument to ward off the prospect of increased Western support to the mainstream opposition. Basically, the Syrian

regime is competing with that mainstream opposition in trying to convince Western powers that they are their best allies in the War on Terror! You can see here the similarities between the Syrian regime, the Egyptian regime, and the Israeli government. They all speak the same language, the language of WOT, and it is in the name of this WOT that they request a carte blanche for all sorts of violence. They are all telling Washington: "We are your best friends, supporting us will be in your best interest".

**Al: Isn't the US attitude to the emergence of ISIS one of containment rather than eradication?**

GA: Your choice of terms is correct. It is containment that prevailed until now: the U.S. intervened to stop ISIS's advance, but it doesn't want to move beyond containment before achieving a political goal. Washington saw this ISIS outbreak as a leverage to get rid of Maliki and reduce Iranian influence in Iraq. Maliki had indeed become increasingly dependent on Iran, and the tensions between him and Washington had steadily increased since the end of direct US military presence in Iraq in 2011. Maliki's relations with Washington deteriorated to the point that he went to Moscow to discuss an arms deal. Sisi is doing the same, incidentally, as a gesture of protest against US reluctance to fully endorse him. You can thus see how much ground Washington is losing in the region. However, with ISIS in Iraq, the Iraqi state needs the U.S. It is dependent on

US military support because its army was reconstructed with US weaponry after the 2003 invasion, and a lot of this weaponry have fallen in the hands of ISIS. The U.S. has set conditions in order to enhance its support to the Iraqi state, starting with the departure of Maliki. They got what they wanted: Maliki stepped down and has been replaced.

Washington is now trying to repeat what it did in 2006 after losing ground in the face of Al-Qaeda. At that point, the U.S. bought off the Sunni tribes, the very constituency among which Al-Qaeda was developing. Washington even succeeded in turning the Sunni tribes into US allies, thus managing to practically eradicate Al-Qaeda in Iraq. What we are seeing now is a repetition of that same strategy: the Sunni tribes have been completely alienated by the sectarian attitude of Maliki, backed by Iran. So much resentment has been building among them that they aligned with ISIS when it crashed in. The fact is that it is not ISIS alone that took over large parts of Iraq, but ISIS in alliance with the Arab Sunni forces: tribes, remnants of Saddam Hussein's Baath party, and others. This is what happened in Iraq previously, after the massacre in Fallujah in 2004, when the Sunnis became so alienated that they let Al-Qaeda in, and backed it until Washington changed its strategy. We are seeing now a remake of the same scenario, the Sunni tribes having this time allowed ISIS in, with Washington wanting to renew the strategy of alliance with them. For this they needed to get rid of Maliki. This is now achieved and we'll see how the next stage will unfold.

## “an interview with Hisham Ahmed

**7 September 2014, by Hisham Ahmed, Suzi Weissman**

**Suzi Weissman: Welcome to “Beneath the Surface,” I’m Suzi Weissman “and today we’re going straight to the West Bank to speak to Hisham Ahmed. He is a colleague of mine at St Mary’s**

**College, and the chair of the Department of Politics there. He is formerly from Birzeit University and right now he’s in the West Bank with his family.**

The crisis in Gaza has spilled over to the West Bank, where at least six Palestinians have been killed. Many more have been wounded in the last 24 hours. Yesterday somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 “we’ll

ask Hisham for exact numbers, as far as he can tell â€” marched from Ramallah to Jerusalem in a Day of Rage over the military carnage in Gaza, which included the bombing of a UN school where many had taken refuge.

International public opinion is moving against Israel, although in the United States it remains divided. Hisham is joining us to discuss the situation, including the underlying causes and possible impact on the political prospects for the future of Hamas and Israel.

Let's start with yesterday's demonstration, and also the bombing of the UN shelter in Gaza. What you can tell us about exactly what's going on right now?

Hisham Ahmed: Obviously, the situation, especially in Gaza, is quite catastrophic. Indeed, yesterday there was heavy bombing of a United Nations (UNRWA) school. At this school, there were thousands of Palestinians who tried to escape from the bombing when their houses were completely destroyed by Israeli F-16s. These people thought, unfortunately mistakenly, that they would be safe at this UNRWA school.

This school should have immunity in any society in any country. But as they were there, and as they were about to be transported to another school that UNRWA employees thought might be safer, several bombs were dropped at the school, killing 16 people and injuring tens of Palestinians.

It's a catastrophic situation, Suzi, in Gaza, because the death toll now stands at about 860 people. [This was before a temporary cease-fire during which bodies were recovered from collapsed buildings, bringing the numbers of dead to more than 1000 at that point â€” ed.]

In Gaza there are about 1.8 million people. The injured have reached about 6,000, and you can definitely do the math: in proportional terms that would be equivalent to some 15 million Americans being wounded in a matter of a couple of weeks.

Tens of houses were destroyed

completely while people were living there. Most of the killed are children and women, all unarmed civilians. When you see hundreds of thousands of people trying to escape the bombing, it does remind Palestinians of the 1948 Nakba, the Catastrophe, where they were left homeless and stateless. The scenes are horrific. There is an act of genocide that the Occupation is committing in Gaza.

We have been trying to account actually for some relatives and been constantly on the phone; unfortunately we haven't been able to reach them. Such is the case for almost every Palestinian family, because Palestinians have been dispersed as refugees in the West Bank, in Gaza, in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, all over â€” so you might find one family split into more than one location. This is the case with us, and unfortunately we haven't been able to account for relatives and friends that we know in Gaza.

As you accurately mentioned, the situation in Gaza has spilled over onto the West Bank; this is to be expected. Today six Palestinians were killed, and several were injured. Yesterday there was a peaceful march coming from Ramallah, with the participation of over 40,000 people. The occupation army opened fire at the demonstrators, killing a couple of them and injuring about 200 Palestinians.

This is one of the most difficult moments, I think, for Palestinians; it really makes them feel that they are completely forgotten and neglected by the international community. Israel does act as if it is above the law, as if it has total sanction by the United States unfortunately; it is violating international law, humanitarian law, committing acts of genocide. And in the final analysis this hurts Palestinians most directly, but at the same time, it does deform Israeli society, especially when it sees its army flexing its muscles mainly at unarmed civilians.

## The Background

**SW: This situation has divided public opinion in the United States**

**in a way that I can hardly remember since the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 but perhaps much more now. The newspapers, just talking about coverage here, are telling stories â€” for example, that the worst call that you can get is that in 10 minutes the Israeli military is informing you that your house is going to be bombed, and in 10 minutes you can hardly gather much more than yourself.**

But on the other hand here, people will be able to say "at least they warned you." And there's all kinds of fairly ugly repetition of Golda Meir's famous statement that the Palestinians, or the Arabs, are "forcing us to kill their children." Can you comment on that?

HA: I arrived here around the middle of June, and it was very clear from the very first moment that the Israeli occupation was preparing itself for spilling Palestinian blood.

First, they fabricated the story of the three settlers [teenagers whose kidnap and killing was instantly blamed on Hamas â€” ed.] The Israeli army deployed literally thousands of troops, invading Palestinian villages and camps, ostensibly searching for the three [whom the Israeli government almost immediately knew were dead â€” ed.].

Usually whenever there are settlers or an Israeli soldier captured, a Palestinian party, faction or organization would claim responsibility for it, and announce publicly that they are behind it â€” there are political ends to be achieved, mainly exchange of Palestinian prisoners. Such was not the case.

The Israeli occupation was really preparing for an all-out assault on Palestinians. They arrested many leaders, many members of the Palestinian Parliament â€” mainly from Hamas, but not exclusively. At any rate, immediately thereafter, the Israeli army launched a number of attacks on Gaza, setting off this carnage.

Now, there is nothing more precious for Palestinians than life, a dignified life. What Palestinians have really

been struggling for is simple: their freedom, and independence. One can really get the picture when they see Palestinian families completely wiped out; tens of Palestinian families are completely wiped out because of the bombing.

I think what the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and his foreign minister Lieberman “who are the most extreme” calculated that this is an opportune moment regionally and internationally to lash out at Palestinians. Gaza has been under siege for over eight years now. There is a government in Egypt, headed by Sisi, which is anti-Palestinian, which has tightened the noose around the neck of the Palestinian people by closing the only outlet out of Gaza, the Rafah checkpoint. So Netanyahu thought that this would be a good moment indeed to “teach the Palestinians a lesson.”

Netanyahu has nothing to offer; to get out of the embarrassment of the failed negotiations that Kerry has led for the past several months, I believe, Netanyahu wanted to set up a whole new set of events, mainly by launching attacks at Palestinians.

The conventional wisdom has always been that Israeli warplanes would fly over Gaza, drop bombs, kill people for a couple of weeks, and then they would stop, while maintaining the siege and the blockade around Gaza.

This time, Netanyahu was right in the sense that regionally, this was a good moment for him to attack, but he was completely wrong in the sense that if you push any people into the corner, as is the case in the Gaza Strip, they’re bound to try to defend themselves. And therefore there are some casualties now amongst Israelis.

### **Support for Hamas**

Hamas has lost much of its popularity before this attack “and you know quite well, Suzi, that I am well-known to be a critic ideologically and politically of Hamas” but I can really tell you with utmost certainty that what Netanyahu has done, among other things, is to revitalize the popularity of Hamas in an unprecedented manner.

**SW: If it is the case that Hamas (and you’re an expert on Hamas) was flagging in its popularity, and that as a result of this very lopsided assault on Gaza and on Hamas, it has raised support for Hamas “speculate, if you would, on what the political endgame in mind may have been. What can you can see of Israeli public opinion in regard to this assault?**

HA: Let me address the second point first. Israeli public opinion right now is almost unified in support of the Israeli army and the Israeli government. This is usually the case; it’s similar as a matter of fact to the U.S. public during wartime, they rally around the effort.

But once the carnage really begins, once the snow begins to melt, that is when Israelis start questioning the strategy of the government, the efficacy of the policy used. I believe that this is coming really really soon, especially when it will become clear that the Israeli government has failed in achieving all of its objectives, not just some of them.

Rather than weakening Hamas, rather than weakening any radicalized tendencies, they are boosting the radicalization, not just in Palestinian society but in the region as a whole. There are rallies and demonstrations by Arab people all over the Arab world, even against the tight grip of the dictatorial governments.

Within a short time I think we will see an incredible uproar from Israeli public opinion vis-a-vis the mismanagement and miscalculation by their government. While it is quite risky to make any prediction about political arrangements and composition, I would venture to say “I repeat, I would venture to say” that this attack represents the beginning of the demise of Netanyahu’s political life.

That all he has done is kill children and women is really the picture that’s coming out for everybody in the world. European capitals are flooded with demonstrators against Israeli occupation actions. Israel is going to face more isolation in the world. The whole effort to introduce more

boycotts and sanctions against Israeli products and industries, I think, is on the rise.

### **The Forgotten of the Forgotten**

**SW: What’s the Israeli endgame? How could they possibly imagine any sort of political gain in the future from this? Or is there really no concern that once Netanyahu’s out of office, it’s somebody else’s problem?**

HA: All that Netanyahu has done is to introduce military solutions to what is a political problem. I think it’s really a repeat of his egoistic, idiosyncratic personality. Netanyahu is the kind of person who tells a lie, and ends up believing in this lie and acting upon it. I believe he is not living reality in any way whatsoever.

This is a political problem that requires a profound political solution. Even the United States, as supportive as it is of the Israeli occupation, now realizes that you cannot keep an entire people under blockade and under siege forever, and expect them to remain passive.

Gaza is not the forgotten place of the world; it’s the forgotten of the forgotten places in the world. It is the most densely populated place on the face of the earth. It’s the largest human prison on this planet. And therefore people in Gaza have had it. They believe that life and death have become synonymous. And hence they have tried, with the little means that they have at their disposal, to defend themselves.

Of course, there is no match between what they have and what the Israeli power has; it’s an asymmetrical conflict. Israel has the fourth strongest army in the world, with a tremendous arsenal not just of conventional weapons, but also of non-conventional weapons. And it’s flexing its muscle on one of the weakest spots in the world. For Netanyahu to fail even in doing that, I think, will come to haunt him very, very soon.

As you know, the situation is tense, it’s hot “Israelis in particular are really focused on the conflict” but I have every reason to believe that the post-



war, post-aggression phase will be completely different from the pre-aggression phase.

This attack has reshuffled all the pieces on the table for Palestinians and Israelis. No longer will the Israeli military be able, I believe, to think of launching attacks on Palestinians without being impacted themselves. The Ben Gurion airport, for example, was practically shut down for four days.

We just now got news reports that the Netanyahu government, the Security Cabinet, has flatly and unequivocally rejected the ceasefire proposal advanced by Kerry. We are likely to see more bloodshed unfortunately, in the days to come, but sooner or later this conflict will have to end.

What Palestinians are determined to do is that they want it to end now, because they are the ones who are paying the price, they are the main victims of this conflict, they are the David vs. Goliath; but they want it to end by lifting the blockade. People want to be able to live in relative freedom, with dignity, with humanity. It is really sad to see that the Israeli army continues to bomb, continues to destroy, while the world is immovable – at least on the official, governmental level.

The popular level is completely different. People are protesting all over the world. People do see that Israel indeed has come to pose as a main disturber to international peace and stability. But governments – whether in Britain, or the United States, or France – still haven't really seen the extent of the horror, the terror, brought upon Palestinians.

## Political Aftershocks

**SW: Would you speculate on what the future is for Abu Mazen**

**(Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas – ed.) and Hamas? Will a new political configuration come out of this? Does it strengthen one or the other?**

You mentioned that you've been a long critic of Hamas and belonged to the secular opposition. Are worse forces in the wings, as you've intimated before, or does that no longer pertain? What's the possibility of reigniting a kind of Arab Spring?

HA: I think it's one of the most important questions that need to be raised. One of the main casualties of this conflict is the political current and tendency that Abu Mazen-Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, represents.

To begin with, people were quite skeptical of his ability to deliver on any peace talks and negotiations even before this attack. But once this attack happened, and once Palestinians saw that there is another force – i.e. Hamas and some other resistance groups that are somewhat able to send a message to the Israelis that they are not about to submit, not willing to acquiesce, refusing to surrender – I think that has weakened Abu Mazen, especially in the West Bank.

I saw this here on the ground; even supporters of Abu Mazen became absolutely skeptical of his ability, and of what he represents, and became more sympathetic and empathetic with Hamas. Therefore, yes, actually now Hamas has managed to acquire tremendous support within Palestinian public opinion, even among some previously not sympathetic with Hamas.

That's number one. But number two, and what I have been really warning all along, if no accommodation, no political settlement at least to end this carnage is arrived at with Hamas, I have every reason to believe – and I wish Israeli strategists would hear what I am saying – I have every reason to believe that the seeds for

more fanaticism will be planted. We might see tendencies that are a lot more rigid than Hamas.

The region should teach us some lessons. When we think of ISIS, for example, and the tendency they represent, they can have a spillover effect easily onto Palestinian society – which I hope we would never see. But this is all dependent on the kind of settlement, on the kind of ceasefire arrangement that can be done now.

If I were in the shoes of the Israelis and the Israeli strategists, as much as they might despise Hamas, as much as they would hate Hamas and would not want to do any deals with it, believe this is the most rational thing to do now: End the carnage right away, stop the killing of Palestinian children, let people live a dignified life with the siege lifted.

Introduce or allow the introduction of serious, credible programs and projects of reconstruction, social and economic development in Gaza, simply to give people a spark of hope. Despair leads people to radicalization and extremism. The whole world should stand up to the Israeli government to tell them that enough is enough, because that won't be confined to the Palestinian-Israeli situation.

We're talking about a small geographic area between Gaza and Tel Aviv; it's less than 120 km (i.e. about 80 miles), a very short distance. That leads me to say that in this geographic area, either all are safe, stable and peaceful, or in my view none will be safe, stable or peaceful.

I think it is time for any Israeli leader to realize that the destiny of the Israeli public is organically linked to the destiny of the Palestinian people. And seeing it any other way is shortsighted, destructive, and lacking any perspicacious thinking.

[September/October 2014, ATC 172](#)

# For a vote of censure in the streets

6 September 2014, by **François Sabado**

The resignation of the first Valls government, only four months after its formation, and the nomination of a second [139], is a new demonstration of this political crisis, which the institutions of the Fifth Republic are increasingly incapable of containing. And the answer of the ruling team to these convulsions is the deepening of the neoliberal course and the preparation of an authoritarian policy. An unprecedented austerity policy and the composition of a clearly neoliberal Cabinet, with in particular the choice as minister of the economy of a partner-manager of the business bank Rothschild, Emmanuel Macron, who affirms loudly that the “traditional left is a dead star” and that it is necessary to destroy “the statutory economy” – including all the social and public statutory rights that still protect employees. Many observers and even PS deputies spoke of the appointment of this banker to the government as provocation.

## A neoliberal government

The choice of this second Valls government represents a headlong rush forward in the application of the current policy known as “the offer”, a policy at the service of capitalist profits, ever more aid to employers, and ever more austerity, with the prospect of voting for a budget built on aid of 40 billion Euros to industry and drastic reductions in welfare expenditure and public services investment. These measures result from the pressure of the financial markets and the requirements of repayment of the debt and its interest, to which Hollande and the leadership of the Socialist Party have committed themselves. This policy was warmly applauded by the bosses following a speech by Valls at the summer school of Medef, the French employers’ organisation. This government is the

political expression of a direct alliance with the employers within the framework of the “pact of responsibility”. [140] An unprecedented austerity plan since, unlike the austerity policies of the late 1970s or the 1980s, the current neoliberal offensive aims at destroying what remains of the social gains of 1944-45 and later.

In the world competition between the United States, the so-called emergent countries like China, and the “hard core” of Europe, the European ruling classes and the French bourgeoisie have decided to break the “European social model” or what it remains of it: the aim is to lower wages by between 20 and 30% as in Greece, Spain or in Portugal. This involves not only freezing or cutting wages, but also lengthening working hours. Macron has already declared – in an interview with the weekly magazine *Le Point*, one day before his official nomination – that company agreements could undermine the 35-hour week. [141] The agenda of the employers and government is to continue dismantling social security, collective agreements and employment legislation, giving primacy to enterprise level agreements and reducing public services.

Up to now, the reality of the economy and French society – the sixth biggest world power – deadened the shock of the counter-reformation, if one compares the French situation with that of the countries of southern Europe, but the requirements of the employers and the current choices of the government indicate that they will move into higher gear.

## An open political crisis

The source of the political crisis is this historical change carried out by

successive governments which have brutally destroyed the living and working conditions of millions of people. These policies are largely rejected, and deepen a crisis of representation in which institutions like the traditional parties are nothing than relays for the financial markets and capitalist transnationals.

Because, while the institutions of the Fifth Republic still make it possible for François Hollande to govern, they no longer mask the real relationship of forces in the country. The policy of Hollande and Valls enjoys minority support in the country, on the left and in the Socialist Party. How long can the president and the government hold on?

Remember that Valls scored only 5.63% at the time of the Socialist presidential primary election in October 2011! Including Hollande supporters that could go up to 15 to 20% of the PS. The government can discipline its parliamentary majority through article 49.3 of the Constitution, by requiring a vote of confidence in its policies. But will that be enough? We can no longer dismiss the possibility of a minority government in the National Assembly. From there, two hypotheses are possible: a new Socialist government or the dissolution of the National Assembly. The threat of dissolution could force the Socialist deputies to fall into line, especially in the current situation where new elections would doubtless bring a sweeping victory of the right and far right and a process of dislocation of the PS. But the Socialist deputies also know that Holland and Valls are leading them into the abyss.

## Divisions of the right and pressure

## of the far right

Because what faces the country today is a collapse of the PS leading to a rise of the right and the Front National, based on a mounting tide of racism and all kinds of reactionary ideas. How many votes can the FN expect to gain, either in early elections or at the normal expiry of the presidential term in 2017? This is the question which is posed and which will over-determine the situation on the right. Which will be the situation of a UMP ((Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) on the verge of an implosion as a result of corruption scandals and leadership rivalries? From these questions a reorganization of the right could emerge which could centre around the FN and an authoritarian line described as populist but also around “the centres”, taking its cue from the European Union and the German coalition government – between the CDU and the SPD – to form a coalition of national unity going from the PS and Greens to the centre right.

We are not yet there, in particular because the institutions and the mode of representation prevent the formation of a coalition of national unity. Lastly, all the polls indicate that the PS would be swept aside by the right and far right. Consequently, the presence of a candidate of the PS is not assured in the second round of the presidential election, [142] only an open division of the right could leave it a certain space.

## The spectrum of fragmentation and collapse for the PS

The “social liberal” trajectory of the Socialist Party is not new. Its integration at the heights of the state and finance capital has been evident for several years. Even the “social” adjective in “social-liberal” is too much. Its process of transformation from social democratic party into a type of “US Democratic Party” is quite advanced. Even Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, first secretary of the PS, recognizes, in his manner, that “the identity of the PS has dissolved in

management”. But the cost of these structural transformations in this situation of historic crisis causes tensions, confrontations, fissures and fractures.

Who can say what will be the situation of the PS in the weeks or the months to come? Until now a process comparable with that of PASOK seemed remote, but the choices of the Holland-Valls team could cause a collapse of this PS. Two hundred socialist deputies signed a call to support the government, but there are 300 socialist deputies. What will the others do? At this stage, these fragmentations have not led to leftwing currents emerging. One of the alternatives to be considered, vis-a-vis the failure of Holland-Valls, would be a reorganization of the Socialist apparatus with Martine Aubry – who opposed the recent removal of rent controls – or others who are profiled as being more “on the left” than the current leadership. But all of them, so far, have accepted the austerity policies.

Nevertheless “too much is too much”. The PS, according to Cambadélis, has lost more than 25,000 members in two years. The weakening of the party is a given of the present situation: what will be the extent of internal divisions? How far will this situation open up, in the ranks of the PS members and beyond, a space for questioning, debates and possibilities of actions against the austerity policies?

## And the Front de gauche?

This governmental political crisis is also likely to accelerate the tensions and the fractures within the Front de gauche. The initial formula of the Front is “null and void”. A terrible blow was dealt to it by the choice of the leaders of the PCF to ally with the PS in the main cities at the local elections of March 2014. The Communist Party is continuing its discussions with the PS for alliances in the next senatorial elections in September 2014. As for Jean Luc Mélenchon, he has just resigned from the co-presidency of the Parti de gauche to build a movement for the

Sixth Republic around his candidacy for the 2017 presidential election.

How can you claim to fight for democracy and take as a starting point methods “of a Bonapartist type” which circumvent parties and reject real rank and file democracy? The political crisis of representation can hold surprises, but, if Chavez had a progressive role against US imperialism under the specific historical conditions of Latin America, can a project of this type constitute a response to crisis in Europe of this early 21st century?

## Elements of an anti-capitalist response

In this gap between the reality of the government and that of the real relationship of social forces social, the social and political strains can only be exacerbated and the social or democratic explosion can emerge at any time and on any question. When the dominant classes and the traditional apparatuses can no longer regulate the extreme problems of the situation by parliamentary methods, the eruption of the youth and popular classes is on the agenda.

Social and political polarizations between an ultra right of the US “Tea Party” type and radical social movements can also constitute one of the givens of the situation. What, then, is the outline of a democratic, radical anti-capitalist response to the crisis?

1. The social question remains at the centre of the political situation. All the economic and social policies of the government must be rejected, starting with the “pact of responsibility” and the budget which give gifts to employers and the attacks against the public services and social security.

The crisis is such – with unemployment over 5 million and exploding poverty – that what is on the agenda it is not a remoulding of the pact of solidarity with Medef, but an emergency programme at the service of the workers and masses: prohibition of layoffs, an increase in the minimum wage and wages generally, massive

creation of public jobs, defence of the 35 hours and reduction of working time, defence of social security, nationalization of the key sectors of the economy under control of the employees, socio-ecological planning, cancellation of the illegitimate debt, rejection of the European treaties.

The crisis is so deep that half-measures cannot constitute credible answers. The requirements of the dominant classes are so strong that the satisfaction of elementary social needs cannot avoid confrontation with the financial markets, the big employers, their political representation, and the European Union, which implies the need for an anti-capitalist reorganization of the economy.

2. The political crisis also requires radical democratic answers. Once again, the institutions of the Fifth Republic show their antidemocratic character: while the government's policies have minority support in the country, Hollande and the government, concentrating all powers, force them through. To emerge from this political crisis, the people must speak, but it is not about replacing one majority by another in the context of these same institutions and these same austerity policies undertaken by the right or the so-called traditional left.

And what meaning does the demand for a Sixth Republic have if one maintains, like Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the leaders of the Front de gauche, the cornerstone of the institutions of the Fifth Republic, namely the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage? A

huge institutional upheaval is needed, a dismantling of the institutions of the Fifth Republic, an end to the election of the President and the current mode of two round majority voting. More broadly, the current crisis of political representation demands a break with the current institutions and the opening of a constituent process centred on "real democracy": assemblies elected by universal suffrage at the national level which decide on all the political, social and economic questions. The capitalist markets should not negate democracy. The people and their representatives should decide, not the bankers and captains of industry!

That is what anti-capitalists argue for in such a process. This new democracy should also involve proportional representation of all currents and political positions. A process of de-professionalization of politics must be undertaken. The income of elected representatives should not be more than the average wage of the country. Multiple office holding should be abolished. Citizens should be consulted regularly, at the level where decisions should be taken, by assemblies or referendums. In short, "a democracy by the people and for the people".

The current political blockage demands that the workers and popular classes erupt on the social and political scene. Of course, the social and democratic objectives which anti-capitalists defend demand a different social and political relationship of forces, but sharp turnarounds are to be expected. The vote of "censure" of this government should not be left to the various parliamentary manoeuvres of the right and far right. It should be expressed in the street.

New generations like that we saw during the SNCF strikes show that employees, when the conditions of struggle are present, resist the attacks of government and bosses, even if there is a substantial gap between combativeness and an anti-capitalist political consciousness. The demonstrations against Israeli aggression in Gaza also witness to the mobilization of a sector of the population in the popular neighbourhoods. On April 12, 2014 tens of thousands demonstrated against austerity behind a coalition of trade unions, associations and parties. It should be stressed that in these mobilisations the NPA, with others, had a positive role. We must now continue down this unitary road and rally all those who wish to oppose the government policy from the left, around concrete demands and objective, like the rejection of the Hollande-Valls budget. Every step forward for popular mobilization should be supported.

But we should avoid once again falling back into "left" combinations that stay in the context of current austerity policies and institutions. Faced with a political crisis which disorients and demobilises those on the left, action and common discussion are needed, but not with ex-ministers who supported the pact of responsibility just a little while ago. Fighting the employers, right and far right effectively requires a break with all austerity policies and independence from the PS and all the forces allied with it. It is in this context that the elements of an anti-capitalist alternative and movement can be built.

## Toward Energy Democracy

6 September 2014, by **Bill Resnick**

As with many other emerging technologies with vast implications for profits and power, a great battle has

erupted as to their integration into the productive system "under whose control, in whose interests? Indeed the

"great game" of the 21st century, this time not between nations but within nations, will not be over control of



Middle Eastern crude or any other deposit of plentiful but increasingly costly to exploit fossil fuel.

The battle this time will be rather over sun and wind production – centralized or decentralized, corporate top down or democratic.

In the United States, on the one side of the struggle are the corporate energy apparatuses including the Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs), the fossil fuel industry, their financiers, and various state actors (legislatures, regulators, planners that the IOUs have colonized though do not completely control).

Their aim is to maintain a highly profitable centralized system featuring big finance and big IOUs, managing huge production facilities feeding electricity into a new multi-trillion dollar grid, this system slowly replacing fossil fuels with large remote solar and wind farms.

On the other side stand the populist broadly democratic forces of “distributed energy” (DE), often called community energy, i.e. networks of small dispersed sun and wind electricity production units, employing mass-produced off-the-shelf devices – solar panels and wind microturbines, their prices rapidly declining – that can be quickly and cheaply installed by small construction firms.

California already has over 100,000 rooftop solar units. In the DE movement’s vision, eventually multiple millions of relatively small local production units will feed into existing grids, hardened and smartened at modest expense and also fortified by adding storage capacity. In that vision the local system will be managed and maintained by local organization; the whole system is to be managed by regional and national confederations of the locals.

DE systems are at the heart of a radical transformation to stop climate change: the promise of a new world from, literally, the ashes of the old.

At first glance, DE forces are no match for the IOUs who generate over 90% of U.S. power to ever growing markets

and are gaining responsibility for powering most of the transport industry, thus greatly increasing demand and their capitalization and returns. They’re solidly connected in corporate America and entrenched as regulated utilities, big players in nearly every community with friends at every level of government including the regulatory agencies.

Selling a necessary commodity with little demand elasticity, the IOUs are the safest of loans and investments, part of every diversified portfolio. Of all industries they borrow at the lowest rates of interest. In contrast to this Goliath, DE now produces a fraction of one percent of U.S. electric energy, not much of a David.

But appearances can be deceiving. An investor advisory “Rising Sun: The Implications for U.S. Utilities” by Citi Research (an “independent” unit of way-too-big-to-fail Citi Bank) contended that (1) solar electricity is growing extremely fast in the United States, driven more by economic advantage than environmental concerns; and (2) investors should be careful about putting money into companies whose technologies might well become obsolete, comparing traditional electricity production to the now dying landline phone business, fast marginalized to near death by emerging technologies. (“Rising Sun” by Citi Research, March 2013, can be accessed at <http://www.wecc.biz/committees/BOD/TEPPC/SPSG/Lists/Events/DispForm.aspx?ID=706>.)

That same year, 2013, the Edison Electric Institute (the influential association and national lobbyist for the IOUs) distributed a report, “Disruptive Challenges: Financial Implications and Strategic Responses to a Changing Retail Electric Business.” (It’s free on the Internet and easily readable if you are amused by academic business and policy language.)

This report warned the big private utilities that they were in great danger of entering a vicious cycle to bankruptcy. It begins with erosion of the customer base as homeowners, businesses, churches and community organizations come to realize that

they can produce clean environmentally benign energy at less cost per month than their IOU electric bill.

As a result interest rates for the IOUs could quickly rise as lenders came to see the utilities losing customers to the new technologies chiefly solar. Having huge fixed costs, losing customers and paying higher interest on their debt, the utilities would be forced to seek higher prices from generally compliant Public Utility Commissions (PUCs). And the new technologies would gain even greater price advantage, thus accelerating the hemorrhage of customers.

The report concludes by advising the utilities that they must take action to protect themselves.

## Battle Lines Redrawn

The DE challenge was not new to the IOUs. For some time they have engaged in defensive skirmishes in state legislatures and PUCs, attempting to defeat or denature and weaken proposals from DE advocates for programs and rules that would encourage development of sun and wind energy.

These battles generally led to compromises that the IOUs found harmless. DE electricity production grew but remained very small; the IOUs remained complacent. But the Edison report, based on research in the expected cost curve of DE and its growth around the world, concentrated IOU attention. Across the country they have gone on the offensive, taking a new tack.

No longer opposed to sun and wind investment, the IOUs have come to describe themselves as fully committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by utilizing renewable non-carbon energy sources, and do that in efficient and economically sound ways.

Their plans envision a gradual replacement of plants that could not be converted to clean and green (by, for example, carbon capture and

sequestration equipment for coal plants).

In these plans the replacements would be big plants, using diversified energy sources including geothermal, wave, hydro, sun, wind, nuclear and “clean coal and gas” to be chosen for their economy and durability.

This offensive has done fairly well. In some states the IOUs have won legislation and regulation that (a) strangles DE development in a web of bureaucratic requirements and makes it much more costly, and (b) gives the IOUs unchallengeable discretion over entrance to the grid and payment for the electrons offered.

At the federal level the IOUs have won big research grants for carbon capture, nuclear plant design for safety, and planning for an expanded grid.

But for all the power, connections, money and support they are receiving from conservative organizations — the infamous Koch machine has prioritized stopping DE, succeeding in Ohio, losing in Arizona — the IOU offensive has not landed a knock-out blow. In fact, in many states the IOUs have been unable to stop the DE advance.

Why then is DE continuing to advance? It's because DE-produced electricity is in many areas considerably cheaper than IOU electrons, and people hire firms to help them get through the regulatory barriers that the IOUs have imposed. It's because California's 100,000 rooftops with solar keep pumping out electrons and lowering electricity bills, and the schools, churches, businesses, coops, and individual owners become dedicated supporters, and tell their neighbors who notice the installations.

It's because DE producers and forces are further inspired by the great success in Germany (where renewable energy is now 27% of production,

having risen from just 5% ten years ago) and in transition cities across the globe, with some U.S. cities like Boulder, Colorado seeking to emulate that success. It's because DE is researched and championed by multiple research labs and programs, like Stanford's Civil and Environmental Engineering School's Atmosphere/Energy Program.

It's because DE is strongly supported by much of the environmental movement — not just those opposing cancer, mercury poisoning and other public health concerns; those seeking to increase mass transit and design walkable livable cities; those working on energy conservation; those promoting sustainable organic agriculture, those with a taste for local healthy food, and more.

It's because DE has manufacturing firms and thousands of small installation firms ready to fight for their livelihoods.

It's because the promise of clean, green and affordable energy is very popular across the United States, particularly for those who see corporate power suffocating democracy, and are excited by DE's potential for local ownership and control. And finally it's because many labor unions and coalitions — such as the Blue-Green Alliance and Labor Network for Sustainability — understand that DE will ameliorate the climate crisis, create millions of good jobs, greatly reduce corporate power and improve potentials for struggle from below.

## The Hope and the Challenge

For the same reasons that DE is a nightmare for the utilities and corporate America, DE represents a great hope for the left. In fact in Boulder, DE forces became the core that organized coalitions, including

importantly environmental justice, low-paid workers, labor and poor people's movements, to reconstruct the city toward healthier, democratic and more egalitarian living.

This is no struggle for the impatient. To be sure, as climate science demonstrates climate change could spiral past the point of no return. But international elites, led by the United States and the fossil fuel industries, as well as parts of finance, will not accept a mobilization that would require regulation/control, taxes, public direction, and increased democratic local organization.

So the responsibility for the left now is to build forces that could contend for political power when the crisis worsens, when the corporate apparatus proves itself unable to effectively respond to global warming and its growing threat to the planet and human life, and when the working class realizes that great change is necessary.

Building that contending force would of course now require much “reform and revolution” political work and action: To support and build local DE installations and forces that demonstrate DE's promise of sustainable production and democratic management. To work in all the movements — environment, labor, social justice — to build consciousness of the common enemy, the threat of climate change, and the DE democratic alternative.

The challenge is to stop the enormous waste of resources and valuable time should the IOUs and fossil fuel interests gain state support for their plans. To build public appreciation of DE, in fact recruiting converts to the movement, at least ready to join the crusade when the crisis comes to a head and corporate and DE forces go into pitched battle. And thus to build a force capable of building the new world in the ashes of the old.

[September/October 2014, ATC 172](#)

# The Fed is destabilizing emerging market economies

5 September 2014, by **Éric Toussaint**

1. Reducing purchases of toxic assets [143] from the US banks in order to relieve them of this burden.
2. Reducing the acquisitions of US Treasury Securities from these banks which the Fed does in order to inject them with liquidity. [144]
3. Raising interest rates (0.25% as of now).

This announcement itself was enough to lead major financial companies in the US and other countries (banks and their satellites in the shadow banking system, mutual funds, etc.) to pack-off some of their liquid investments from the emerging market economies (EMEs). This destabilized those economies: plunge in stock markets and currency depreciation (Indonesia, Turkey, Brazil, India, South Africa ...) [145]. In fact, the low interest rates prevailing in the US and Europe, combined with the central banks' massive cash infusions in the economy, have always set financial companies on the trail of maximum profit by investing in the EMEs which offer better returns than the North. The outflow of financial investment from the EMEs towards the most industrialized economies can be explained by the fact that the financial companies expected attractive returns in the North as soon as the Fed hiked interest rates [146]. These companies thought that other "investors" would withdraw their capital from these countries and it was better to act first. A herd mentality response resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Finally, the Fed did not raise interest rates and waited till end-2013 to reduce purchases of structured securities and treasury bills from banks. The dust almost settled.

The situation in June 2013 gives some idea of what might happen if the

Fed increases interest rates significantly. This is what the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the central banks' central bank, says "Capital flows could reverse quickly when interest rates in the advanced economies eventually go up or when perceived domestic conditions in the host economies deteriorate. In May and June 2013, the mere possibility that the Federal Reserve would begin tapering its asset purchases led to rapid outflows from funds investing in EME securities" BIS, 84th Annual Report, 2014, p. 76,

The BIS brings to light a worrying trend: financial companies that invest a part of their assets in EMEs do so in the short term. They can swiftly withdraw their funds if they discover other profitable avenues. Here is what the BIS says: "A higher proportion of investors with short-term horizons in EME debt could amplify shocks when global conditions deteriorate. Highly volatile fund flows to EMEs indicate that some investors view their investments in these markets as short-term positions rather than long-term holdings. This is in line with the gradual shift from traditional open or close-end funds to exchange-traded funds (ETFs), which now account for around a fifth of all net assets of dedicated EME bond and equity funds, up from around 2% 10 years ago... ETFs can be bought and sold on exchanges at low cost, at least in normal times, and have been used by investors to convert illiquid securities into liquid instruments". BIS, 84th Annual Report, 2014, p. 77,

In short, the wellbeing of the EMEs depends a great deal on the policy followed by the most industrialized economies (especially the US, Europe and Japan). A hike in interest rates in the US may result in a significant outflow of volatile capital invested in

EMEs with higher returns in mind.

"In addition, roughly 10% of the debt securities maturing from 2020 or later are callable, and an unknown proportion have covenants that allow investors to demand accelerated repayment if the borrower's conditions deteriorate." (BIS, 84th Annual Report, 2014, p. 76. <http://www.bis.org/publ/arpdf/ar2014e.htm>) This means that financial companies that purchased debt securities maturing in a relatively distant future (2020 or later) can demand accelerated and full repayment from a crisis-hit country. Obviously, this can only aggravate the situation of an indebted country: all inflows will stop simultaneously. This is another reason why the populations of developing nations need to be aware of the serious dangers posed by their country's public debt. Payment of the illegitimate portion of the debt must be challenged immediately.

The decline in revenues from raw material exports is another factor that might lead to a fresh and acute debt crisis in developing countries, since China - a major consumer of raw materials for her manufacturing industry - has reduced her huge imports. A drop in the price of raw materials can be fatal to the economic health of developing countries which depend mainly on exports. In this respect prices for raw materials might also drop if the Fed increases interest rates, as this reduces speculation responsible for high prices. The combined effect of a hike in interest rates and a decline in raw material prices could produce a situation similar to what happened in the early 1980s, when the debt crisis exploded in the developing countries. It is imperative to learn from that crisis and to act, so that the Southern people do not have to foot the bill once

more.

*Translated by Suchandra De Sarkar in  
collaboration with Christine  
Pagnoulle.*

CADTM

# Our Planet, Our Movement

5 September 2014, by **Against the Current**

If solutions are to be found, where to begin? Undoubtedly, all-out efforts in basic and applied climate research, conversion to solar and sustainable technology, and profound changes in agriculture and industry will be essential for human civilization “to survive. Most urgent, however, is the need for mass environmental movements armed with both a clear-headed understanding of the crisis and a transformational program for survival with social justice.

Nature’s warnings are ubiquitous. The poisoning of the drinking water of half a million Ohioans by algae bloom toxins, the result of phosphorus fertilizer and livestock manure runoff into Lake Erie, is no isolated incident “the same threat exists in hundreds of bodies of water in the United States. Smoke from fires in the Canadian Northwest Territories, the inevitable consequence of climate warming, has risen into the stratosphere and blown so far as to be detected in Portugal. Every week brings new examples.

Those of us who call ourselves “ecosocialists” understand that two stark realities stand out. The first is that capitalist production and “the market” cannot and will not halt the rush to climate catastrophe. Whatever “green” technologies may come on stream in a capitalist economy won’t replace, but only supplement, the consumption of deadly fossil fuels “from new coal-fired plants to deep-sea oil drilling to tar sands to fracking.

The second reality, however, is that even though a socialist transformation will be absolutely necessary for survival, the crisis cannot “wait for the revolution” if we’re going to avoid the

collapse that could well become irreversible “according to a mounting mass of scientific evidence “within a few decades. As scientists and activists like James Hansen and Bill McKibben have pointed out, preserving good odds of survival depends on keeping four-fifths of known hydrocarbon reserves in the ground “reserves already listed as “assets” on the books of the energy corporations “to say nothing of deposits yet to be discovered.

In fact, the struggles to halt environmental destruction and capitalism itself must be waged simultaneously, and inextricably. It’s not about what comes “first.” A rapid transformation from fossil fuel to sustainable energy entails both a technical and a radical democratic transformation “both feasible, but both revolutionary.

The most promising sign regarding the Peoples Climate March is the extent of union support it’s achieved. Labor has been deeply divided on environmental issues “not surprisingly with high unemployment and weakening industries, with construction unions lining up for the Keystone XL pipeline and auto workers naturally concerned about their jobs if those SUVs and F-150s were to go away. But New York unions like SEIU 1199, AFSCME District Council 37 and the New York State Nurses Association are strongly in support of the march. [147]

That’s not surprising either, since the folks these unions serve “and many of their members “have been among those devastated by events like Superstorm Sandy. Other union support is coming from the Communication Workers, the

Transport Workers Union and Amalgamated Transportation Union, UAW Region 9A, IBEW Local 3 and SEIU 32BJ.

That’s a promising start, but only the beginning of what’s desperately needed. Certainly there’s potential for expanded labor outreach. For example, workers in municipalized or public utilities will tend to be open to the possibilities for conversion to renewable energy “their jobs aren’t dependent on coal and oil extraction. With 20% of U.S. cities and towns currently owning their electric utilities, campaigns to increase municipal ownership of utilities can be a starting point for popular control of energy production and supply. Such reorganization requires mobilizing our resources and transforming our jobs. Laid-off workers need full compensation until their new jobs open up.

Activists can reach out to link labor with a host of community-rooted environmental justice struggles, including fights around the health disasters produced by coal-fired plants and the mining industry, many of which are rooted in communities of color.

The labor movement should be embracing the principles developed more than two decades ago by the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit [148]. And for an example of the kind of community campaigns taking place around the country, see the energy program of Progressive Richmond (California) [here](#)

Capitalism, however, presents millions of workers with the impossible choice: Your job or your life. A program to



address the crisis facing people and communities that are dependent on the industries that are killing them, and the ecosystem, must be both practical and genuinely radical. Mel Packer, a veteran labor, community and public health activist, lays it out in a powerful article that should be required reading: [“Coal miners are mad, and scared...And they have a right to be”](#)

## A Survivable Future

The task ahead is to build massive strategic and visionary alliances, across not only sectoral but even national borders. The central question is how can millions “indeed even billions of people covering a gamut from relatively high-paid working people in rich countries, to vast global populations living at or near what the United Nations calls “absolute poverty,” and every level in between” see a common future that will be in their own interests and those of their children, not simply a nice idea abstracted from their real lives and problems?

No one should imagine that this can be simple, free from contradictions, or brought about through some miraculous technological salvation “although technical breakthroughs can and will happen. A solution cannot be based on a fantasy that a global population of seven billion people (today) to nine billion (by 2050) can attain the per capita levels of meat consumption or private automobile ownership as found in North America and Western Europe today. Obviously it cannot be premised on maintaining the obscene existing levels of inequality between the rich and poor countries, or for that matter within these societies.

But neither can a “solution” be based on somehow battering down global living standards to some minimum level in the name of sacrifice to save the planet. Even if a universal pledge of austerity were desirable, there would be no way to impose it except by some totalitarian elite dictatorship (and those with such power never sacrifice their own privileged

standards of consumption).

There are differences “which should be frankly acknowledged” within the fledgling “ecosocialist” movement, over how drastically certain forms of consumption must be cut, to what extent the very definitions of things like “growth” and “standards of living” need to be rethought, and whether advances in technology represent a promise or a curse. There are also varying perspectives on the degree to which “prefiguration” “reshaping our individual and communal life styles today in directions we hope will represent a future society” can pave the way for an ecosocialist transformation.

These are important debates, but they will be ultimately decided not within small “vanguard” circles but only through conscious movements on a massive and global scale. That’s one reason among many to fight for cutting the work week “giving people time and space to discuss priorities, structure their own lives with more free time and less stress, and participate in politics.

To envision the kind of future that’s necessary and possible, the place to begin “even if only the beginning, it’s a critical one!” is with what engineers call “low-hanging fruit.” Surely that begins with abolishing the war industries that consume so many resources while producing so much misery around the world. A fraction of those expenditures would suffice to provide clean drinking water to a couple billion people who lack it (not all of whom live in the “Third World,” as thousands of cut-off Detroiters will attest). In the process, the biggest global cause of child mortality and much endemic disease would be eliminated in short order.

Second is the urgency of eliminating production of pure waste “like all the horrible ubiquitous plastic packaging that consumes massive quantities of oil, and ultimately winds up in the oceans choking and poisoning sea life. Third, agricultural production must be transformed, to eliminate the factory-farming methods of stuffing livestock with the antibiotics that are rapidly producing

drug-resistant pathogens, massive pesticide applications that poison farmworkers and waterways and kill off pollinating bee colonies by the millions. As to a sustainable democratic community agriculture, the international, women-led Via Campesina has offered a model “not as a blueprint, but as an outline of possible directions to explore.

Affordable mass transit in car-choked cities like Los Angeles, or Detroit, where so many low-income residents without cars can’t get to jobs that are available for them, is a must.

Are these measures, in themselves, sufficient? Almost certainly not. There are hard choices that will need to be made. But as revolutionary and democratic ecosocialists, we recognize that those choices can only be made and solutions found through movements that must be built today against war production, stopping fracking and Keystone XL, defending indigenous communities’ struggles against dams and deforestation...In short, the bonds of solidarity built in movements today are crucial for people to see themselves as a human family to make the hardest of decisions tomorrow and beyond. The ecosocialist goal is to overcome the alienation of capitalism through unleashing the creativity that prioritizes meeting human needs sustainably and equitably. [See Bill Resnick’s article in this issue on a democratic energy future.]

## No Technical Saviors

Among the reports and technical programs circulating in government and expert circles is a Deep Decarbonization Pathway Project (DDP) developed under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Network, led and heavily promoted by liberal economist [Jeffrey Sachs](#).

Such reports, and their warnings of the consequences of failing to cap global warming at two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial temperatures, are useful in their way. But what’s fatally missing

“indeed, beyond the horizon that those like Sachs, deeply embedded in the existing system, can recognize” is the understanding that “deep decarbonization” is simply incompatible with the most basic imperative of capitalist production.

That imperative is growth “meaning the growth of production for profit, whether or not such growth enhances or degrades human lives, the viability of life on Earth, or anything else. The absolute urgency of cutting way back on fossil-fuel consumption is going to require,

inevitably, a reduction in growth in that sense” although if properly organized, not necessarily a reduction in production for human needs. The production of war materiel and plastic wrapping is profitable, in a way that clean water for two billion folks who can’t pay “market price” may never be.

In a capitalist market economy, each unit “each enterprise” must profit at whatever expense, or die. Honorable intentions make little to no difference. And each capitalist nation-

state can be expected, under DDP or any similar project, to advance the interests of its own leading businesses’ and industrial corporations’ interests,

It’s our bet that working people “through their struggles and bonds of solidarity with others near and far” can understand that reality, and act on it. That’s the socialist side of ecosocialism. Yet as we said at the outset, we can’t afford to “wait for the revolution” either.

September/October 2014, ATC 172

## Why the international left should support a yes vote for Scottish independence

4 September 2014, by Terry Conway

The polls currently suggest that those who wish to maintain the Union will probably win a narrow majority, but the reality is that the result is probably too close to call [149] following two high profile TV debates between the pro-independence Scottish National Party leader (SNP) and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, and pro-union Labour MP and former Cabinet member Alistair Darling, leader of the Better Together campaign. [150]

The campaign around the referendum, particularly that organising for a yes vote, has reshaped politics in Scotland. Mass canvasses including on working class housing estates and packed public meetings have been organised not only by the official Yes campaign dominated by the ruling SNP, but by more radical groups such as the Radical Independence Campaign [151] and Women for Independence [152] which have involved huge numbers in every part of Scotland in political discussions – in a context where mass abstention from the political process has been growing across Britain in election after election. Even the Better Together campaign has been forced to emulate

these so-called old-fashioned methods, while both sides have used social media to the full as well.

There has been a huge and successful campaign of voter registration. Everyone predicts that the turnout will be much higher than in other elections and the media is forced to concede that the Yes campaign has far more troops on the ground.

Even if the yes campaign is not successful on 18 September there can be no doubt that the dynamic of the campaign and the mass politicisation it has brought about will have an enduring effect and it will certainly not be the end of demands for Scottish independence. On the other hand, if the yes campaign is victorious the left in the rest of Britain will need to ensure that the British state does not act to put further blocks on the right of the people of Scotland to exercise self-determination.

### The back story

Scotland has had its own parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh since 1999, following a referendum in 1997 in

which 74% of the population of Scotland voted in favour of this step and 64% voted for the parliament to have tax-raising powers. This achievement was itself the result of a vigorous campaign which brought a new generation of activists into politics. While the SNP was an important part of that campaign, it was by no means hegemonic and the process of fighting for the re-establishment of the Parliament was a central part of what led to the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party .

The fact that the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher had used Scotland as a testing ground for the introduction of their hated poll tax [153], introducing it in 1989, a year earlier than in England and Wales, gave the campaign for the Scottish Parliament important impetus. This was also the issue which saw the long term undermining of the electoral support of the Scottish Conservative Party. [154]

Further financial powers were devolved to the Scottish Parliament in 2012 in an attempt to undercut the yes campaign in the forthcoming

independence referendum. Nevertheless key matters, including all foreign policy and overall economic policy, remain the preserve of the Westminster parliament and this reality is a key impetus for the yes campaign. The appeal of more democracy is very potent in practice – again undercutting those who argue that the reason for growing political disinterestedness is apathy rather than disdain for processes which have become so hollowed out by corruption and centralisation.

During the first two terms of the Holyrood parliament in Edinburgh, the Labour Party in Scotland was in government and the Scottish National Party in opposition. In 2007 the SNP won a majority of seats and formed a minority government. In 2011 the SNP won a landslide victory, taking 69 out of 129 seats and forming a majority government.

When the first election took place for Holyrood, Tony Blair and New Labour were in government in Westminster, implementing neo-liberal policies south of the border with fierce determination as well as going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Blair was then succeeded as party leader by Gordon Brown who won the 2007 election. In 2010 David Cameron's Conservative and Unionist Party won the Westminster election.

## The SNP

The SNP victory of 2011 was a key turning point for a number of reasons. The SNP, founded in 1934, did not win its first MP in Westminster until 1967 but of course the Scottish Parliament would always be a better terrain for it than Westminster. [155]

The SNP is itself a political formation with a contradictory political programme and practice. At one level using the traditional characterisation that it is a petty bourgeois nationalist party is perfectly accurate – the problem is that the description does not actually tell you much of what you need to know.

In policy terms for example, the party has always been in favour of the retention of the British monarch as

head of state in an independent Scotland! Not very radical then? Certainly one of the reasons why historically many, especially Labour members in Scotland referred to the SNP as Tartan Tories.

For 30 years the SNP had a policy of opposition to NATO – an important stance which put it to the left of the other mainstream parties in the country – but at its Perth conference in October 2012 it reversed this position. This was a turn to the right too far for two of its MSPs who resigned from the party in disgust.

While the SNP currently remains committed to getting rid of Britain's nuclear submarine Trident, currently located at Faslane in the west of Scotland, which is why Scottish CND campaigns for a Yes vote, it is clear that this amongst many other things will remain a contested question in practice after September 18.

There is a general consensus in Scotland against the presence of nuclear weapons in the country because they are immoral, they are incredibly expensive and almost useless in terms of protecting against the most significant threats to national security. [156]

On social matters, where Holyrood has devolved power, the situation is often different from that in the rest of Britain. For example the Scottish government under Salmond has decided to end the right of council tenants to buy their homes, a policy brought in by Thatcher, which has seen the significant depletion of council homes available for rent, as well as acting as a key ideological lever against the idea of collective provision of basic social needs. Scottish students do not pay tuition fees if they study in Scotland – a policy introduced by Scottish Labour but strongly backed by the SNP. Similarly the Scottish government did not introduce charges for personal care for the elderly when they were introduced in the rest of Britain. The SNP abolished prescription charges for medicines in 2011.

But despite these positive moves in a world of neo-liberalism, there are deep limitations to the SNPs approach.

Ralph Blake explains in *Socialist Resistance* why we need to be sharply critical of Salmond's economic strategy, explaining amongst other things why an independent Scotland needs an independent currency. [157]

The No campaign's relentless focus on the formal question of whether Scotland needs permission to continue to use the pound sterling has probably backfired on them – with people pointing out that there are many countries that use the currency of another. But there has been less debate – at least south of the border – on what this says about Salmond's overall economic approach and the extent to which he and his party, let alone their friends and supporters in big business, are interested in a real break with the economic orthodoxy of the market. On this question, as on all the others, what will determine the outcome is the extent to which the radical forces that have grown through the yes campaign can maintain a real pressure on the SNP afterwards.

The electoral system under which elections to the Scottish Parliament take place – a combination of 73 constituency seats where MPs are elected on a first past the post basis plus 56 seats allocated to eight regions elected on the D'Hondt system [158] – was deliberately crafted to prevent the SNP ever gaining a majority. The SNP itself, since as far back as 2002 when it adopted its seminal document "A Constitution for a Free Scotland", [159], has campaigned for full proportional representation.

The key election pledge of the SNP in 2011 was that it would demand a referendum on independence. But exit polls made it clear that many who voted for the SNP last May did not do so on the basis of support for independence. Rather, they saw the SNP as being to the left of the other main parties on offer – the Tories, the Lib Dems and also Scottish Labour.

So part of the battle around the referendum has been to convince those same voters that it is only by voting yes that these gains can be protected. The message of those fighting for a Yes vote to the left of the



SNP is of course of a different emphasis - that the best conditions to defend and extend the social gains achieved since 1999 are to vote yes - but also to remain mobilised to ensure that these gains can be protected.

## Constitutional crisis?

British Prime Minister David Cameron's position would be very seriously undermined by a Yes vote. The state that was established by the Act of Union of 1707, the Kingdom of Great Britain, would hear its death knell at the hands of a democratic vote by the people of Scotland - though independence itself would not take place until March 2016. The Union flag - generally referred to as the Union Jack - would have its future in doubt with the withdrawal of Scotland's Saltire. [160]

The whole constitutional situation would be up for grabs. The first past the post voting system by which Members of Parliament are elected to Westminster is an archaic undemocratic model which hardly exists anywhere else on the globe. Campaigning against this should be a higher priority for the left across Britain.

The fact that other voting systems are used to vote for the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly should give some impetus to this. [161]

The *New Statesman* in February 2014 gave the lie to the argument which, like arguments against proportional representation, are used by some in the Labour Party and trade unions on what can only be seen as a tribal basis - that if Scotland goes independent we are consigned to a Conservative government at Westminster on a permanent basis.

In fact it states "on no occasion since 1945 would independence have changed the identity of the winning party and on only two occasions would it have converted a Labour majority into a hung parliament (1964 and October 1974). Without Scotland, Labour would still have won in 1945

(with a majority of 143, down from 146), in 1966 (75, down from 98), in 1997 (137, down from 179), in 2001 (127, down from 166) and in 2005 (43, down from 66)".

The fact that the Scottish referendum will be the first time that young people from the age of 16 will be able to vote in Britain must open up a debate about extending the franchise to younger voters in other elections. In a situation where turn out in many elections is low, where the expenses scandal has further undermined confidence in mainstream politicians, this extension of democracy is again something that the left should trumpet.

Over the last several decades we have seen the closing down of democracy in England at the same time as the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Local government across Britain has been gutted of meaning not only by the cuts imposed by both Labour and Tory governments but also by legislation which limits what local authorities can do - for example in terms of deciding to build council housing.

The development of cabinet (executive) control of councils which completely marginalises backbench councillors (those who work for a living) has combined with the introduction of populist measures such as directly elected mayors and Police Commissioners.

The left in Britain has had very little discussion about its position on regional government, partly because of the defensive position we have been in during the period that these issues have begun to be discussed, but also because such democratic issues have tended to be way down the list of priorities.

The Scottish referendum has further stimulated discussion on these questions and, if a yes vote were to be achieved, this would be even more the case. But while it is clear that the left needs to campaign for proportional representation (though this is not uncontroversial - there are, surprisingly, still people who defend first past the post) and for reform of

the existing tiers of local government to give them real power, the debate about whether regional assemblies are something that should be argued for has barely started.

So a Prime Minister in Westminster who presided over this disaster for his class would have some real explaining to do, particularly given the drubbing his party had the European elections at the hands of the right wing anti-European party, UKIP.

The Tories introduction of fixed-term parliaments means that for the first time in British history we know the next General Election will take place in May 2015, which gives Cameron some protection against the prospect of being removed as party leader. However the fact that a prominent Conservative MP has resigned his seat in recent days to fight a parliamentary bye-election as a UKIP candidate means the pressure on him is ratcheting up even before the referendum.

This combines with the fact that an increasing number of Conservative MPs are arguing that if the outcome of the referendum were to be a yes the General Election should be postponed. [162] This would require the repeal of the Fixed-term Parliament Act passed in 2011 which would have to be agreed by both Houses of Parliament in London - not at all a certain prospect. Their argument is that with independence itself not set to take effect until March 2016 you would otherwise have the situation where Scottish MPs for the Westminster Parliament would be elected in 2015 but would continue to hold their seats for 4 years beyond independence. This is of particular concern to Conservatives because few, if any, of them are likely to hold such seats.

## Not romantic

Support for a yes vote does not mean romanticising Scotland or the SNP and its programme. There have been forces in Scotland before and after 1707 that have supported British imperialism. The Scottish ruling class in its majority has rallied support for imperialist wars and the Scottish



military has fought under the bloody flag of the union in many conflicts.

In terms of the colonisation of Ireland, settlers from Scotland were central to the organised plantation in the seventeenth century – before the Act of Union between Scotland and England – a historical fact which is not irrelevant in understanding the support the vicious and reactionary Orange Order still attracts in parts of Scotland today.

It is perfectly possible to be more than a little critical of all or some of Alex Salmond's programme and still believe that this campaign is key for socialists.

Indeed while romanticism and uncritical support for Salmond is a stick used to beat supporters of a yes vote by their opponents both in Scotland and England in fact a rather worse romanticism permeates many of their arguments.

In his speech on Scottish independence in Edinburgh in February 2014 [163], Cameron said he was “a Unionist head, heart and soul”, and acknowledged that the Conservatives were not “currently Scotland's most influential political movement”.

But he ducked speculating about what a Yes vote would mean for Tories either north or south of the border – never mind for his own leadership of the party. Of course the main reason for that is that by contemplating such a defeat he fears to make it more likely – but the fact that the Westminster media gives him an easier time on the question of Scottish independence than in debating the politics of UKIP is also a factor.

## New Labour's tribalism

And it is not only the Conservative and Unionist Party who know that a victory for the Scottish independence campaign would be a problem for them – the New Labour leadership is central to the “Better Together” campaign. They are all too aware that independence for Scotland would mean more independence from New

Labour – in the sense of relying on working class people's votes even when you put forward policies and act in practice in a way which consistently kicks those very supporters in the teeth.

It is not surprising then that when Darling says that a yes vote is “as bad for the city as the banking crisis” he is roundly attacked – pointing out his own role in that crisis. Gordon Brown, who had previously kept clear of the Better Together campaign needed to pile in with a speech attacking the so-called pensions' hole that he claims independence will lead to. Brown has not become more media savvy since he left Downing Street but he is not a member of the Edinburgh elite like Darling. New Labour is aware that key to delivering a no vote in the referendum will be convincing working class voters to stick with the Union – a battle they seem increasingly to be losing.

The Better Together campaign is deeply committed to downplaying the role of British imperialism – claiming that Britain has played a positive role in world politics! Whether it is to prettify the role of British (and Scottish) troops in Iraq and Afghanistan or to pretend that the role of neo-colonialism was driven forward by selfless moral imperatives rather than the greed for profit it is all a lie to defend the Union.

There are sections of the left that support a no vote in the referendum – objectively supporting the union though of course they do not say so. They do not argue on the same lines as the New Labour leadership, but they too tend to imply that there are no divisions within the working class and that support for independence would introduce such alien divisions from the outside. The reality is much more complex than that.

Workers across the globe are divided by racism, by sexism, by homophobia. Working people often believe that some politician of a mainstream party will carry through their promises – despite much evidence to the contrary. Unity of the working class is a dynamic not a static concept – it has to be built and fought for – and it has ebbs and flows.

In terms of the precise relationship between Scotland and England, Allan Armstrong in his article for Left Unity [164] explains that different trade unions in Britain and Ireland have different models of organising. For example, there is a Scottish version of the National Union of Teachers, the Educational Institute of Scotland, which organises only in Scotland, while UNITE, Britain's biggest union, organises across the whole of Britain and Ireland.

Workers in the public sector face different situations in different industries – for example health is a devolved responsibility in both Scotland and Wales (and in the North of Ireland). In the private sector – and indeed in the public sector with privatisation – solidarity action across national boundaries is key to defending jobs and conditions in many situations.

Also central to this discourse, and again little noticed in the rest of Britain, is the shift that the Unionist parties have had to make on the question of devolution for Scotland. When the campaign to create the Scottish Parliament was in full swing the Tories were opposed to any form of devolution and the majority of New Labour in Scotland was extremely mealy mouthed.

But over time they have been forced to concede more. The Scotland Act of 2012 gave Holyrood more revenue raising powers. Unionist politicians of all hues have dangled a new package of devolution (referred to as “devo max”, maximum devolution) in front of the people of Scotland to persuade them there is no need to vote for independence.

This is what David Cameron said when he addressed the Scottish Conservative Party Conference in March 2014:

“Let me be absolutely clear: a vote for No is not a vote for ‘no change’. We are committed to making devolution work better still, not because we want to give Alex Salmond a consolation prize if Scotland votes No but because it is the right thing to do.

“Giving the Scottish Parliament

greater responsibility for raising more of the money it spends, that's what [Scottish party leader] Ruth Davidson believes and I believe it too." [165]

Davidson has subsequently put more flesh on these bones. [166] But as we approach the vote it seems increasingly that such pleas are falling on deaf ears.

But a yes vote will awaken

expectations amongst the many who make their mark believing that Salmond can be trusted as well as those that do not. That's one of the reasons why the British elite are throwing so much time and money into campaigning to defend the Union.

And as Ralph Blake argues [167], a victory for the yes campaign can open

up a dynamic political process in Scotland around a campaign for a constituent assembly - one of the ways in which discussions in Scotland relate to debates in Catalonia. Socialists across the world have nothing to lose and much to gain by aligning ourselves with such a dynamic movement for radical change.

*September 4 2014*

# At NUMSA's Initiative, New liberation Forces Debate Future of Post-Apartheid South Africa

## 4 September 2014, by Federico Fuentes

This call by the country's largest trade union, with over 300,000 members, has caused reverberations throughout the working class as a whole, and has led some in the media to describe the process as "likely to lead to the birth of a workers' party that will eventually challenge [the ANC] for power".

NUMSA's challenge to the established status quo has also highlighted the many dangers and challenges they face, perhaps most graphically illustrated by the murder of three of its shop stewards on the eve of the symposium.

## Post-apartheid South Africa

That NUMSA's call has received so much attention can be explained by the reality of South African society, twenty years after the fall of apartheid.

When the ANC was swept into power in 1994, under South Africa's first elections in which all citizens were allowed to vote, it did so as the party that had successfully led South Africa's "democratic revolution" against apartheid.

Many believed that an ANC government would be able to

implement the goals set out in the Freedom Charter. Drafted up in 1955 by the Congress of the Peoples, and with the participation of thousands of delegates, the charter's mission was neatly summed up in its opening demand: "The People Shall Govern!"

Since then, the Charter has served to bind together the component parts of the Tripartite Alliance: the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

However, after twenty years of ANC rule, South Africa continues to remain a long way away from the vision set out in the Freedom Charter.

Instead of completing the "democratic revolution", the ANC has in fact presided over dual transition processes, neither of which it has been able to successfully complete.

On the one hand was the transition towards a post-apartheid political democracy. While important strides have been taken in dismantling the old system of segregation, NUMSA General Secretary Irvin Jim noted that much still remains to be done.

In his presentation to the symposium, Jim listed a litany of ways in which South Africa has actually moved further away from the original vision of the Freedom Charter.

For example, he said that far from sharing the country's wealth, the ANC rules over a South Africa that is more unequal today than it was in 1994.

Similarly, life expectancy dropped from 62 years of age in 1992 to 58 in 2012, with the gap between blacks and whites still an astonishing difference of 23 years (48 years compared to 71 years, respectively).

In terms of labour rights, Jim noted that while apartheid laws have been abolished, studies showed that "being African reduces the odds of being employed by 90%, in comparison to being white."

Jim also pointed to figures that indicate that white employees continue to earn on average four times more than African employees.

The failure to achieve the aims of the "democratic revolution", in large part can be explained by the fact that the ANC's coming to power coincided with the peak moment in neoliberalism's global supremacy.

Rather than challenge neoliberalism, South Africa's new rulers preferred to acquiesce to the international terms imposed by big business and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

"The negotiated settlement",

explained Jim, “was one of a neoliberal capitalist transition, carried out largely behind closed doors.”

While the Freedom Charter proposed nationalizing the mines and banks, the ANC instead further entrenched the economy’s dependency on mineral exports, while facilitating the rise of a powerful financial sector.

At the same time, the manufacturing sector suffered a steep process of de-industrialisation. The result, Jim explained, was that more than 620,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1995-2008, and in 2009 alone, 1 million jobs were lost across the economy.

Yet, the ANC was never able to inflict the kinds of defeat on the working class that had accompanied the implementation of neoliberalism globally.

Instead, strike levels remain relatively constant through out the nineties, and rose dramatically from 2005 onwards, reaching levels that surpass that of any other country in the world.

Moreover, the rise in worker militancy was paralleled by a surge in community protests, mainly over access to basic services and unemployment.

As a result, South Africa today has the highest rate of protests per capita of any country, and been dubbed by some the “protest capital of the world”.

## Marikana

This tension between, on the one hand, a growing nexus between mining and financial economic elites and the new ANC state managers, and on the other, rising discontent from below, ultimately exploded with the tragic events at Marikana.

On August 16, 2012, state security forces gunned down 34 workers from a local platinum mine operation run by Lonmin, in an attempt to end the month-long strike. Subsequent investigations into the events at Marikana revealed a high level of collusion between company executives and state officials in perpetrating the

massacre.

For many, Marikana seemed to bring into sharp relief everything that was wrong with post-apartheid South Africa.

Despite the immense wealth being extracted out of the country’s platinum belt, responsible for 80 percent of the world’s supply of the precious metal, workers continued to labor in deadly conditions for extremely low wages.

When workers decided to fight back, they not only had to confront the company, but also its backers in the ANC government.

This included figures such as Cyril Ramaphosa, a former mineworkers union leader who became the deputy president of the country and sits on the board of Lonmin.

Despite the tragic events of August 16, workers maintained their strike for another month and ultimately won a 22% pay rise.

Moreover, the events at Marikana triggered off a new wave of strikes across various sectors.

The following year saw South Africa register its highest level of strike incidents yet (more than half of which involved unprotected actions), while 2014 has already seen a five-month long strike involving 70,000 workers in the platinum belt and a month-long strike by 220,000 NUMSA members.

All this has contributed to a rising sentiment among activists that conditions exist for building a left wing, working class alternative to the ANC.

## NUMSA’s response

Faced with this situation, NUMSA convened its 2013 SNC to decide how best to respond.

Delegates to the congress decided NUMSA should establish a “United Front” that could coordinate struggles in the workplace and communities, while retaking up the fight to implement the Freedom Charter.

They also resolved to call on COSATU to break from the Tripartite Alliance.

Another decision was for NUMSA to explore the creation of a political organization “committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a Socialist South Africa.”

This included a proposal to study the different types of political parties that have existed - “from mass workers parties to vanguard parties” - with particular attention being paid to those new experiences in countries such as “Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, [and] Greece.”

The international symposium brought together 28 party activists, trade unionists and social movement activists from 17 countries.

Among those present were representatives from the Movement Towards Socialism (Bolivia), PAIS Alliance (Ecuador), Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Brazil), Syriza (Greece), The Left (Germany), Korean Metal Workers Union, Labour Party (Nigeria), Broad Front (Uruguay), Party of the Laboring Masses (Philippines), and the Egyptian Socialist Party.

Discussion ranged across a variety of issues including what attitude any new party should take towards elections and government (especially in light of the ANC and SACP’s trajectory), how it should go about “raising consciousness”, and which classes and social forces should the party include in its ranks.

Another issue had to do with the role of trade unions in politics. The general consensus, certainly among NUMSA leaders, was that the NUMSA would always be a trade union, acting as a “shield and spear” in the hands of workers. Nevertheless, this was not counter-posed to playing the role of “catalyst” for a new party.

What was apparent throughout the three days was the enthusiasm and seriousness with which NUMSA leaders and members alike had taken up this discussion.

# Challenges

Also apparent are the serious challenges and obstacles they will face.

The murder of three NUMSA shop stewards the day prior to the symposium is one example. While the exact circumstances behind the murders have not been fully clarified, NUMSA leaders and members were in no doubt that it was part of a concerted campaign against the dissident trade union.

They also believe this is connected to an attempt by forces, most notably the SACP, to form a new, pro-ANC trade union in the metalworkers sector with the intention of challenging NUMSA for members.

Another challenge will be dealing with the disputes that have emerged within COSATU, particularly over NUMSA's push for a special congress to discuss the confederation's alliance with the ANC. This has led to talk of expelling NUMSA, COSATU's largest affiliate.

NUMSA is not only facing the challenges posed by those forces opposed to its initiatives ; but also of how to relate to potential allies.

At the most immediate level is the question of NUMSA's relationship with COSATU's rival, the National Council of Trade Unions, and especially its largest affiliate, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, which played a key role in the Marikana dispute and subsequent strikes in the platinum belt.

Through this process, AMCU has become the biggest union in the platinum mining sector, and is seen by many as a powerful symbol of resistance to the ANC government.

Any attempts at unity are sure to stoke tensions with COSATU.

Then there is the issue of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a new political force established by former ANC youth leaders who were expelled from the party. Although invited to attend the symposium, the EFF declined to participate.

Set up just one year before the May 2014 elections, the EFF went on to become the third largest political force in the country (winning 6.4% of the vote) on a platform focused on nationalizing the mines and banks, and opposition to ANC corruption.

Most of the EFF's support came from disenchanted youth and workers, particular in the platinum belt, where party leader Julius Malema campaigned heavily both during the Marikana dispute and then the election campaign.

Perhaps the biggest challenge however, will be how any new party seeks to involve the ever-increasing numbers of grassroots workplace and community activists, and even broader sectors of society, who while fed up with the ANC, have yet to find a political home.

Without a doubt, the ANC continues to loom large in South African politics, in no small part because of its historic legacy as the party that defeated apartheid.

Yet, increasing numbers are questioning whether the party

remains a useful vehicle for advancing change.

That is why despite winning the 2014 elections with 62% of the vote, some within the ruling party are deeply concerned by the fact that its share of support in terms of the overall voting population (which includes those that abstained or did not bother to register) has consistently fallen at every election, from 54% in 1994 to 35% this time around.

NUMSA therefore faces the challenge of uniting with grassroots worker and community leaders, as a vital stepping-stone to tapping into the broader social discontent present in South African society.

This is in a context where an unequal relationship exists between a large, organized trade union and small, disparate local community groups.

Moreover, any new party will have to deal with the existence of different left tendencies, each with their own particular ideology and discourse that, in many cases, reflect difference experiences and practice.

Today NUMSA is at the heart of an emerging process of left re-composition. NUMSA's ability to navigate through this difficult terrain will play an important role in determining whether the new liberation forces that have emerged in South Africa are capable of transforming the existing social discontent into a political force for lasting change.

*August 22, Johannesburg*

[TeleSUR English](#)

## September 11 and November 9 - the moment of truth

### 2 September 2014, by Josep María Antentas



The first measures of the script of the coming weeks seem clear. After the mobilization of 11-S the Mas government [of the Generalitat of Catalonia] will approve the Law of Consultations [concerning the independence vote] and then, sign the decree for calling of the consultation, which will probably be suspended by the Constitutional Court.

From there two routes are possible. To maintain until the end a democratic disobedient impulse that would accelerate the process of sovereignty and would wear down the State, or to go into reverse gear. And in this second option there are also several possibilities, from the search for other short term routes to allow the democratic exercise of the right to decide, to attempts to postpone the process sine die.

To respect the decision of the Constitutional Court, as everything indicates Mas will do, despite his grandiloquent gestures, would be a strategic error of the first order. A very bad symptom. To defend the consultation at all costs must be the first step in this game. To disobey a ban which is unjustifiable and inexplicable outside the context of the Spanish State, but also before a considerable part of Spanish public opinion, is the main challenge of the Catalan democratic forces. The Asamblea Nacional Catalana (ANC) and those who lead the pro independence movement should clearly take this route and not accept the policy of plan Bs of uncertain content. Faced with the evidence that this will not happen, the left forces must become the main defenders of the consultation. At the moment of truth there should be not doubt on who favours going to the limit in favour of the right to decide.

## Unity? What unity?

In this situation it will be key in the next months to maintain the broadest possible unitary block between those in favour of the consultation. A unity which cannot, however, be tied behind the Mas government, but that must maintain a strong pressure on the latter and seek to go beyond it. No room should be left for a retreat or the

indefinite postponement of this key moment. Unity in defence of the consultation should not be confused with the mantra of patriotic unity that reduces all social contradictions to the national question and serves to deactivate the resistance to austerity policies. The Pujol scandal should serve as definitive warning for all those that still defend this policy with good intentions. The problems are at home, not only on the other side of the Ebro.

The justification for a pro-independence strategy disconnected from social demands is based on the argument by which it is first necessary to advance all together to independence, not to divide and to weaken ourselves, and later discuss what type of Catalonia we want. There are several weak points in this argument. First, unity in favour of the exercise of the right to decide is not incompatible with everyone defending their model of how the country should be. Second, independence without social content is incapable of connecting an important part of the Catalan society of popular and working class origin with Catalan nationalism. Third, today, here and now there is already a national model and those who lead are defining it day to day, with cuts, layoffs and evictions.

One Catalonia already exists, that of financial power, that of Mas. So why postpone the defence of our Catalonia? So we who want a Catalonia without cuts, layoffs and evictions must postpone our proposals? Might we not request the same of those who cut, lay off and evict? There is no doubt: to cut, lay off and evict divides Catalan society. But it benefits some, and this is what in the end counts. And, in fourth and last place, it should never be forgotten that in a transition process who controls it determines what comes later, and that through the latter, the relationship of forces between social actors is never equal. The concessions and demobilizations of today are never recovered later.

The subordination of social demands and social and economic transformations to political demands has a long tradition of failure in the trajectory of popular movements of all

types. History is full of revolutions by stages in which after the democratic stage the social one never arrived and was lost in the space-time of broken illusions. It is not necessary to go very far back either: paradoxically the discourse of "first independence and then the rest" resembles amazingly the argument of "first democracy and then social rights" of the Transition, which served to justify resignations and concessions that never would be recovered. In politics promises for the future do not exist, they are both illusory and fleeting. To take advantage of the opportune moment, the suitable conjuncture is the base for any movement which makes demands. What cannot be obtained today cannot be guaranteed for further ahead.

National unity, in addition, far from being a conjunctural policy, ends up becoming a permanent strategy in which there is no end in sight. If now the argument of "first independence then the rest" is accepted, soon we will be called on to accept, in the hypothesis of an independent Catalonia, the austerity imposed by the European Union. "Stay calm, it is necessary to make sacrifices so that the Troika recognizes us, but later we will recover the lost rights", would be then the argument. Always there is a good excuse to postpone redistributive policies and the extension of rights.

The paradox of the situation is that, although during the great mobilizations of 11-S of 2012, 2013 and this year, the national demand was explicitly separated from the social ones, the latter were present in latent form. Those who favour independence do so in their majority because they think it will be synonymous with more democracy and more equality.

There is, in the independence process, a double inter-crossed conflict. First, on the surface, the institutional clash between the state apparatus and the Catalan government. A second, deeper, opposition between the politics of the street, participation and real democracy, and politics from above. This latter opposes the Catalan popular movement against Rajoy, but also opposes those who want to manage, in the best of cases, the right

to decide from above and place this process within controlled channels, against a constituent and democratizing logic. We have to oppose a dual reason of state, that of the actually existing Spanish state and that of the nonexistent Catalan State. Both have anaesthetizing potential. To fight requires openly confronting the first, without being used by the second.

Under the combined impact of austerity policies and the independence process, the traditional Catalan party system has self-destructed. Its two great pillars, CiU and the PSC, have entered into crisis. The second, without credibility on either the social or national planes, faces the destiny of PASOK. The first, although in a better position, undergoes unstoppable erosion, because austerity fractures it and its credibility with respect to the independence process is relative.

Unlike the party system of the Spanish State, where the PP and PSOE are in decline, but have not yet been overtaken by any emergent force, the crisis of CiU and the PSC is deeper and they have lost the political-electoral leadership. But, due to the centrality of the debate on the national question, what benefits from the political crisis is a force, ERC, that incarnates a project of rupture at the national level but continuity at the economic level, and not an anti-austerity force such as Syriza in Greece or Podemos in the Spanish State. This is the great paradox of the Catalan political crisis.

In this context it is essential to articulate a broad pro-sovereignty political alternative opposed to austerity. The proposal defended by the Procés Constituent of Arcadi Oliveres and Teresa Forcades from April of 2012 is, right now, more necessary than never.

Faced with the decline of CiU and the PSC and the ascent of ERC, a new actor is needed which can become a point of support of Catalan politics and which incarnates the critique of austerity policies and traditional politics that exploded on 15-M of 2011. Neither ICV-EUiA, nor Podemos, nor the CUP nor even Procés

Constituent, in themselves, have the strength to become an alternative that can destabilize Catalan politics from the left. It is then time to consider formulas of convergence and joint work. But a new actor of this type could not be only a sum of abbreviations; it requires simultaneously convergences of non-organized people and existing organizations. And, still more important, it will only have sense if it represents a clear break with the traditional politics and the institutional culture that has done so much damage to the left from the Transition until now.

Only such a new political instrument will make the crisis of the traditional Catalan political system complete and open the way to a new system of parties. It would be a disaster if the CiU and PSC cannot be challenged by a force with social, electoral and institutional weight with a national project that does not advocate obedience to the financial world and the Troika, and that the new hegemony of ERC was facilitated and uncontested by a left fragmented into multiple options. For the first time in decades, those who want not only political change, but also a change of economic and social model, have the possibility of playing a significant role in Catalan politics. Something that does not happen often. Something unimaginable three years ago. Something that is still hard to believe. To let this type of opportunity pass has in the long run a much higher price than the apparent sacrifices and short term difficulties in forging convergences.

## Inside and outside

The consultation of 9-N 2014 is more than a simply Catalan affair. Contrary to which the majority common sense of the Catalan independence movement believes, what happens outside Catalonia is determinant. Without external allies, the exercise of the right to decide is much more complex and the pressure towards unity with the patriots whose money is invested in Andorra is much stronger. And contrary to what a good part of the Spanish left thinks, the Catalan

independence process, far from being a fringe obsession, is a fabulous opportunity to strike an accurate blow to the battered ship of the Transition.

It should be repeated time and time again: those who wish to prevent the Catalan people's right to vote on 9-N are those who have not let to the Spanish people choose between monarchy and republic, have cut health and education, protected banks before families, and covered up cases of corruption for each other. Although it is lamentably not explicitly formulated and understood, there are many points of common interest between a good part of those who demand the independence of Catalonia and those against the bipartisanship of the PP-PSOE and their policies. If Rajoy (and the PSOE of Pedro Sanchez) lose the Catalan standoff, their authority across the State will be debilitated. The feeling of shipwreck will be generalized.

It is precisely from this double strategic understanding, in Catalonia and outside Catalonia, that the germ of a will for free coexistence and neighbourliness and alliance between sovereign peoples faced with domestic and international financial power must be born. The national question should not be approached from a basis of identity politics or emotion, but from a democratic and strategic viewpoint. There lies the key to not losing the way, or confusing friends with adversaries, choose mistaken priorities and thus play the game of those who want nothing to change or to those who want everything to change so that everything remains the same.

Nobody knows what would happen if there were a head-on collision between the institutions of the Spanish State and the Catalans. Nobody glimpses with clarity the result of a frontal collision. But such a clash can do nothing good for the battered present regime, and many possibilities can open up for the democratic and anti-austerity forces across the state, on condition that they know to read the moment and do not leave the initiative to those who fight to maintain a crumbling political and institutional framework.

# A ‘soft’ military coup? - “The army has earned lost ground and is being presented by the media and the government as a saviour of the system”

**1 September 2014, by Farooq Tariq**

Late-night August 30 meetings by Khan and Tahir Qadri with the army chief General Raheel Sharif have been severely criticised by members of parliament as showing the weakness of the PMLN government. The government then came up with the excuse that it was the wish of the two “protesting long marchers” to meet the army chief.

Since August 20, a few thousand supporters of the PTI and the PAT have been occupying the main road leading to the parliament, Prime Minister House and the Supreme Court of Pakistan in Islamabad. Both right-wing parties were unable to mobilise a “million” people as promised to demand the immediate resignation of the prime minister on charges of rigging the May 2013 general election.

Despite claims and counter claims, it is an established fact that the government has allowed the two protesting leaders to have direct contact with the military. They both are expecting and wanting a military coup after their occupation of the main road, which is being televised live 24 hours a day by all main commercial media. It showed the extremely weak nature of Nawaz government’s democratic credentials.

In fact, a soft military coup may have taken place. The army has earned lost ground and is being presented by the media and the government as a saviour of the “system”. Thirty-four out of 65 years of Pakistan’s independence has been under military rule, the last ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, left power in 2009 after a

mass campaign against him by lawyers and most political parties.

The military will be able to dictate all its terms to the PMLN government if it survives a hard military coup, a remote possibility that cannot be ruled out. The civilian government that has dared to show some independence from military domination for over year and half with its policies of peace talks with India and the trial of Musharraf may have to abandon these defiant policies.

The occupation of the main road by the PTI and the PAT has fizzled out. It has not spread all over Pakistan. The deadline set by the two parties’ leaders for the final show down has been extended over a dozen times. Imran Khan’s appeal for mass civilian disobedience was opposed by the majority of traders and businesspeople. His party has submitted the resignation of some 30 parliamentarians. However, the provincial government of Khaiber Pukhtoon Khawa, formed by Khan’s party, has not resigned, a double standard that has not gone down well with the people of Pakistan.

Khan launched his long march on August 14 to protest against the rigging of the general election last year. He is demanding that Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif resign to pave the way for a fresh election. The PTI’s Azadi March (liberation march) caught the imagination of many in Pakistan in its initial stage, however the expectation that 100,000 motorcyclists would lead the “million march” were not realised. It failed miserably.

A few thousand marchers left Lahore, from the residence of Imran Khan at Zaman Park, riding in expensive cars.

The Azadi March is being complemented by the Inqilab March (revolution march) called by the PAT. The PAT is a religious political grouping active in the fields of education and health and has a worldwide network of charities. The government allowed the “Revolution March”, led by religious scholar and chief of the PAT Mullah Tahir Qadri, only after an initial bid to repress it. Tahir Qadri, a Canadian citizen, has talked about changing the system and replacing it with a more progressive set-up. The PMLN government’s strategy to arrest workers and cordon-off the provincial capital Lahore and the federal capital Islamabad with large containers worked well.

The left-wing Awami Workers Party has characterised the two marches led by rich politicians and mullahs as reactionary and appealed to the working class not to participate. Both marches had reached Islamabad separately at the time of writing. The unity of the two actions was hit hard by the big egos of Khan and Tahir Qadri, who could not agree who would lead the rallies.

In the meantime, PM Nawaz Sharif has been repeatedly asking: “Why the march and what is our fault?” He asked the question in his long-awaited nationally televised speech on August 12.

Imran Khan says that the May 2013 general election was rigged and is demanding a new mid-term election under a government of technocrats.

He later made a U-turn on the issue of a technocrat-led interim government after the president of the PTI, Javed Hashmi, objected and refused to be part of the long march.

The issue of rigged elections came a “little” 14 months late. During that period, Imran Khan formed the provincial government in Khayber Pukhtoon Khawa province and the PTI is still in power there.

Imran Khan was at ease with the federal government and started negotiations with the religious fundamentalist Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). As expected, the talks did not go very far and a military operation was launched by the federal government in June 2014.

Initially, Khan raised questions about the operation; his main objection being that he was not consulted. Later, it turned out that the interior minister Choudry Nisar, from the ruling PMLN, had not been consulted either. Khan endorsed the military operation reluctantly and offered help from his Khayber Pukhtoon Khawa provincial government.

Within a month of the launch of the military operation, Khan announced that he would march to Islamabad to finish the rule of a “corrupt royalist” government. Many commentators were puzzled about the real motives of the long march.

It seems that Khan, who has always tried to please the religious fundamentalists, is again on the same path. A military operation could not be opposed publicly, so he started a campaign against the PMLN on the issue of election rigging.

It is worth noting that during the 2013 general election campaign political parties like the Pakistan People’s Party, the Awami National Party and the Mutihida Qaumi Movement were attacked by suicide bombers. They were not allowed to canvass in public by the fanatics. Both the PMLN and the PTI were not attacked. The reason

was simple: both were seen as sympathetic towards extreme religious groups.

Now the conservative right-wing parties are at loggerheads on the issue of power sharing. Both are in power, one in the centre and other in Khayber Pukhtoon Khawa province. Imran Khan wants power at the centre just 14 months after the general election. It seems an untimely decision as the PMLN has not lost all the popularity it enjoyed after the Pakistan People’s Party failed miserably during its 2008-13 term.

The PAT and the PTI have presented the most serious challenge to the PMLN government in its one and half years in office. Both are using a revolutionary vocabulary to attract the masses. Azadi (independence) and Inqilab (revolution) marches are an insult to the real meaning of the two slogans. Khan’s PTI is supported by and joined by the rich of Pakistan. It has become a right-wing conservative capitalist party. The PAT is a counterrevolutionary party using revolutionary slogans. It wants religion as the dominant political force to guide the state.

These parties are gaining popularity because the Nawaz government has failed miserably to do anything to lift the poor.

The PMLN is overseeing a fast implementation of a neoliberal agenda. To fulfill the conditions of the International Monetary Fund for a US\$5 billion loan, the PMLN government has doubled electricity prices and increased the prices of gas and other services. A wholesale privatisation of major public-sector institutions has been announced despite massive opposition by several political parties and trade unions.

The issue of election rigging is just a cover for Imran Khan. His real motives include covert opposition to the military operation against Tehreek-e-Taliban, opposition to the PMLN’s

attempt to put Musharraf on trial and to cover-up the performance of the PTI’s Khayber Pukhtoon Khawa provincial government.

The real question is: what will happen after the dharna (sit-in) in Islamabad? The PMLN has made it clear that it will not give in. The Lahore High Court has declared these dharnas unconstitutional. Imran Khan says that he will not come back without securing resignation of the prime minister. Tall claims have been made by both Khan and Tahir Qadri. It seems both are expecting some sort of military intervention. There is no other way to remove this government. However, direct military intervention seems unlikely at present:

“The two marches lack support in Sindh and Balochistan. That is an important factor why the military might not move to take power.

“There is a total opposition, at least in words, by all major political parties (except the PTI). Even the PTI leadership is paying lip service to the cause of democracy.

“There is still a vibrant lawyers’ movement and an activist judiciary that is totally against a military takeover and they are not going to validate a military coup as was the case in the past.

“Social movements, organisations and peasant and trade unions will oppose a military takeover.

“The present civilian government is not unpopular to the extent that a military coup would be accepted.

Imran Khan is in haste. His “rigging formula” is not being accepted by the majority of the people. His appeal is still confined mainly to Punjab. He has used very dogmatic language. He has made a bad case against the PMLN government. It might have been different if he launched his campaign a year or so later.

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