



## IV479 - December 2014

### IV479 - December 2014 PDF

27 January 2015, by **robm**

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## Now, let's throw out the internal troika!

31 December 2014, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

On the contrary: we can even think that the pitiful spectacle of the one-sided interview of prime minister Samaras by two puppets (in the opinion of the Athens journalists' union of ESIEA) from his governmental TV channel (created after the dictatorial closing of the public radio and television station ERT) turned against him: whereas we could have expected a number of deputies close to 180, the vote on this Monday, December 29 did not even bring him one more vote: 168 the same score as in the second round. This is likely to pose problems for Samaras' continuing role as leader of the right wing, internal disputes are becoming more and more obvious.

This is excellent news: the institutional block created by the impossibility of electing a president thus leads to the dissolution of the Parliament and parliamentary elections fixed for 25 January 2015. It is unnecessary to insist on the exceptional character of these

elections: for 3 weeks the European bourgeoisie has been continually warning against this possibility of elections, which could see the radical reformist party Syriza coming to government, and in particular provoke a wave of mobilizations which should not stop at the Greek borders!

The electoral campaign is already very much on the horizon, it started from the result of the vote this morning: Samaras, in a state of total disarray, once again went into a rant against Syriza, asserting it to be in alliance with the Nazis to push into the abyss a country that he claims to have saved... This will surely be the tone of the campaign, and which implies right now that the radical and revolutionary left continually point out 2 things:

- it can never be said enough, Greece has been controlled for 4 years by politicians of the PASOK or New Democracy who brought the far right into the government (the PASOK with the LAOS group) and while discussing

in a friendly (if not more ...) way with it (Baltakos, advisor of Samaras, regularly giving voting orders to Kasidiaris, tough guy number 2 of Chryssi Avgi), and the defeat of the "interior troika" will be also a defeat of the far right;

- the abyss, we've been in it for 4 years, and currently frozen measures (lower pensions, further attacks on basic rights) are ready in the files of the current government, obviously within the framework of its submission to the orders of the troika and the Merkel and Hollande governments. And those who were thrown into the abyss this weekend, are the trade unionists of the books and paper sector, beaten by the MAT (Greek riot police) when they protested against the imposition of a third successive Sunday worked in front of a bookstore, Ianos, which wants to offer a cultural facade like the FNAC of the 1970s but brought in the riot police using sexist insults against the workers and violence of all kinds. Or

then, the same day in the north of Greece, the MAT again was sent against a demo of more than 500 residents protesting against the authorization given to a large company of goldmines to poison the region of Skouries. In both cases, police violence engendered casualties. These two examples would be enough to show some of the many challenges of these elections: workers' rights, defence of an environment

shamelessly sold off to all comers recently, cleansing of a police affected the gangrene of the far right... It is the whole destructive logic of capitalism that must be stopped!

What demands to propose in the electoral campaign? What alliances? Both for Syriza (whose leadership is ogling a rightwing group which came out of Syriza and who took part in a

previous pro-memorandum government!) and the anticapitalist left ANTARSYA (a section of it wants an alliance with the nationalist and rightwing group of Alavanos, former leader of Synaspismos)? International Viewpoint will continue to report on this situation, which now needs to evolve in the right direction, that of broad popular support in Europe!

*Athens, 29 December 2015*

## Is Africa rising? A critical perspective (1)

**29 December 2014, by Firoze Manji**

There have been significant increases in prices of other minerals and grain. Africa is one of the richest continents: it has 10 per cent of the world's reserves of oil, 40 per cent of gold, and 80-90 per cent of chromium and platinum.

Natural resource extraction and associated state expenditure account for more than 30 per cent of Africa's GDP growth since 2000. The primary contributors to the growth in GDP have been a small number of the oil and gas exporters (Algeria, Angola, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Libya, and Nigeria), which have the highest GDP on the continent but are also the least diversified economies.

International capital sees the possibilities of major profits to be gained from oil, natural gas, minerals, land grabbing and the like. Transnational corporations court African governments to implement policies that include the massive privatisation of state-owned enterprises, low or no taxation of corporate profits and opening markets to a flood of manufactured commodities.

All of these measures have had a devastating impact on the ability of local manufacturing to survive. It is hardly surprising that, according to a McKinsey report, the "annual flow of foreign direct investment into Africa

increased from \$9 billion in 2000 to \$62 billion in 2008 - relative to GDP, almost as large as the flow into China". Most of this investment has been into the extractive industries.

So how has Africa benefitted from this? According to Carlos Lopes, the executive secretary of UNECA, "Average net profits for the top 40 mining companies grew by 156 per cent in 2010 whereas the take for governments grew by only 60 per cent, most of which was accounted for by Australia and Canada."

He points out that the profit made by the same set of mining companies in 2010 was \$110 billion, which was equivalent to the merchandise exports of all African LDCs in the same year. To make matters worse, as I have pointed out elsewhere, mining of non-renewable resources is equivalent to amputation: far from contributing to anything that could be called "development", it constitutes the depletion of the riches of the continent with little or no gain for its people, except for a tiny minority that enriches itself at the expense of the majority.

The GDP growth rates that proponents of the idea of "Africa Rising" rely on disguises the fact that across the continent there has been a decline in the manufacturing sectors, caused primarily by the neoliberal policies that opened up the economies to

manufactured goods from the industrialised countries.

As pointed out by Rick Rowden in his analysis of the 2011 UNCTAD report, the share of manufacturing value added (MVA) in Africa's GDP "fell from 12.8 per cent in 2000 to 10.5 per cent in 2008", while in developing Asia it rose from 22 per cent to 35 per cent over the same period: "There has also been a decline in the importance of manufacturing in Africa's exports, with the share of manufactures in Africa's total exports having fallen from 43 per cent in 2000 to 39 per cent in 2008. In terms of manufacturing growth, while most have stagnated, 23 African countries had negative MVA per capita growth during the period 1990 - 2010, and only five countries achieved an MVA per capita growth above 4 per cent". The trend of the declining contribution of manufacturing is confirmed once again by the 2014 UNCTAD report on LDCs.

So while their "Africa Rising" means salivating over rising GDP and the profits to be made by transnational corporations, the reality is that in Africa we have rising unemployment, rising amputation of natural and non-renewable resources, rising dispossessions of land, rising profits of the transnational corporations, rising landlessness, rising inequality, rising food prices, and rising pauperisation

of the majority.

As a recent report highlights, the rest of the world is draining Africa of resources. "While \$134 billion flows into the continent each year, predominantly in the form of loans, foreign investment and aid; \$192 billion is taken out, mainly in profits made by foreign companies, tax dodging and the costs of adapting to climate change. The result is that Africa suffers a net loss of \$58 billion a year."

## Rising discontent

But another aspect of the idea of "Africa Rising" that gives us hope in the future and potential for self-determination of the people of the continent needs to be given greater attention: that is, risings of people across the continent, which I have highlighted elsewhere.

In addition to the outbreak of revolutionary situations in Tunisia and Egypt that resulted in the ousting of Ben Ali and Mubarak (respectively), there have been popular uprisings in Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Djibouti, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Somalia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Western Sahara, Zimbabwe.

More recently, we have witnessed uprisings in a number of other countries including Nigeria and Chad. Most recently, uprisings in Burkina Faso have led to the deposing of

Blaise Campaore, the murderer of the Burkinabé revolutionary, Thomas Sankara.

Each of these uprisings has been fuelled by decades of disposessions and pauperisation that accompanied the latest phase of capitalism, popularly referred to as "neoliberalism". They were fuelled also by reversals of the gains of independence that established universal education, access to health care, social welfare, water, power and a wide range of social infrastructure.

But in the period before neoliberalism, the South chalked up significant achievements that are frequently forgotten by media, academia and the "development" industry alike. According to a UN/WIDER report produced by Surendra Patel, over the 40 years from 1950-1990, countries of the South, whose population is ten times larger than that of the developed world, sustained an average annual growth rate of over 5 per cent.

The period saw significant levels of industrialisation and an increasing share of manufacturing in exports; an increase in the rates of savings and investment; and an unprecedented expansion of social development, including health and education, dramatic improvements in life-expectancy (from 35 to over 60 years), literacy and an unprecedented expansion of education.

However, all across the continent Africa has experienced not merely material disposessions, but also a rising political dispossession. Our governments have become more accountable to the transnational

corporations, international financial institutions, banks and the imperialist states than they are to the citizens who elected them (or at least the citizens over whom they exercise political control).

The uprisings we have witnessed have begun to challenge the authority of these governments to some extent, but have as yet to bring about transformations in existing power relations.

Transforming the existing power relations will require us to go beyond the fetishisation of the ballot box. Citizens are allowed to vote (if they are lucky) every four to five years, but capital votes every day, every hour, every second on the stock exchanges. Capital's "vote" has a direct impact on people's lives, even on the price of food.

African countries need to regain control over their destinies and dignity. The question is: how can we democratise our societies?

What kind of processes do we need to allow us to democratise every aspect of our lives? Who determines what is produced, how it is produced, how much, by whom, and for whom? Who decides how the surplus is used, and how do they make those decisions? These questions also apply to other sectors: health, education, social welfare, telecommunications, agriculture, the use of natural resources, and so on.

Africa is rising. But not in the way the popular media would have it.

*Amandla No 37/38 December 2014*

# Is Africa rising? A critical perspective (2)

**29 December 2014, by Jean Nanga**

Among additional signs of Africa's economic awakening is the growing visibility of African billionaires and millionaires, as well as the growth of the African middle class, which is

deemed to be exponential. According to the African Bank for Development (ABfD), one out of three Africans currently belongs to the middle class. We are told this will only get better

with time, and the "trickle down effect" will eventually take care of the poor. This "afro-optimism" even veers into "afro-enthusiasm": How can we not rejoice at the imminent

emancipation of Africa?

Of course, despite these perceptible changes in virtually all African societies, this much-lauded growth is far from being the path that leads to such emancipation. On the contrary, it resembles instead a makeover of the mechanisms of domination and social injustice.

There is no denying the average growth of Africa's GDP, including even double-digit figures for some countries, which cannot be found anywhere in the centres of capitalism at present. However, the growth of Burkina Faso's GDP (7,9 per cent in 2010, 4,2 per cent in 2011, 9 per cent in 2012, 7 per cent in 2013) or Ethiopia's (12,6 per cent, 11,2 per cent, 8,7 per cent, 10,4 per cent over the same period), for example, does not, in terms of (social) "development" allow for comparison, let alone comes close to growth figures in Denmark (1,4 per cent, 1,1 per cent, -0,4 per cent, 0,4 per cent) or Switzerland (3 per cent, 1,8 per cent, 1 per cent, 1,9 per cent).

The current praise African growth receives from the praise singers of capitalism essentially lauds the profitability of investments no matter their source. Africa is considered to be a "leading space" for returns on investment. Such growth, sometimes involving African capital, indeed benefits mostly transnationals that primarily invest in extractivism, which is still the continent's main driving force of growth - an old "specialisation" inherited from colonial times.

In Ghana, oil extraction nearly doubled GDP growth in a few months after its initiation: from 7,7 per cent in 2010 to 14,4 per cent in 2011. Leaving aside its contribution to global warming, this boom has left workers behind, and Ghanaian oil workers were recently on strike over the meagre salaries they receive compared to their "expat" colleagues.

The new capitalist land grabbers who benefit from this growth - among them some local bourgeois - effectively push hundreds of thousands of farmers not towards the middle class - said to be in

extraordinary expansion - but into an over-exploited agricultural proletariat, working land that yields mainly for export. This includes children such as those in West Ethiopia who are thus deprived of primary education. This pattern reinforces traditional food dependence, which continues to grow, costing Africa at least USD30 billion even in these times of GDP growth. In the meantime, local small-scale production is choked, which will worsen with ratification of Economic Partnership Agreements with the EU.

Meanwhile, seed transnationals promote Africa's greater dependence on patented seeds, whether genetically modified or "pirated" from communal heritage. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the African Bank for Development (ABfD) are the main puppets of this harmful business conducted by these seed transnationals, such as Monsanto. One of the major stockholders is none other than the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation which, in the name of philanthropy, develops its influence on supposedly African elites, in charge of relaying its propaganda.

Profits are repatriated from Africa on a massive scale, by legal or illegal means, with the complicity of African governments. This explains the attempt by sub-regional godfather of FrançAfrique, Blaise Compaoré, to tamper with the constitution and cling to power - but for each Compaoré swept away by a popular movement, how many similar individuals are on the lookout, hoping to succeed where he failed? The autocratic and plutocratic Robert Mugabe prepares his dynastic electoral succession through his wife Grace Mugabe. Another, in Congo, does not hesitate to stir the spectre of a blood bath in case of objections to his tampering. Africa is a fertile ground for capitalist vampirism as the South Sudanese factions, under the spell of the petro dollars, prove. A further case in point is the massacre of miners in Marikana, South Africa, seemingly encouraged by a former trade union leader turned billionaire.

The current celebration of GDP growth in Africa is in fact the celebration of the on-going project

that neoliberal imperialism had concocted for Africa. It had started with the Structural Adjustment Programmes, imposed as a cure-all to the public debt crisis in which states of the so-called "Third World" found themselves - with "help" from the international financial system.

Even while entertaining economic relations with African states that differ from the imperialist tradition in Africa, these emerging powers are in no way opposed to the advancement and consolidation of global capitalism. They want to gain better positions in the hierarchical structure, including taking over positions of traditional powers, allied and rival at the same time. "south-South relations" with Africa are an asset on the road towards realising this ambition. Due to its wealth of natural resources, Africa proves to be a prerequisite destination for consolidated and emerging powers.

African capitalists, billionaires and millionaires, increasingly coming "out of the woods", certainly benefit from this growth and are by no means less criminal than the others. Meanwhile, it is not very beneficial to the African people in general and wage earners in particular. Let us not speak about the youth, affected by very high unemployment, leading to such outcomes as, for example, joining the criminal sect Boko Haram. In the CAR, with its 3 per cent growth rate preceding the political crisis, juvenile poverty divided itself along confessional lines, split between Seleka and anti-Balaka militias. Guinean societies organised alongside an actual general interest, the improvement of the lives of peoples, with their sovereign participation, would not have furthered the Ebola tragedy in Guinea, Liberia, and in Sierra Leone. The latter two cases also illustrate the meaninglessness in human terms of double digit growth rates: in Liberia: 15,7 per cent, 10,5 per cent, 13,8 per cent, 10,2 per cent, and 11,3 per cent GDP growth in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012 and in 2013; in Sierra Leone: 15,2 per cent and 20,1 per cent in 2012 and 2013. All of this without positive effect on the poor and the public health services.

A new middle class, associated with



jobs in computer sciences, finance and business is indeed emerging. Its key quality for the praise singers of neoliberal growth lies in its boundless, stupid consumerism. However, it merely constitutes a minority of the middle class, its "superior" bracket, according to the African Bank for Development. The percentage of the African population within this "superior" bracket, added to the so-called "low" bracket of the middle class, is not more significant than prior to the imposition of neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes - characterised by the freezing of wages, liquidation of enterprises, redundancies, etc. The bracket is labelled "floating" - that is to say, always in danger of falling back into poverty - still very prevalent in African societies - which constitutes the majority of the so-called "middle class".

The living standards of a big part of the middle class today, in Cape Town like in Cairo, in Accra and elsewhere,

is hit by the increase - imposed by local governments - of fuel prices, which has led to a rise of other basic commodities. Worse, this so-called increase of the middle class does not go hand in hand with the capturing of serious social data collection. It is more like pure and simple disinformation. However we can believe the African Bank for Development, and other similar types of dispensaries, when they affirm that African economic growth comes with growing inequalities and estimate that the poor still make up nearly or more than half of the African population. And thus it will be for decades to come, following this criminal socio-economic logic.

It is, however, not a fatality. It is far more necessary now than in the past, to put an end to Africa's status as a springboard to accumulate capitalist power, even if it were for the future foundation of Africa as a capitalist power. No real emancipation can derive from the exploitation, the

domination or oppression of others, part of progressing ecocide. Having to take a seat in the cockpit of that crazy vehicle driving capitalist growth should not be a requirement. Today, far more than yesterday, at the risk of being too late tomorrow, a change of mode of transport is required towards another destination than the capitalist development of African societies, which is fiercely non-egalitarian, unjust, oppressive, harbinger of wars, ecocides.

Those who are exploited, oppressed and opposed to the ecocide will unite in local and regional struggles for the emancipation of Africa, in solidarity with those facing similar struggles elsewhere. Nobody will emancipate them in their stead - certainly not the partisans of capitalism, be they from Africa or elsewhere, from the North or the South, and even if they wear the trade union mask, or that of the glorious struggles of the past.

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## **Internal Democracy and Social Division: Lessons from NUMSA's shop steward tradition for the South African labour movement**

**28 December 2014, by Sam Morecroft**

This is the term NUMSA stewards use to describe the social, economic and political divide that emerged within NUM between the shop steward network "who worked above ground in offices and were often supplied with phones and cars by the union" and the membership "who worked below ground often in dangerous environments for low wages.

As many observers have pointed out, it was this gulf between the living standards, social authority and even career prospects of organisers and

rank and file members that led to the total breakdown of relations between NUM shop stewards and members at Marikana, and thus to the wave of mass defections from NUM to AMCU throughout the platinum belt.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about this observation. Many analysts have written about the role that NUM's dysfunctional grassroots organisation played in the build up to the brutal massacre at Marikana. The fact that workers were forced to organise independently of the union through grassroots

committees shows that NUM's organisational model had totally failed its members, even before the massacre.

But the significance of NUMSA's conclusion has ramifications beyond the collapse of NUM. Indeed it tells us something significant about NUMSA's own grassroots culture and structures.

NUMSA has discussed NUM's collapse at length and throughout the union, from the factory floor right up to the national conferences. It did this not in order to heap scorn on a union with

which it had a tense and somewhat uncomradely relationship, but to develop a sense of the efficacy and culture of its own shop steward networks. It asked whether the same kind of collapse could ever occur within its own ranks and it did so to educate members about the role and responsibilities of shop stewards in the union.

From my own research within NUMSA locals, it is clear that many other COSATU unions are beginning to show signs of divisions between the members and the leaderships, but NUMSA itself continues to enjoy a high level of loyalty and pride amongst its membership towards their union.

There are clear reasons for this. The differences between NUMSA and a union such as NUM begin with the shop stewards. For a NUM miner, the appeal of becoming a shop steward is clear: it offers the chance to work above ground in an office as opposed to the dangerous conditions in the mines, to have a phone, to have a car, and perhaps to advance through the structures of the union.

In NUMSA, however, the 'worker-leader' structure (of which shop stewards are generally immensely proud) ensures that shop stewards must continue to work alongside the members they represent, for the same pay and in the same conditions as before.

For NUMSA members, becoming a shop steward is not a chance to escape difficult or unpleasant working conditions, but an opportunity to become a worker-leader and earn the respect of fellow workers. There are no material incentives for workers to become shop stewards within NUMSA, but such a role offers what may be the only good opportunity many workers are likely to have to develop themselves as individuals.

NUMSA has a long history of taking worker education very seriously and this is still the case today. From employment law and worker rights to Marxist ideology and thought, NUMSA members and worker leaders in particular receive extensive political and legal education.

If you spend time in any NUMSA local, you will find shop stewards who are just as comfortable quoting Lenin and Gramsci or discussing the role of the vanguard party, or the nature of hegemonic order, as they are in assisting members to understand the finer points of the Labour Relations Act. Given the enduring barriers to education and training that poor black workers still face in South Africa today, many see NUMSA's worker education programmes as representing their only opportunity to develop themselves as individuals.

As a result of all this, NUMSA members see being elected a shop steward as a huge mark of respect and prestige and demonstrate huge pride in being elected 'worker leaders'. Indeed, one of the things I found surprising during my research in NUMSA locals was the reaction of members who were not shop stewards when I engaged them in conversation.

Without fail, every time I posed the question 'Are you a shop steward?' to a member who was not one, they would look sad or dejected for a moment, then tell me that although they were not, they hoped to be soon. They were always at pains to point out that they were 'active' members in their local, and that they hoped to be shop stewards soon.

It was clear that by attending meetings such as shop stewards councils, which they were not required to be present at, many were attempting to prove that they were dependable and committed - that they could be trusted with the honour of representing their fellow workers.

Furthermore, the embedded culture of grassroots accountability within local NUMSA structures places intense pressure on shop stewards and local office bearers. Stewards are expected to provide regular reports on the situation in their workplaces, to attend shop stewards' councils and act as a link between the particular workplace they represent and the union.

Failure to attend shop stewards' meetings without providing a legitimate reason in writing can lead to a steward being removed from the post. Likewise, failure to provide

sufficient reports from the factory floor to shop stewards' committees that help to make local office bearers and other stewards aware of potential issues and problems, can equally be grounds for removal.

Workers' expectations of new stewards are clear; they have responsibilities and they will be held accountable. This practice goes beyond a simple bureaucratic procedure. Having had the opportunity to observe NUMSA shop stewards' councils and meetings, I can attest that stewards are subjected to serious scrutiny on all aspects of their conduct if other stewards are concerned that they are not pulling their weight or living up to their responsibilities, as a steward. If it is deemed necessary, stewards can be quickly removed from the post and new representatives elected.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, NUMSA members see themselves as having 'ownership' of their union, and control over what it does. Frequently in my observations of NUMSA meetings, workers and shop stewards would declare: 'NUMSA is not Irvin Jim or the National Office Bearers. NUMSA is all of us. We are NUMSA.' - or some variation on that theme.

In every interview I conducted, all respondents agreed that political discussions started at the factory level, before being discussed locally, regionally and nationally. NUMSA members place huge emphasis on the importance of democratic discussion from the bottom up.

This strong culture of democracy, accountability and pride in the union at the grassroots level stands in stark contrast to the clear disconnect between the union and its members in evidence within NUM in the platinum sector. Indeed it stands in strong contrast to the majority of unions in South Africa in the current period.

This is not to suggest that NUMSA represents a perfect model of how a workplace union should operate, or that it has done away with 'social divisions' entirely; far from it. It is simply not realistic to envisage a

union without ‘social divisions’ of any kind between the members and the local or national leadership.

But in the wake of NUMSA’s expulsion from COSATU and the seemingly inevitable split which will follow, the confidence NUMSA members have in their union makes it possible for the organisation to be bold, to challenge the trajectory of trade unionism in South Africa and put forward different

ideas.

It is this confidence that allowed a senior NUMSA official to tell me of MAWU (a newly registered rival union to NUMSA that has been set up by a former NUMSA leader, rumoured to be bankrolled by the SACP): ‘We are too strong on the shop floor for them to challenge us.’

It is this confidence which means that NUMSA’s membership will not be

dented by its expulsion from COSATU. And it is this confidence that means NUMSA, alone amongst COSATU’s affiliated unions, holds sufficient trust among workers to play a leading role in creating a working-class, explicitly socialist political alternative to the ANC government – should the national officer bearers of NUMSA be prepared to do so, that is.

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## Why We Can’t Breathe

### 26 December 2014, by **Against the Current**

The targeting and routine police abuse and humiliation of African-American youth, and communities of color in general, is an everyday manifestation of the deeper politics of repression and economic austerity that throw those communities onto the scrap heap. Mass incarceration, police impunity and the epidemic of killings by “law enforcement” are only the visible and inevitable products of an unfolding social disaster. And it’s also about imperialism: A system that tortures prisoners abroad will also murder people at home.

“We Can’t Breathe” is certainly about murderous police violence, but also so much more – the entire matrix of structural racism in the United States economy and its gerrymandered, voter-suppressing political system. That’s why the dying gasps of Eric Garner have become the banner of a new civil and human rights uprising, perhaps even more dramatically than “We Are the 99%” drove the Occupy movement’s spirit of protest against the financial gangsters.

In some ways, this new movement can be viewed in an international context alongside such diverse upheavals as the pro-democracy occupations in Hong Kong, indigenous peoples’ resistance to oil pipelines and the destruction of their lands and forests, the early mobilizations of the Arab Spring, the current social explosion in Mexico over the mass murder of

students by police and drug gangs, and many others – a much bigger theme that will require a separate discussion.

In the U.S. setting, this issue of *Against the Current* covers a number of topics including police violence, mass incarceration and the incredible rise in murderous white racism and Black resistance in the World War I period. It’s also important to see killings by police in Ferguson, Staten Island, Cleveland and elsewhere, and the magnificent upsurge in response, as the real-life context in which we need to examine the November 2014 midterm election results and what they may portend.

The right wing is taking over Congress, but people in the streets are moving independently of the political establishment – and in the process forcing some action from Barack Obama who, during most of his presidency, has been notoriously cautious at best in speaking out on racial injustice.

In fact, the entire pattern of the Democratic Party’s behavior in regards to the social crisis has been a sad spectacle while it had the chance to act. When the Democrats held sizeable majorities in the U.S. Congress following Barack Obama’s election in 2008, they made precious little use of them beyond passing the badly flawed Affordable Care Act.

Banksters who brought down the financial system went unpunished; millions of families facing crushing debts on their “underwater” mortgages went with little if any assistance; rhetoric of “comprehensive immigration reform” hid the reality of record mass deportations.

African-American communities devastated by the Great Recession and decades of structural racism got no help at all; teachers who poured out in support of Obama’s election were rewarded by being kicked in the teeth with “Race to the Top” and the spreading for-profit charter school plague. Any wonder “we can’t breathe”?

## Immigration, Pipeline Battles – War Too

Those initial Obama “change you can believe in” promises evaporated long ago. Finally, after the midterms, the president got around to his long-promised executive action on a partial immigration reform. It’s inadequate, cumbersome and above all late in the game – and Obama and his Republican opponents both neglect to mention the fundamental realities behind the immigration crisis.

The president’s victim-blaming phrase

“that the undocumented should be allowed to “make amends” for their illegal status” is particularly odious. Quite the contrary, it’s the United States that hasn’t made amends to the countries it’s destroyed: by the U.S.-sponsored genocidal repression and wars in Central America in the 1970 and ’80s; the insane “war on drugs” that has bred the murderous narco-syndicates of Mexico, Colombia and El Salvador while also producing mass incarceration in U.S. communities; and topping it off, those much-praised bipartisan “free trade agreements” wiping out family farmers in Mexico. They can’t breathe!

Still, Obama’s promised deferral of deportation for perhaps four or five million longterm undocumented immigrants with U.S. citizen children (perhaps 40% of the undocumented population in this country) is enough to stir the pot of vicious racism that’s the main political asset of today’s Republican right wing. As the Republicans take over Congress, Obama’s immigration action will be one of the looming battles.

That president Obama has taken any action on immigration, and promised at least to do something about police militarization and brutality, is testament to the bravery, determination and independent struggles of the communities affected and especially of young people. On immigration as in the atrocities in Ferguson and Staten Island, it’s street heat, not the two-party electoral cesspool, that’s the driving force for change.

The other two flash points are the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline “a leading symbol of the environmental forced death march on which capitalism is driving the planet” and interlocking crises and wars in the Middle East. After repeatedly kicking the Keystone XL decision down the road until after the midterms, president Obama is now caught in a political tar sands trap of his own making, with a chunk of his own party ready to oppose him. (“Repealing Obamacare” will remain a rightwing slogan, but no longer a real legislative objective given that the private health insurance industry is now reaping big

profits from it.)

## Grand Theft Election 2016?

The Democrats took an electoral butt-kicking, and they’ve earned it. While the Democrats moved to the corporate center, the Republicans galloped to the right, openly proclaiming their intention to wreck the Obama presidency. Although receiving a slim 52% majority of the votes in the midterm House of Representatives elections, the Republicans will now solidly control both houses.

What’s more important, the GOP is essentially guaranteed control of the House in 2016 and probably beyond, with “sure winners in 373 districts, leaving only 14 percent of the House even potentially in play.” Thanks to gerrymandered districts drawn up by state legislatures following the 2010 elections, the Republicans were able to take control of the House in 2012 with only 48% of the overall votes, and would have maintained their majority in 2014 with as little as 45%. [1]

Despite the reactionary state of U.S. bourgeois party politics, there are indications that the popular mood, when able to express itself, is not swinging rightward. In New York state the Green Party gubernatorial ticket of Howie Hawkins and Brian Jones drew a more than respectable 4.8% vote “in the process, outrunning the Working Families Party which put the wretched incumbent Andrew Cuomo on its ballot line.

In Wisconsin, the independent socialist candidate for Milwaukee County sheriff, bus driver and union activist Angela Walker, drew a very impressive 20% of the vote. [2] In the embattled California town of Richmond, a three or four-million dollar smear campaign by Chevron Corporation to retake control of the mayor’s office and City Council was beaten back by the activist energy and acumen of the Richmond Progressive Alliance. [3]

We don’t claim that there’s some kind of invisible mass swing toward the left; indeed, the hollow results of

Obama’s promises have produced widespread cynicism about the possibilities of positive change. But it’s not that the people of the United States are voting for the politics of racism, war and global warming denial; it’s primarily the matrix of the two capitalist parties and mountains of billionaire-driven political campaign cash that can make it look that way.

Meanwhile, not content with the rigging of the House of Representatives, and the whole raft of voter suppression laws that have already disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of mostly poor and disproportionately people of color, rightwing Republicans are playing around with an exciting new game of “Grand Theft Election.”

There isn’t space to detail the scheme here, but as the nasty, brutish and long 2016 electoral cycle already looms, it’s being proposed first in the state legislature in Michigan, a state that tends to vote Democratic in presidential elections. Republicans currently control its state government, and are proposing that Michigan’s 16 electoral votes should be divided proportionally in presidential elections. The obvious purpose of the scheme, if spread to enough such states, is to steal a close presidential election “inasmuch as no Republican state legislature is going to suggest such a scheme in states that vote Republican.

Certainly, the Electoral College should be abolished and presidential elections decided by the straight-up popular vote. (Mainly, it’s basically impossible to steal a national election that way, as the 2000 election was stolen in Florida for George W. Bush with such ruinous results for America and the world.) But that’s hardly the right wing’s intent here.

## Can We Breathe?

The fireworks between Capitol Hill and the White House, and the internal battles within each capitalist party, shouldn’t distract us from a basic reality of how positive change happens. There are real-life examples of movements winning gains by organizing and fighting independently.



That's the example now being set by the eruption against murderous police, and by the Dreamers who stood up "undocumented and unafraid," marched and sat in at Obama campaign offices, and ultimately forced this administration to quit stalling and do something "late and insufficient as it is."

Also, as we've noted on previous occasions, the LGBT movement has made real gains "under Republican as well as Democratic administrations" at least in the civil rights arenas of anti-discrimination and marriage equality. Enormous unfinished struggles remain, particular for transgender and marginalized Queer people outside the economic "mainstream," but it's remarkable how overt gay-bashing has faded as a vote-winning strategy in such a short time.

Struggles around a living wage have swept through states and cities "four localities voted for raising minimum wages in November" and are challenging corporate giants like Walmart and the fast-food industry. The Occupy movement put rampant inequality on the political agenda, and despite the repression of that upsurge, the Fight for 15, anti-foreclosure housing campaigns and other local efforts have kept it there.

We also note that while some mainstream environmental organizations are stuffed with corporate and foundation cash and have trimmed their programs and policies accordingly, there's a powerful grassroots pushback against not just the Keystone XL pipeline but the whole ecocidal tar sands drilling

project, encouraged and inspired by Native communities and activist resistance in Canada.

Anger over shale oil and natural gas fracking is deepening, as shown by the vote in Denton, Texas to ban it "although it's alarmingly true that fracking is expanding, globally as well as in the United States, more rapidly than the movement has been able to contain it."

In the halls of power, "We Can't Breathe" where the cards are stacked and the votes are rigged. As always and now more than ever, from Ferguson to the fracking fields it's the movements that hold the progressive energy and our hope for survival.

*Against The Current 174, January/February 2015.*

## Cuba: a victory and some risks

24 December 2014, by **Fourth International Bureau**

When the Soviet bloc collapsed in the 1990s under the blows of the pressures of imperialism, its internal contradictions and the bureaucracy who were playing an active role in capitalist restoration, many observers predicted the fall of the Cuban regime. And it is true that the island, dependent on Soviet aid, would go through an unprecedented crisis, the Cuban economy would be drained, in what the Cubans called the "special period". The economy, within certain limits, took a decade to rebuild (with the participation of the state but also with European capital in the tourism sector and later with the help of Venezuelan oil) but without overcoming a series of structural problems compounded by the US embargo, strengthened by the Helms-Burton act. The bureaucratization of the regime, the stifling of democratic freedoms, and the effects on popular mobilization have weighed on the situation of the island. Alongside the interventions, now, of Raul's daughter Mariela Castro, the restrictions on the

autonomous self-organization of women, LGBTI persons and other oppressed groups should also be noted.

But, despite these problems, US imperialism was unable to break this revolution: one cannot understand this resistance without taking into account the anti-imperialist, national, popular dynamic, of a socialist character, of the revolution of 1959. Let us remember that the Cuban revolution overthrew the possessing classes of the period. If the regime has held on, it is because it was the expression of this great Cuban dignity, of this profound aspiration to national and popular sovereignty of this people, of this formidable refusal of a return to the situation preceding the revolution, which had seen Cuba become the "brothel" of the United States of America. The Cuban resistance would not have had this strength without the initial conquests of the revolution, and a series of social gains, especially when compared to other countries of

Latin America, in particular at the level of health and education. This dignity is also expressed in one of the facets of the international policy of the Cuban leadership: support for revolutionary attempts in Latin America in the 1960s, the struggle of Che Guevara, or the support in Angola to those who were opposed to the regime of apartheid South Africa. There was also, unfortunately the support for the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, in August 1968. But internationalism has always been a fundamental value of education in Cuba. Today, it is still being reflected by the sending of doctors around the world, Venezuela in particular, but also in Africa where the humanitarian work of Cuban doctors and volunteers is recognized globally in combating the Ebola virus. Cuba is also an example in the choice of a sustainable development, according to environmental organizations which relate human development to the calculation of consumption of energy and resources.

This resistance has been strong enough to stand up to the politico-military confrontation with US imperialism, but not enough to resist the pressures of the capitalist world market. Once more, it is tragically confirmed that we cannot build "socialism in one country". This pressure has penalized and distorted an economy which is insufficiently diversified - tourism, monoculture of sugar, exploitation of nickel - and too dependent on imports, notably basic needs products. The introduction of market mechanisms in the Cuban economy has been encouraged with the "cuentapropista" (self-employed) economy but also the layoffs of those employed in the public sector, including in the sugar enterprises. It has strengthened and crystallized inequalities between a dominant layer of the state apparatus linked to the military hierarchy often in business with big capitalist companies and multinationals, also those who have access to the dollar (a privilege of those who have relatives abroad or work in the tourism or biotechnology industries) and the vast majority of the Cuban people. These inequalities and the strengthening of this dominant layer could constitute the foundations of an evolution of the Vietnamese or Chinese type - a state capitalism and an authoritarian bureaucratic Communist Party regime - with specific characteristics. Except that Cuba is not Vietnam, and still less China. It is difficult to see how this type of system could ensure the national independence of Cuba. Located 150 kilometres from the USA, under the pressure of United States imperialism and the Cuban-American bourgeoisie in Miami, Cuba can only resist through social mobilization and the resumption of the revolutionary project. During the past few years, the Cuban leadership has been able, in the face of these contradictions, to rely on aid from Venezuela, in particular through the delivery of tons of oil at prices defying all competition, but

today, the difficulties of Maduro and the post-Chavez regime mean it is not possible to help Cuba as it did during the last decade, hence an anticipated worsening of the economic situation, and the importance of loosening the grip of the US blockade.

Once again, this resumption of diplomatic relations between the USA and Cuba is a good thing for the Cuban people. But this is only a beginning, the embargo is still not lifted, and we must continue the mobilization and international pressure for this to happen.

But, even in the case of the implementation of the Obama strategy, we should not be duped. US imperialism has not changed its goals. If the strategy of political-military confrontation has failed, it will try another strategy to bring Cuba back into its zone of influence: that of "bombarding" Cuba with US goods and capital. It is already, leaving aside US government policy, the choice of important sectors of US capitalism, particularly in agro-industry, tourism, telecommunications, new technologies, and airlines. And Cuban resistance to this new strategy could be more difficult than to that which has been deployed in recent years.

Indeed, state control of these new trade relations is essential for controlling the corrosive effects of economic flows and financial capitalists. The situation is already worrying with the installation of a free trade zone in the region of the port of Mariel and the new law on foreign investment (which guarantees eight years of tax exemption to attract new businesses). This control must be accompanied by active popular intervention, especially since sectors of the Cuban bureaucracy can make arrangements with and take advantage of these economic changes. This is now the key question.

The broadening of the capitalist market in Cuba is heavy with dangers: the development of casualization, of inequality, challenges to national sovereignty, the end of sustainable development, among others. In addition, US imperialism will certainly attempt to obtain concessions from the Cuban regime (like, for example, "freedom" of commerce) in exchange for the lifting of the blockade.

To combat these dangers, there is no other way than mobilization and popular control, the control and management of enterprises by the workers and their representatives.

The traditions of social struggles and national liberation, like the existence of supporters of social self-management renewing links with the history and libertarian fibre of the Cuban revolution can constitute, even if these currents are a minority, an asset for the Cuban people. The positions and experiences of these currents, which have some relays within the Cuban Communist Party, should be made known. Once again: there is no other way, to build on the current victory while protecting the population from the social effects of a US capitalist pressure, than to promote the mobilization of the people and the constitution of a genuine socialist democracy. To do this it is necessary to create the conditions of democratic debate in all the popular organizations in Cuba. This requires the organization of forms of pluralism in the Cuban Communist Party and in the popular movement.

It is an extraordinarily difficult challenge in the current relationship of forces between globalized capitalism and the popular movement at the world level, but the Cuban revolution has held out for more than fifty years against US imperialism: could it not, once again, find an original way out of this situation?

*23 December 2014*

## **"Arab Spring has now turned into a winter"**

## 24 December 2014, by **Gilbert Achcar**

**Since the 2010-11 uprisings, except in Tunisia, the model of liberal democracy has not taken off in MENA (Middle East, North African) countries. Is there still hope or do you even see liberal "electoral" democracy as an answer to the ongoing crisis in the region? We saw, for instance, how despite elections in June this year the dictator Bashar al-Assad of the Ba'ath Party remained in power in Syria.....**

The question of democracy in the MENA region cannot be reduced to one of liberal democracy as it presently prevails in the West. Even if you take liberalism in the political meaning alone, Arab countries are far from implementing it, and this applies to Tunisia too where a formally democratic government is now in place. The MENA region is suffering from a very deep social and economic crisis, which is at the root of the general turmoil and upheaval. In order to solve the ongoing crisis, there must be a shift away from the neoliberal socio-economic model in the region, which led to the crisis. The real stumbling block is the combination of a heavily repressive and corrupt "deep state" with crony capitalism of the worst type. This combination has not been dismantled in any of the region's states, including Tunisia. In Syria, where the Ba'ath dictatorship is entrenched in power since half a century, the elections lacked any democratic legitimacy. To achieve real democratisation, what is needed is a radical dismantling of the "deep state" that continues to uphold the existing social-political order in the region.

**The initial wave of hope for liberating the Arab peoples from the autocratic regimes seems to have been dashed. When the movement started in 2010 there was a great deal of euphoria, not anymore. Where is the movement headed in your analysis?**

The euphoria, when the movement began, was based on illusions, but was

justified by the fact that the peoples of the region started to come out massively on the streets wanting to impose their will.

However, the fact that they got onto the streets was not enough in itself to achieve the outcomes to which they aspired. We had a tremendous massive popular uprising in the MENA region, but with only weak and/or disoriented progressive forces. Even in a country like Tunisia where there is a strong progressive organisation in the form of a trade union movement dominated by the left, the latter suffers from a lack of appropriate strategy. They fell into the trap of the bipolarity between two equally reactionary forces - the old regimes on the one hand, and the Islamic fundamentalist opposition forces on the other.

The progressive forces have been shifting alliance from one to another of these two counter-revolutionary poles. Currently it is the infighting between the two reactionary poles that is dominant in countries like Syria, Yemen, Libya, and to a certain extent in Egypt as well. This is the key reason why the whole momentum of the initial movement has been lost. Fanatical Islamic fundamentalist forces have grown all over the region, the most spectacular being the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" and caliphate. What should have been clear from the start has become obvious now: radical regime change can only be violent due to the utmost brutality of the old regime. But to conclude that the old regime has won would also be very short-sighted. MENA countries hold world record rates of unemployment. Until this crucial issue is solved, the upheaval will continue. I have been saying this since 2011. It is why I have maintained that what started then is not a "Spring", which denotes a season, but a long-term revolutionary process that will carry on for several years and decades before the region reaches lasting stability.

**In your work you classify Arab**

**countries as rentier states, as they derive most of their revenues from oil and gas. The recent crash in prices of oil worldwide has hurt the economies of these countries. What kind of socio-economic transformation is necessary to resolve the ongoing crisis in the region?**

Indeed, the MENA region has been very much dependent on oil and gas exports, the prices for which are fixed by the world market. These are extremely volatile prices. Hence the countries in the region face the risk of sharp economic ups and downs. However, not all MENA countries are similarly affected: some of them are oil importers; others are small producers and others massive exporters. But oil dominates the regional economy overall. A major aspect of the radical change necessary in the region, therefore, is diversification of the economies - developing a real industrial base and reducing the dependency on crude oil and gas exports. The region does not lack natural resources, capital and labour. However, much of the natural resources and the capital accumulated from their export are under Western control. All major oil exporters of the region - the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council that comprises the richest Arab States - depend on the U.S. for their very existence and security. The Saudi kingdom is actually behind the fall in oil prices and they are doing that at their own cost for strategic reasons benefitting the U.S. The bulk of Saudi money abroad is invested in U.S. treasury bonds and U.S. banks. All this is pure loss for the whole region. Western imperialism has created the regional system of Gulf monarchies in order to guarantee its exploitation of their resources, and this may remain the case until the last drop of oil has been sucked out of the region. Another aspect of the radical change that is necessary if the region is to come out of its disastrous condition is to realise the dream of a leader like Egypt's former president Gamal Abdel Nasser



who wanted to unify the Arab countries in a federal republic or a union of republics. You have there a group of countries, which speak the same language and share the same culture, but are split, into two dozen states to serve the interest of erstwhile imperial forces that are keen on perpetuating this division. This is at a time when Europe, with its much higher diversity of cultures, has been building its own union.

**Are you supportive of Western intervention in Arab countries, like Syria, that are fraught with civil strife? In your book you haven't taken a categorical position on this...**

Western imperialism is a major part of the problem of the MENA region, and definitely not part of the solution. However, this does not lead me to a knee-jerk attitude, opposing any form of intervention under any circumstance. When you have circumstances such as one in which a whole city or a population are threatened with a large-scale massacre – as was the case in Benghazi in Libya or in the city of Kobane in the Syrian part of Kurdistan – and the danger is imminent, in the absence of an alternative, you cannot oppose military strikes from the air inasmuch as they contribute to removing the direct threat. But as soon as this imminent threat is removed then the continuation of this direct Western intervention should be opposed. The U.S., which leads such interventions, always tries to co-opt ongoing processes steering them to its own interests. This is why I oppose direct Western military intervention in general. However, I do support the demand for arms deliveries made by the Libyan uprising in 2011 or the Syrian democratic opposition since 2012, or the Kurdish left-wing forces in 2014. They need weapons in order to fight back forces that are much more heavily armed than themselves. However, the U.S., whether in Libya in 2011 or Syria since then, refuses to provide the democratic oppositions with the defensive arms that they require. This leads me to consider that

the U.S. has a big share of responsibility in the huge massacre inflicted on the Syrian people and in the destruction of their country. Had the Syrian opposition received the defensive weapons it has been requesting from the start, anti-aircraft weapons in particular, the Syrian regime would not have been able to use its air force, with which it perpetrated most of the destruction and killing caused in the course of the civil war there.

**The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) had significantly benefitted from the Arab Spring uprisings, winning elections in Tunisia and Egypt and playing a major role in the uprisings in Syria, Libya and Yemen. But with the fall of Mohamed Morsi's government in Egypt last year, its prospects appear to be doomed. Can we conclude then that Islamic fundamentalism cannot be the answer to the demands of the masses in these countries? I ask this because the whole Arab Spring and its aftermath has been analysed primarily through the lens of Islamic movements, which is driving Western discourse on intervention in these countries ...**

Not only is Islamic fundamentalism not the answer, but Islam itself is not the answer – nor is it the problem. The 2011 uprising is not an uprising about religion. It is a culmination of the socio-economic crisis and political oppression that exist in the region. The failure of the MB is above all due to their lack of economic and social policy different from what was pursued by the old regimes. In Tunisia and Egypt they failed in solving the social crises. What we are actually witnessing right now is the decline of the MB accompanied by the rise of fundamentalist forces that are much worse – Al-Qaeda and IS. The lack of progressive leadership is the key reason why various forces of Islamic fundamentalism are able to cash in on the popular anger in the region. In order to understand this historically, one just needs to look back at the

surge of fundamentalism that started in 1970s. In most Muslim-majority countries, Islamic fundamentalism had been marginalised in the 1960s when left-wing nationalism was on the rise, as represented above all by Nasser. It is only when this went into decline starting from the 1970s that we saw the beginning of the rise of Islamic fundamentalist forces.

**During the Arab Spring the role of the media in the uprising and that of the social media in aiding the organisation of the movement on the ground was emphasised. Four years on, do you think it still has a role to play in influencing the movement's organisation and outcomes?**

The role played by the modern media and social media cannot be reversed, of course. There has been a deep change in the overall technological environment of humanity. Satellite television played a major role in the recent upheaval, and it is still playing an important role, albeit diminished from its peak in 2011. On the other hand, the role of social media keeps increasing. When the Arab uprising in 2011 was called a “Facebook Revolution”, this was an exaggeration, to be sure, but not one without a grain of truth. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, all these media, have become major tools for spreading messages and videos, across the political spectrum from progressive forces to forces on the far right, such as IS that uses the Internet intensively.

**Your advice to progressive forces aiming for a successful revolution?**

Progressive forces need to be bold enough to dare to struggle and dare to win. If radical change does not come through them, we will only get what I called a “clash of barbarisms”. Syria is the clearest example of this presently with the Syrian regime on one hand, and IS and Al-Qaeda on the other. But the uprising is not over yet. The Arab “spring” has now turned into a “winter”, but there will be more seasons to come.

*The Hindu, 23 December 2014.*



# Resistance on the rise in Italy but political crisis on the left remains.

22 December 2014, by **Franco Turigliatto**

## **How important was the general strike called by the CGIL and UIL trade unions on 12th December?**

After years of total passivity from the big trade unions faced with the austerity policies of the last three pro-boss governments (Berlusconi, Monti and Letta) they finally called a general strike against the policies of the current Renzi (PD - Democratic Party) government. He is in alliance with the so-called New Centre Right of Alfano and a centrist party. In reality he also benefits from the decisive support of Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy) party even if it is not formally part of the government. Despite the demagogic propaganda of Renzi it is a government of the bosses aligned on the policies of the European troika. The strike was called by the biggest union, the CGIL, and the UIL, both of whose leaders are card-carrying members of the PD. It was a clear success with massive demonstrations in 54 towns (40,000 in Milan and Turin and 20,000 in Rome and Naples). The other big trade union, the CISL is very pro-government and did not join in the strike. The strike took place after two months of mobilisations. It began with the struggle around defending jobs, particularly in the engineering industry. Then there was the big national demonstration in Rome on the 25th of October with hundreds of thousands taking part. Finally there was the strike in the northern region led by the FIOM on the 14th November with a very strong anti-government demonstration in Milan. A "social strike" took place on the same day called by the rank and file trade unions, the social movements, precarious workers and students. Demos were held in many towns. What forced the CGIL and UIL to call the strike is this context of struggle and confrontation with a government that

is directly attacking the rights of workers and indeed the existence of the trade union apparatuses.

## **How are the government and the bosses attacking workers wages and conditions?**

At the heart of the attacks is a new labour law called the Jobs Act which completely destroys the rights of workers in the workplaces. These rights had been enshrined in the 1970 Labour code, a conquest of the great post 1969 wave of struggles in Italy. The new law gives the bosses a free rein to hire and fire at will and to bully workers, to reclassify their status in order to exploit them more. At the same time there is the new budget which has two aspects: a big giveaway to the bosses with a sharp reduction in taxes on companies and new cuts in social spending by the state, regions and local councils. Furthermore there is a process of privatisation of state schools underway and finally there is a new decree law "Unblock Italy" which unleashes property speculation and environmental destruction.

## **What are the consequences of the general strike on politics and the recomposition of the workers movement?**

The fundamental question is whether this movement will continue after the 12th and really challenge the government's policies. After years of passivity something has changed but the path to the recomposition of the organised workers movement into a combative force is still very difficult. So we are still a long way from rebuilding a unity between the different movements and between the generations. This process is even more necessary, not just to stand up to the action of the capitalists who want a defeated and fragmented society but

also to push back the increasingly threatening presence of the Lega Nord (the Northern League) of Salvini, who has made a nationalist turn and is now in full agreement with the French Front National and is linking up with the far right. Given the social degradation today it hopes to develop a racist, reactionary and anti-democratic project.

## **What has been the role of the political parties, the trade unions and the social movements?**

The official mainstream parties of both right and left, which have governed together over the last few years, are all managers of austerity. The left forces are weak and divided even if there are attempts to unify and recompose the left around the Tsipras slate which at the European elections had won 4% of the vote. At the moment this project looks difficult partly because the main force, Vendola's SEL (Left, Ecology and Liberty), still looks for unity with the PD. What is left of Rifondazione is still very weak and suffers from internal divisions. Furthermore a big part of this left is still very dependent on, or tied in to, the CGIL or the left wing of the FIOM leadership.

The bureaucratic leadership of the CGIL is largely responsible for having acquiesced to neo-liberal economic policies for years. Today it has been obliged to take the initiative but it is difficult to envisage it building an overall movement capable of responding to the present bosses' offensive. It can also be seen in the way its main objective is to ensure it has a seat at the negotiating table, to play a mediating role with the government while safeguarding its apparatus and credibility among working people by reaching compromises that could limit the

extent of the damage to workers' interests. This approach is also evident in the platform of demands it put forward on the 12th of December which was very general and did not call for the clear withdrawal of all the government proposals. Our organisation, Sinistra Anti-capitalista is doing all it can to raise the question of continuing the struggle on a clear radical basis and bringing together the workers movement and the social movements.

### **Are there any class struggle currents being organised in the trade unions or anywhere else?**

A small but significant left activist current called 'A trade union is something else' emerged at the last CGIL congress. It is present in all CGIL industrial sectors but particularly strong among engineering or metal workers. On the other hand there are the various rank and file

trade unions which can organise actions and mobilisations which are politically important but have a limited impact. There have been attempts to set up unitary initiatives between these different forces, for example on the 14th November but there is still a predominantly sectarian attitude so these rank and file unions made a big mistake in not supporting the 12th December strike. They cut themselves off from the broad mass of working people on this crucial day. It is difficult to challenge the positions of the majority trade union apparatuses with this type of approach.

### **What has happened with Beppe Grillo and his movement?**

The Five Star movement (M5S) is the main parliamentary opposition. It leads significant democratic battles within the institutions, including against the Jobs Act. Today it is having problems even it still retains

significant electoral support. In addition to the corporate type of political leadership organised by its two chief executives, the M5S is a movement that does not really intervene in the trade union or social struggles. It just does not relate to that reality. Many of its voters join in the social movements and were certainly in the demonstrations of the 12th but the party/movement as such, because of its political and class character (not right or left) and its strategy, is not capable of being an active protagonist in building a social mobilisation or movements in the working class. Rebuilding the workers movement is clearly not its problem. On the contrary its electoral success comes from a combination of people's rage and passivity. Rebuilding the workers and social movements is more than ever the task of the class struggle left.

*Translation D. Kellaway*

## **From Ferguson to CIA Torture Cells**

### **22 December 2014, by Solidarity Steering Committee**

From Ferguson to CIA Torture Cells  
from the Political Committee of  
Solidarity  
December 17, 2014

- Dehumanization. In order to subject someone to waterboarding, sleep deprivation, freezing, or stretching until their tendons rip and bones break, the torturer has to regard the prisoner as both subhuman and dangerous, inherently unworthy of life. To gun down or choke to death unarmed people on the pretext that they might have sold loose cigarettes or shoplifted a box of cigars, or a kid holding a toy gun, the police must regard those people and their communities as collectively and individually criminal, "animal-like" as officer Darren Wilson described Michael Brown, and too dangerous to come under the protection of human rights and due process.

- Routinization. Torture of "terrorism

suspects," we're told, began with CIA and U.S. government panic in the wake of the intelligence failure to detect the 9/11 attacks. It became a commonplace, institutional routine in the following years, even when it produced no authentic information. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, night raids by "coalition" troops on villages and homes were standard practice, with huge civilian deaths.

- In Black and Latino communities, institutional practices like stop-and-frisk in New York, or the regular practice of driving-while-Black and walking-while-Black arrests to fund Ferguson and other St. Louis County municipalities, or grabbing immigrant parents dropping off their kids at school, become standard daily routines of policing. It's a permanent "low-intensity conflict" from which daily abuse escalates all the way to confrontations and deadly force.

- Control. The purpose of torture, as its expert practitioners testify, is to achieve complete subservience of the subject - to the point where a detainee would voluntarily walk to the waterboarding table when the torturer snapped his fingers. In today's America, police instruct Black community meetings that in how young people should comply with orders so not to be blown away - which of course normalizes and further emboldens police provocative behavior, deepens resentment and increases the likelihood of confrontations turning explosive and lethal.

- Impunity. There is never prosecution for police who murder unarmed Black civilians, just as there is always political protection for the CIA and military torturers and the higher-ups who gave them the orders. This, unfortunately, is so consistent that the

agents of the state who carry out these practices can take it for granted that they will face no consequences.

## Intimate Connections

But the connections between torture, drone strikes, and civilian killings abroad and murderous police brutality at home go beyond these important commonalities. Military adventures in the service of imperialism produce a militarized apparatus of control at home, which functions on several levels.

First, there is the consequence of wasted resources. Communities of color are criminalized because they're impoverished, starved of services and education, and have much of their youth thrown on the scrap heap of

structural unemployment. In no small part, that's because hundreds of billions of dollars every year go to feed the military machine at the expense of urgent human needs. All kinds of "surplus" military hardware get funneled into U.S. police departments in the same communities that lack funding for jobs and education that they desperately require.

Second, the realities of war need to be kept hidden from an increasingly skeptical public. Keeping secrets requires constant monitoring and surveillance of opposition and "subversion," whether imagined or real. Communities where opposition tends to be strongest and perceived as "dangerous" are of course those of people of color and immigrants—including in the present wars, of course, Arab and Muslim communities. And the methods of

infiltration, intimidation, and repression deployed against one "unruly" sector of the population naturally spread.

Much of the repression and abuse occurs under the radar screen of mainstream media and white society, which largely feels unaffected until the events in Ferguson and Staten Island, or the torture revelations, explode into the headlines. Why that takes so long would take us into a lengthy discussion of both class and white supremacy. Suffice it here to say that breaking the curtains of silence on America's social disaster at home and imperial crimes abroad, their intimate connections and the surprisingly short road from one to the other, is an essential step in getting our society to face its real condition.

*Statement by the [Solidarity Political Committee](#), 17 December 2014.*

## The battles of Kobane, Aleppo and the relearning of solidarity

**19 December 2014, by Pierre Rousset**

However, clearly, solidarity is not just about denouncing one's own imperialism: it must also respond to the concrete needs (political, humanitarian and material) of the peoples and movements whose struggle we support. This often raises no particular problem, as with the defence of activists sentenced to iniquitous sentences by special courts - yet we still have to do it! But in many other cases, to be effective, we must learn from the conditions in which these struggles are waged, which has nothing obvious about it.

Internationalism has a history; its modalities are, in particular, deeply affected by capitalist globalisation, the character, now global, of the ecological crisis, the geopolitical upheavals underway, the crisis of the labour movement and the loss of legitimacy of socialist references. All

areas of solidarity are affected by these radical changes; much has already been written on the subject and I will not return on this. I would like to focus here on specific questions raised by support for resistance and popular armed struggles.

This is, of course, not about posing as a military expert, but learning to acquire a minimum "political intelligence" in this field of struggle. In the 1960s-70s, we thus worked on the question of revolutionary war, prolonged people's war and urban guerrilla warfare, attempting to assimilate the lessons of the armed struggles of the time and the guidelines implemented by the leading organizations (to name some of the most well known authors expressing these experiences: Trotsky, Mao, Giap, Che, the Tupamaros and so on).

I am not trying to present here a balance sheet of these "years of fire", but to compare the past to the present as to the role of solidarity, particularly taking into account the radical changes of geopolitical framework. Having been involved in the Vietnam mobilisations before 1968, and then in the foundation (1969) and leadership of the Indochina Solidarity Front, and then having been engaged in many organizations of solidarity with countries such as Thailand or the Philippines, I refer primarily to the Asian experiences.

Armed movements of the left and/or oppressed peoples have never disappeared from the Asian map (India, Philippines, Burma, Southern Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka and so on), even if in most cases the initial socio-political dynamism of "persistent" armed struggles is exhausted, and

some of these movements have disarmed or have been placed in a specifically defensive position (self-defence) - and a few other have degenerated. Let us recall that the Nepalese revolution (the temporary conquest of government by a "classical" armed organization via mass action and the electoral process) is recent - it dates from 2006. But in most regions of the world, armed struggles have ended with a few exceptions (Colombia and so on) or have been replaced by the militarization and the ethnicization of conflicts (which I am not dealing here). In addition, the end of the "years of fire" has often been traumatic (including for us with, in particular, the military crushing of our small Argentine organization, and of the PRT).

Let us say that for a large part of the radical international left, reflection on the conditions of armed struggle or resistance has been interrupted. Thus, we have not studied under this angle the new experiences, particularly in the Arab world after 2011 - and the discussions on the tasks of solidarity.

## The acquisition of arms: yesterday and today

The question of the disarmament of the bourgeoisie is obviously key to a revolutionary point of view. It has as a general rule the corollary of the arming of the people.

In some cases, the revolutionary forces had from the outset arms and a significant military know-how: in Russia (1917) with the decomposition of the Tsarist army defeated on the battlefields of the First World War; in China (1927) with the uprising of bodies of the national army who joined the popular insurrections and contributed to the foundation of the Red Army. In many other cases, it was different: weapons and experience were gained gradually, in the course of a general process of "accumulation of forces" (including social roots and a geographical extension).

Outside the rallying of existing armed

forces to the revolution, there are roughly four ways to obtain weapons:

- Taking them from the enemy during military operations (or even buying them from soldiers or officers of the government army).
- Producing them in clandestine industrial workshops, if possible in areas protected from enemy intervention.

These first two points form the foundation of the process of arming of a "classic" popular armed struggle. They are independent sources of arms, of "self-arming", in relation to the strengthening of the social implantation and geographical extension of the movement - all very important things, because the politico-military capacity of a revolutionary organization does not depend primarily on its fire-power, but its roots.

However, this type of process is necessarily relatively slow and rarely allows obtaining arms of high power in numbers. Hence the recourse:

- To smuggling, which is very expensive and is not without danger, because this puts the organization in contact with circles where the agents of multiple secret services operate;
- To more or less "friendly" governments, who often have their own objectives and who use the aid as a means of pressure. At the time, it was Russia, China, North Korea, Libya and Cuba.

To do this, the movements leading progressive armed struggles have rarely publicly called for international solidarity. The contacts established with governments were generally discreet. Material solidarity campaigns mainly concerned financial aid (that the movements could use as they wished) or medical aid (shipments of medical equipment, trips by doctors to guerrilla areas and so on). But we have intervened directly on the question of arms. Here are two examples:

- During the Algerian war of liberation, members of the Fourth International created a clandestine factory manufacturing weapons (mortars, grenades, rifles and so on)

intended for the FLN. There were skilled workers selected for their know-how from several continents.

- Faced with the US military escalation in Indochina, we demanded that Moscow provide Hanoi with the missiles that would have allowed protection of the skies of North Vietnam - particularly from the devastating B52 bombers. These top of the range arms never arrived, but the Vietnamese Communist Party was able to organise air defences by adapting to this end the principles of people's war (Giap) and making the best use of weapons provided by the Soviet Union or China.

Let us note that we did not look to Moscow because we considered that this regime was in any way "revolutionary". We characterised it as counter-revolutionary on the internal level (the bureaucratic counter-revolution) and, in large part, in its international policy (at the time of "peaceful coexistence"). But, from a geopolitical point of view, two lines of confrontation cohabited: between revolution and counter-revolution, with Vietnam as nodal point; between "Eastern and Western blocs" (to which was added the Sino-Soviet inter-bureaucratic conflict).

Moscow and Beijing had dealt a very hard blow to the liberation struggle of the Vietnamese in 1954, when they forced the VCP to accept the Geneva agreements which carried the germ of a new war - the most deadly and the most total of wars - this time directly led by Washington.

However, we can say that Moscow and Beijing have both much helped and much betrayed the Vietnamese revolution - and we, with the solidarity movement, played as much as we were able to on this contradictory relationship.

The geopolitics of today are quite different. Russia and China are capitalist powers. Moscow supports militarily regimes like that of Assad and it would be absurd to ask it to supply arms to the Syrian popular rebellion (as it would have been absurd to ask for Paris or Washington to aid the Vietnamese revolutionaries!). Does this mean that peoples who resist and practice armed



struggle (and therefore solidarity movements) can no longer play on any contradictions among the powers?

In addition, today, in the Iraq-Syria theatre of operations, multiple external actors have intervened, often heavily armed, with fundamentalist movements supported by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others in a regional geopolitics pushing towards the destructive confessionalisation of conflicts. It is a rather peculiar situation. What could the implications be on the question of arms?

To address these two questions, it seems to me necessary to return to the battles of Kobane and Aleppo - inasmuch as I understand a little about what is happening in a country where I do not have direct links.

## Kobane

. Is the battle of Kobane decisive? In many cases, the loss of an urban centre can be costly, but without serious consequences in the course of a revolutionary war. A classic example: during the Sino-Japanese conflict, the counter-revolutionary forces of Chiang Kai-shek took Yan'an, the "red capital" of the Communist Party. The symbol was strong, but this only affected the local conditions of the struggle. The Red Army redeployed a significant portion of its units in the north-east of the country, behind the Japanese lines and immune to the White armies of Chiang - where the CCP created liberated areas of a scope and strategic importance far superior to that of their initial "base" in Yan'an.

The same is not true of Kobane. Beyond the symbol, itself very strong, the stakes in this battle are very large from the point of view of Syrian Kurdistan. On a small territory on the hostile Turkish border, Kurdish forces do not have the space to redeploy whereas in addition, Islamic State is massacring, and deporting people (including women intended for its combatants) leading to a mass exodus. In these conditions, the loss of Kobane endangers all of Syrian Kurdistan and the social transformations underway.

The battle of Kobane must then be

won, while Islamic State has mobilized very significant resources to take it, because, from their point of view also, the issues at stake are very significant: the conquest of this city would allow control in a continuous manner of a long portion of the Turkish border.

Given the relationship of military forces, the Kurds can only win the battle of Kobane under three conditions:

- A great capacity of resistance of the PYD forces in Kobane, without which nothing is possible.
- Supplies of arms to attack the armoured vehicles of Islamic State.
- The bombardment of IS military columns to prevent them reaching Kobane, operating freely in the city or bringing in reinforcements as needed.

I am not laying any "line" down here. It is a factual observation - right or wrong - but that in no way depends on a political "viewpoint". An observation, however, that we must take into account in solidarity, if we are not to deny reality.

Second observation: the Kurdish resistance has succeeded to a significant degree in compelling Washington to change its policy in Syrian Kurdistan. The United States did not want to intervene in Kobane in the same way as they had done around the Mosul dam (in Iraqi Kurdistan): there was the Turkish veto, the marginal strategic importance (to their eyes) for the general theatre of operations, the priority given to Iraq, the refusal of recognition of Kurdish forces linked to the PKK (characterised as "terrorist") and so on.

For these reasons, the US command did not target the columns of armoured vehicles and artillery of Islamic State before they reached Kobane (while the situation on the ground allowed very effective bombing) and arms supplies came late.

What forced the hand of Washington, in addition to the fierce resistance of the Kurds and the PYD, was the worldwide coverage: the assault led by IS, the Kurdish resistance, the

inaction of the Coalition, the manoeuvres of Erdogan's Turkey, everything was filmed from the very close border and broadcast on television. The abyss between the humanitarian claims of the imperialist intervention and the reality of its action (or inaction) became obvious, and unsustainable.

## Imperialist wars

. It is all the more possible to weigh on the contradictions of the imperialist intervention in Iraq and Syria, inasmuch it has been decided urgently, without any strategic plan, to respond to a situation that had unexpectedly gone out of control. This was very different from the conditions of the wars in Afghanistan (2001) or Iraq (2003) - or the French intervention in Mali (January 2013).

In the latter case, Paris planned the intervention with the notable objective (initially concealed) of sending in ground troops with a view to the redeployment of its military apparatus in the region. If the French government was reacting to an actual crisis of the Malian regime, it also grossly exaggerated the strength of fundamentalist organizations to justify its decision: even with (temporary) Tuareg support, the Arab "jihadis" from the North or from abroad were not going to seize Bamako and take control of the south of Mali.

It cannot be argued today that the US presidency has exaggerated the rise of Islamic State (it has on the contrary long under-estimated it). It has taken action under the pressure of events, without clearly defined war objectives beyond a few obvious points (blocking the progress of IS, stabilizing a regime under control in Baghdad and so on). It wishes to avoid getting bogged down again in a deadly "swamp" by sending US troops on the ground (apart from military advisers).

It nevertheless needs troops on the ground, but which? The Iraqi army is impotent; the Kurdish forces of the PKK are effective, but not favoured politically; the Iranian forces in Iraq are not (yet) reliable allies; the non-fundamentalist components of the Syrian resistance have been long

abandoned to their fate and have lost a lot of ground. The military advisers already number 3,000 and Washington may have to decide to move farther than it wishes.

As another source of contradictions, Washington has built a broad coalition of states, but with sometimes conflicting interests, from Turkey (the main NATO military power in the region) to Saudi Arabia with which it is very difficult to claim to be defending the status of women and democracy.

So we are not in 2003. The imperialist wars succeed each other, combine, but do not entirely resemble each other. Beyond constants that we must always denounce, we must also understand their specificities and their inherent contradictions; which is not always simple - but which allows a better evaluation of the conditions in which are continuing struggles and how solidarity can be effective.

Thus, one of the special features of the ongoing conflict is that on the same global theatre of Iraqi-Syrian operations, several separate wars mingle and intertwine. Strategically, the fate of all the peoples concerned is bound together - and the unity of progressive forces is needed. Specifically, the concrete details of the combat conditioning tactics can vary considerably, and even "diverge" at certain times. I am speaking here only of Kobane and Aleppo, but, more profoundly, conflicts also evolve according to very specific situations or global alignments and local alliances, which fluctuate and mingle [4].

## Aleppo

. I would like to take three examples of the difference between the situation in Kobane and that of the popular resistance inside Syria, personified by the battle of Aleppo. Three examples that have implications for solidarity.

*Visibility.* The popular resistance in Aleppo has not benefited from the same media coverage as that of Kobane, be it only for topographical reasons: it cannot be filmed from the Turkish "balcony". In addition, it does not benefit from a network of

associations and movements in Europe and elsewhere of the same magnitude as the Kurdish left (and singularly the PKK).

In the case of Kobane, we can say that public opinion spontaneously influenced Washington as in the same way that a campaign of solidarity could have. We cannot as things stand replace a "strong" media coverage, but that implies that we must do everything that we can to ensure visibility to the Syrian popular resistance: as much as we devote ourselves to the situation in the Syrian Kurdistan, as we must ensure that the struggle in the rest of the country is not "forgotten", while it continues in extremely precarious conditions and the violence of IS obscures that of the Assad regime.

*Exemplarity.* The battle of Kobane is exemplary - but is the resistance in Aleppo less so? The fighting capacity of the forces of the PYD is notably based on its popular roots and the social dynamics initiated by revolutionary measures taken in the "three cantons" which make up Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) - but have we not also had numerous examples of "people's power" in the Syrian uprising against the Assad dictatorship? The role of women in Rojava and the resistance of Kobane are rightly hailed, but they have not been inactive in the rest of the Syria!

There are in various calls for international solidarity with Kobane certain formulas or "oversights" which seem to me quite unfortunate. Let us take for example the global call for the day of solidarity with Kobane on November 1, 2014. The title could have mentioned Aleppo and not only Kobane, this was not the case. The terrorist violence of Islamic State was denounced, but not that of the Assad regime. And then, there is this sentence: "The democratic model of the autonomous administration of Rojava is an example for all the populations of Syria". Which would be greeted with bitterness by the forces and peoples involved elsewhere in Syria in democratic experiments.

The popular uprising against the Assad regime has experienced its own social experiences; if they are

etiolated, it is because they have not benefited from the same "window" of peace as the PYD in Syrian Kurdistan. They were immediately the object of a repressive military escalation on the part of the government, and then were attacked from behind by counter-revolutionary fundamentalist forces supported by regimes which wanted to put an end to the "Arab revolution".

During this time, the popular movements in Syrian Kurdistan benefited from a situation of "non-war" with the Assad regime (which had withdrawn its armed forces from the bulk of Rojava); they were only lately attacked frontally by the fundamentalist movements, first, in May 2013, by the al-Nusra Front, then, in September 2014, by IS. The attack was fierce and the resistance remarkable, the stakes were high, but international solidarity should not forget the importance of the popular movement in the Syrian uprising and the tragic circumstances in which it finds itself: with a lot of mortal enemies and no international support at the level needed.

*Bombing.* On the border of Iraqi Kurdistan and Kobane, there has been effective US bombing without "collateral damage" which the Kurdish forces have been able to benefit from. This is not the case in Aleppo, in the Palestinian camp of Yarmuk, in the suburbs of Damascus and so on. In a general way, in Syria, the Coalition's air intervention does not play in favour of the popular resistance. It enables the regime to ensure that it is done with its agreement and to claim a new international recognition; its forces benefit from it to concentrate their fire against the popular uprising. The fundamentalist movements make much of denouncing the imperialist intervention. Assad, like IS, draws on a new legitimacy. Militarily, the bombing does not loosen the vice on the progressive forces, politically, it detracts from them.

One could say that in the case of Iraqi or Syrian Kurdistan, some US bombing was tactically valuable; but the general situation on the theatre of operations shows that it remains nevertheless strategically disastrous. Solidarity must therefore absolutely not align with the imperialist

intervention, including in this area - but it must not deny the reality of individual theatres of operations. It must also take account of the different positions of the movements it supports, in Syrian Kurdistan and in the rest of the country. The latter have frontally denounced the air intervention of the Coalition, the former have roundly criticized the non-intervention of US aviation in Kobane, then actively collaborated in its effectiveness when it began.

Solidarity does not have to align itself with the viewpoint of Kobane to the exclusion of Aleppo (or vice-versa), but take account of the two.

## Compromise

. The problem posed by the above point is not who is the more to the left (the PKK-PYD or the FSA?), but the relationship between strategy, tactics and compromise. Of course, the analysis of a tactic or a compromise depends in part on the perception one has of the movement(s) involved. That of the PKK-PYD is not self evident. These parties have certainly changed, but to what point? In many articles, they are today are presented as a libertarian current, committed to political pluralism, as armed anarcho-communists; for others, they retain an authoritarian Mao-Stalinist matrix which prohibits them from recognizing in practice pluralism on the left: an iron fist in a discourse of velvet. The war situation and the urgency of solidarity do not help clarify a reality which is probably complex. But in any case, in the region, the PKK-PYD current is one of the most radical components (in its social project and its roots in the far left); probably the most powerful of them.

We should not therefore see in any compromise the announcement of betrayal. Very symptomatically, the PYD wants to keep control of forces on the ground, while using to its advantage the US bombing of IS armoured vehicles: the Kurdish organizations who are close to it reject in advance any intervention on the ground by the Coalition.

Similarly, in the rest of Syria, there have been many tactical and

momentary agreements between various armed components combining for a time against a common enemy. But this situation has never led the Syrian left forces to change their judgment on the counter-revolutionary nature of the fundamentalist groups. Any compromise involves dangers; but the rejection of any compromise also does! It is better to follow the situation over time, rather than rush to judge each political decision of the movements whose struggles we support.

In this area, the role of solidarity is to contribute to creating the best possible conditions for peace talks which allow the victory of the liberation struggle, of the revolutionary struggle; we are not at the bargaining table and we do not have as a general rule to intervene on the terms of the discussions between belligerents; but sometimes it is demanded of us. This was the case in 1973. The Paris negotiations had led to the drafting of an agreement that Washington refused to conclude. The Vietnamese launched an appeal to public opinion and to the movement of international solidarity to force the United States to sign what became the Paris Agreements. We responded actively to this appeal, breaking the rules of secret diplomatic negotiations.

The Paris Agreements were a compromise that could seem risky; but two years later, the US forces were to literally flee the catastrophe of Saigon. The crisis which later shook the "socialist camp" has made us forget the importance of the event. The largest imperialist power in the world had conducted in Indo-china a total counter-revolutionary war, on all fronts - a war at the time without precedent; and still without equivalent today by the magnitude of the effort, by the means implemented, by its multifaceted character - and it lost.

## Peace process

. If the Vietnamese have thus been able to impose "winning agreements" in 1973, it was thanks to the struggle on the ground, to the development of international solidarity and to the major crisis opened by this war in the

United States, but also because they had learned the lessons of 1954 and kept Moscow and Beijing well away from the negotiating table.

The study of the peace process is an important facet of reflection on armed struggle. We can draw on a wealth of experience in this area, historic, but also contemporary. The questions asked are often very difficult. How can one disarm when surrounded by enemy weapons (that is the dilemma facing our comrades of the RPM-M in Mindanao)? How, in the name of the rights of a "majority minority" on a portion of territory, not to sacrifice the rights of "minority communities" present on this same territory: for example, in Mindanao again, recognize the rights of Muslim populations without denying the rights of mountain dwelling "indigenous peoples"?

Can we negotiate with the Taliban in Afghanistan or IS in the Middle East without sacrificing in advance the rights of women in the name of "peace"? What social, environmental and democratic rights must be guaranteed to end a military conflict when revolution is not on the agenda?

All these matters must be taken into account by solidarity, otherwise "anti-war movements" or "peace movements" can contribute to the denial of the rights of entire sectors of the population (women, indigenous peoples, workers and so on) so as not to further complicate an already difficult peace process.

One of the ways to avoid the overlooking of the oppressed or exploited in the course of a peace negotiation is to involve them directly in the process by having them judge at each step the measures and agreements proposed: the negotiation then ceases to be a head-to-head at the summit between armed forces (governmental and dissenting) and itself becomes a democratic process. That is the experience of our comrades in Mindanao (although the peace talks are currently suspended). Solidarity can support this direct integration of populations in negotiations on which their future depends.

# Solidarity yesterday and today

Solidarity must therefore respond to the needs of the peoples and movements whose struggles we support, but that does not mean opposing “effectiveness” to “principles”. A large part of the French “left of the left” refuses to characterize our state as imperialist, or draws no inference from this (Melenchon and the PG, the PCF and so on). Others were easily fooled by the “humanitarian imperialist” discourse of the Hollande presidency when preparing for the intervention in Mali, or confined themselves to press release protests without any consequence. Political currents (like the NPA) or associative groups (like Survie) who are trying to oppose Françafrique in a consistent manner found themselves very much in the minority. Accordingly, there has been no (re)construction of a permanent antiwar or anti-imperialist movement, whilst our imperialism intervenes on a permanent basis in Africa including - and more than any other power - militarily.

A political compass is all the more necessary for the (re)construction of durable solidarity movements inasmuch as we are generally faced with complex situations that we must decrypt, requiring a theoretical approach but also a serious effort to assimilate the realities on the ground. Better then not to take refuge in the comfort of “principled” postures which are likely to screen - behind a simplification of the realities - or lead to positions which are sometimes absurd. It happened to us in the 1960s. An appeal had been launched by personalities had been launched to collect money for the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) in South Vietnam. A simple requirement, without any ambiguity, politically correct. However, we realized late in the day that (one!) left Gaullist had

signed this appeal: horrors, he embodied the “shadow” of this bourgeoisie with which there can be no compromise! We went from poster to poster scratching out with a black felt tip pen two of our signatures (Alain Krivine and Henri Weber, the “youth” of the time) while leaving that of Pierre Frank (our “old man”, more reasonable).

Fortunately the ridiculous does not kill, or we would have died very young. If we are still alive, despite a few outbreaks of “infantile leftism”, it is also because we were fully engaged in all the concrete activities of internationalist solidarity. We devoted much more time to action than to posturing.

Nor should we wildly over-state the internationalist commitment of the 1960s in France. In fact, May 1968 dealt a harsh blow to solidarity, the far left concentrating their efforts on the class struggles in France. The Comité Vietnam national (CVN, unitary) and the Comités Vietnam de Base (CVB, Maoist) ceased to exist! It was necessary to rebuild in a voluntarist manner the Front solidarité Indochine (FSI). But for some years, there was nonetheless a deployment of energy and very diverse activities, on a mass or sometimes clandestine basis [5].

The movement for global justice at the beginning of this century temporarily gave new life to internationalism, after a period during which this aspiration was often decried. Continuity was ensured by the movements of occupation which succeeded each other from Egypt to Hong Kong. However, we must recognize that the sustainable capacity for international solidarity remains very far short of what would be the essential minimum. This obviously reflects the current weakness of radical progressive currents in the imperialist countries, but also the loss of traditions and a difficulty in thinking about the implications in this field of successive geopolitical upheavals.

Since Bush, many of us have realized that we were entering into a world of “permanent war”, but without making a conclusion which is nonetheless obvious enough: we were going to “permanently” support armies of popular resistance. The credibility crisis of the socialist alternative is certainly so deep that in various conflicts, we cannot give our support to any of the movements involved in the fighting (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya and so on, where support should also be given to unarmed movements); but there are cases where we can (Syria, Kurdistan and so on).

More generally, in the face of the abuses by armed bands of all types, the issue of self defence of organizations or communities whose existence is threatened arises (Mindanao and so on), even if the answer to these threats must be above all political and when the “armed struggle” itself is not on the agenda.

In some cases (probably rare), we have to respond to urgent appeals to demand that our governments supply weapons. The example of Kobane shows that said governments can actually be obliged to do so. The example of Aleppo confirmed that they do not want to. In the Syrian context, this is certainly an anti-imperialist demand.

This article is centred on solidarity with armed resistance. However, the “updating” of tasks of solidarity arises in all areas. This is true for example of the response to humanitarian disasters, including climatic - or of the capacity of the trade union movement to better coordinate support for labour struggles in a time of globalized production chains.

We cannot assume our internationalist responsibilities without a broader and more systematic involvement of progressive political and social organizations progressive - and without a more consistent financial support to resistance. Will without means and politics without logistics are impotent.



# Religious fanatics groups: the fascists in the making

19 December 2014, by **Farooq Tariq**

Tehreek Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility and sent a group photo of the seven militants who took part in the “operation” holding guns and bombs. This was in response to the posting on-line of the dead faces of the seven who were killed by the army in the counter attack, not before they caused maximum damage.

The fanatics claimed that they do not kill little children. Their claim was that the children of the “enemy” aged less than 12 are not allowed to be killed by their “Islam”. Almost 11 percent of the total children enrolled in the school were killed within 15 minutes of their occupation of the school.

The principal of the school was fired on to the extent that her body was not recognizable. Her fault: she guided children to escape from the school during the attack. Children were asked to line up and then were shot. Those who dared to run were chased and shot also.

Such was the devastating effect on children across Pakistan that my son aged 14 asked his mum what should he do in case they come to his school, “line up or run”.

The day shocked Pakistan and the world. The news of the killing of the innocent children was flashed all over the world as the main story of the day. There was a great anger and shock.

A spontaneous general strike in all parts of Pakistan was observed on 17 December a day later, not called by any political party, a dream of all the parties of the rich that they could be in a position to shut Pakistan for their own narrow political interests. This was one of the most successful strikes with no transport on the roads and almost all shops and institutions were closed. This reminded us of the aftermath of Benazhir Bhutto’s killing

in December 2007, when all of Pakistan was shut in grief and anger.

A two minute silence in all the schools in India, a so-called arch rival, was observed, with the Indian parliament passing a resolution condemning the attack.

On the same day, heads of all the political parties represented in the parliament met in Peshawar for a useless day agreeing to “work together” with no mind-set change and no concrete proposal for dealing with fanatics. How could they?

In the meeting was Imran Khan whose party is in power in Khaiber Pukhtonkhawa, where the incident took place. He was too busy in campaigning for the overthrow of the federal government with his sit-ins and rallies in other parts of the country while totally ignoring the task of securing lives in the province.

Imran Khan’s philosophy of “good and bad Taliban” meant that no action was taken against the fanatics who had built safe heavens in the tribal areas. He was a strong advocate of “talks with good Taliban” to divide the fanatics. There are no good or bad Taliban. They are all in the same family of neo-fascism.

The ruling Muslim League had long term contacts with most of the religious fanatic groups and used them to win the 2013 general elections. Fanatics carried out suicide attacks on most of the opponents of PMLN and PTI, thus preventing them from running effective election campaigns.

Sitting in the meeting was Jamaat Islami, whose former head, declared dead Taliban as Shaheed (martyr) and army men killed by fanatics as dead. There was also Jamiat Ulemai Islam,

the known political wing of one section of the religious fanatics. Also several other political parties who maintain regular contacts and links with religious extremists groups for their narrow political interests and subscribe to the same millenarian ideology of the Jihadists.

The meeting agreed to form a committee to formulate the security policy for the state within a week, as in one week they could come up with any magic formula.

The Pakistani state failed miserably to curb the rise of religious fundamentalism. There is always a soft spot for them. For a long time, they were encouraged by the state as a second line of security. The security paradigm meant an anti-India enmity was the core purpose of state patronage. The process of Islamisation was accelerated by military Dictator Zia Ul Haq with the full support of American imperialism.

Apart from creating and supporting Jihadist groups, for decades the state and military with the financial and political assistance of imperial powers, has indoctrinated millions with conservative Islamic ideology for the purpose of safeguarding its strategic interests.

The three decades since 1980 are seen as the years of madrassas, over 20,000 at present providing home ground for recruitment for suicidal attackers. Supported mainly by Saudi Arabia and many million Muslim immigrants, they have become the alternative to the regular school system. Most of the terrorist activities carried out in Pakistan and elsewhere are linked to the organizational and political support of these madrassas.

After 9/11, the state’s close relationship with the fundamentalists

has changed to some extent but not broken in real terms. The banned terrorist groups change their name and carry out activities on a regular basis. They hold meetings and public rallies, collect funds and publish their literature without any state intervention.

Pakistan has become more conservative, more Islamic and more right wing resulting in the growth of the extreme Islamist's ideas. Blasphemy laws are frequently used for settling personal and ideological scores. Religious minorities, women and children are the easy targets. These soft targets are paying the greatest price for this decisive right wing turn.

The rise of religious fundamentalism has emerged as the most serious challenge not only to progressive forces but also to the very foundation of a modern society. Education and health are the real targets of the fanatics.

Polio workers, mainly women, are killed by fanatics, on the assumption that a team working for the elimination of polio led to the discovery of Osama Bin Ladin, leading to his assassination. The net result is that the World Health Organization has recommended a ban on all Pakistanis traveling abroad without a polio vaccination certificate.

The primary and high school syllabus in Punjab and Khaiber Pukhonkhawa provinces are amended to give room to more unscientific and pro-Jihad ideas in the name of religion. Education in most schools has been littered with war-promoting philosophy.

Religious fanatics groups are the new version of fascism. They are fascists in the making. They have all the historic characteristics of fascism. They kill opponents en mass. They have found considerable space among the middle class, particularly educated ones. They are against trade unions and social movements. They are promoting women as inferior to men, and aim to keep them in the home. Attacking the religious minorities has become a norm.

The religious fanatic groups are internationalists. They want an Islamic world. They are against democracy and promote Khilafat (kingdom) as a way of governance. They are the most barbaric force recent history has seen in the shape of "Islamic State" and Taliban. There is nothing progressive in their ideology. They are not anti-imperialism but anti-America and anti-West. They have created and carried out the most barbaric terrorist activities in the shape of suicide attacks, bomb blasts, mass killings and indiscriminate shootings.

They must be countered. The American way of fighting back in

shape of "war on terror" has failed miserably. Despite all the American initiatives of occupations, wars and creating democratic alternatives, the religious fundamentalists have grown with more force. Fundamentalists are stronger than they were at 9/11, despite the occupation of Afghanistan.

A whole package is needed. The state must break all links with fanatic's groups. The mindset that religious fundamentalists are "our own brothers, our own people, our security line and guarantee against "Hindus", some are bad and some are good" and so on must be changed. The conspiracy theories are most favorable arguments among the religious right wingers. They do not want to face the reality.

There is no short cut to end religious fundamentalism. There is no military solution. It has to be a political fight with dramatic reforms in education, health and working realities in most Muslim countries. Starting from nationalization of madrassas, it must go on to provide free education, health and transport as one of most effective means to counter fundamentalism.

Right wing ideas are promoting extreme right wing ideology. A mass working class alternative in the shape of trade unions and political parties linked with social movements is the most effective manner to counter religious fundamentalism.

## **Towards a major trial of strength**

**17 December 2014, by Daniel Tanuro**

Organized in a common front of trade unions (FGTB, CSC, CGSLB), this strike is (for the moment) the last stage of an action plan against the austerity plans of the rightwing government resulting from the elections of 25 May 2014. Launched as of the installation of the coalition led by Charles Michel, this action plan started with a mass demonstration (130,000 participating) on 6

November in Brussels and continued with a series of rotating strikes by province (24/11, 1/12 and 8/12). The mobilization grew at each stage

**In 2011 the government**

**directed by the PS struck hard against workers**

To understand the events, the political context should be pointed out. In Belgium, the attacks against workers have been going on for 25 years coming governments in which the

social democrats participate. After the long political crisis following the 2010 , marked by the victory in Flanders of the NVA, the SP Prime Minister estimated that "to save the country" it had to step up these attacks, so that the Flemish traditional right could beat the neoliberal-nationalists and that the coalition with social democracy could be continued.

This policy - which cost the workers the trifling sum of 20 billion Euros - was a terrible fiasco. Last May, the return of the coalition seemed the most likely option. But, to general surprise, the French-speaking Liberal party, put into the saddle by the Palace, formed a homogeneous rightwing coalition with the Flemish Christian Democrat , the Flemish Liberals and the NVA. This latter agreed to keep quiet on its separatist , in return for an ultra-neoliberal program.

## **Today the rightwing government wants to break the existing social model since 1945**

On the socio-economic level, the programme of the Charles Michel government continues and deepens the austerity imposed by its predecessor. There is a new cuts cure, to the tune of 11 billion euros. Wage-earners, civil servant, recipients of social benefits, pensioners, the sick and disabled, job-seekers and asylum seekers... are all hit very hard, in particular young people and the women.

The leader of the NVA, Bart De Wever, describes himself as the political arm of the VOKA, the association of Flemish employers. He is not a minister but he sets the tone. This whole government seems to be at the service of the bosses, with an essential mission: to push the trade unions into a corner, to radically reduce their weight in the political life and society in general. The mainstream media actively collaborate in this project: on the subject of the 15 December strike

in particular, they poured out torrents of vicious propaganda against the strikers and the trade unions.

The Belgian trade union movement is not very politicized, focused on class collaboration ("dialogue"), but extremely massive (3.5 million members in a population of 10 million) and very well organized . From day to day, it rests on the activity of tens of thousands of activists, delegates and organizers. These cadres have understood that they were confronted with something new: an attempt to qualitatively change the power relations in society. The old project of a strong state has been brought back onto the agenda, and at the centre the desire to make the right to strike an empty formula.

## **Several tens of thousands of trade-union activists organize the fight on the ground**

It was the consciousness of this danger as much as the indignation of the activists about the social cutbacks which pushed the trade-union leaderships to link up and propose a true action plan, and this plan in its turn encouraged the activists to go into the action with growing energy and enthusiasm. Tens of thousands of men and women have mobilized and organized flying strikes, blockings of roads, industrial blockings of zonings, in all the areas of the country.

The movement enjoys extremely broad support in public opinion. This was already seen at the time of the 6 November demonstration and has only increased since. This support has taken shape in particular in the formation of broad coalitions bringing artists, intellectuals and actors which have contributed to delegitimizing the austerity policy. The current is turning at the ideological level. The revelations of the far-right past of several NVA ministers has played a part at this level, but the essential

point is the rejection of social injustice, symbolized in the fact that Belgium is a tax haven for rich people and a tax hell for the others.

Six months after the elections, the Flemish regional government led by the NVA (which has also imposed drastic cuts) is only supported by approximately 35% of the population. All the levels of government are discredited, including the Walloon executive led by social democracy, whose policy of "rigour" is no different from "the federal austerity". The PS dreamed it would change its profile in opposition, but the current climate of toughening and rising consciousness has prevented such a change in opinion.

The trade-union common front raised four demands:

- maintaining and increasing buying power through freedom to negotiate and the suppression ending of wage indexation,
- strong federal social security,
- investment in the revival of long-term employment including in quality public services,
- tax justice.

This platform is insufficient (it does not oppose retirement at 67 nor measures leading to mass exclusion from the ranks of the registered unemployed imposed by the previous coalition government). But the government cannot yield on any of them. From an economic point of view, it could give up the ending of wage-indexation, whose effect for businesses is in fact very small. But from a political point of view, this retreat would be interpreted as a brand of weakness which would compromise its project. It could also promise a readjustment of taxation, but it would be only elementary justice, and would not make it possible to justify the new sacrifices imposed on workers.

The trade-union leaderships cannot go to their base without any real gains given the confidence it has gained thanks to the fight. They are currently trying to reenter dialogue with the employers' associations, proposing to

adopt a joint "roadmap" to present to the government on competitiveness of businesses, wages and retirement conditions, in particular. But this scenario is unlikely to occur. In any case, the government is very clear this roadmap will have to fit into its programme.

## Towards a major confrontation

Everything is thus pointing in the direction of a major confrontation. The semi-spontaneous outbreak of a

general strike on the model of 1960-61 is not the most probable scenario in the short run. But, if the government makes parliament vote on its measures in the next few days, the trade unions will have to continue and radicalize their action plan, which will mean for them riding the tiger. In this case, and provided that trade-union unity is maintained, many things will become possible.

The radical left is enjoying a considerable echo, but the convergence dynamic started with the 25 May elections did not continue. This is

partly the result of a choice of the PTB to count above all on building itself, in a social democrat type relationship with the trade unions (by keeping its distance from the call of the FGTD of Charleroi [6]). But there are also different orientations and demands in the movement: unlike the PTB, the LCR defends the idea that it is necessary to drive out the Michel government as quickly as possible, and to begin a debate in the trade unions on an anticapitalist action plan, from the point of view of the fight for a social government.

*15 December 2014*

# Radical Independence Conference 2014

## 16 December 2014, by Alister Black

Three thousand attendees packed in to the SECC in Glasgow. The venue was the largest that was available. The independence movement has continued to engage thousands. Post-referendum discussions and conferences have packed in activists. The first conference of Women for Independence saw all 1000 tickets sell out in record time, despite being held in Perth, outside of the highly populated "central belt".

At a neighbouring venue a Scottish National Party "new members" rally starring new SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon drew 12,000.

The SNP saw an influx of recruits following the referendum. Their membership now stands at 92,000, and the Scottish Socialists and Scottish Greens also saw thousands joining. By comparison the Labour Party in Scotland who dominated Scottish politics for decades, may have fewer than 10,000 members.

## RIC Conference

The conference itself was the most professional I have attended in Scotland, with video projection and an excellent sound system. It was

smoothly run by the team of volunteers from local RIC groups. This is a tribute to the élan and enthusiasm of those who have sustained and led RIC locally and nationally for two years. RIC has no office, no full-timers and no membership subs.

The day was taken up by a series of plenary sessions with "big name" speakers and open mic discussions which sought to formulate an alternative political platform for the post-referendum era.

## Yes Alliance

There was however no escaping the political questions thrown up in the wake of the referendum. One such was the prospect of a "Yes Alliance" for the forthcoming UK elections to the Westminster parliament. This proposal mooted a non-aggression pact between pro-independence parties such as the SNP, Greens and Scottish Socialists and had enjoyed popularity amongst grassroots Yes activists and had been backed by the SSP conference.

Shortly before the RIC conference the SNP put the brakes on this idea, announcing instead that they would

allow a few selected individuals who were not SNP members to stand on an SNP ticket. In his speech at the opening event SSP co-convenor Colin Fox challenged the SNP to heed the wishes of the grassroots. Green leader Patrick Harvie had nothing to say on the subject. Aamar Anwar, an anti-racist lawyer and a well-known figure in Scottish left circles was similarly quiet having recently joined the SNP and been mentioned as a likely candidate for the party. He restricted his speech to attack after attack on the Labour Party.

## Scottish Left Project

Elsewhere a lively session discussed the future for the left with a focus on the "Scottish Left Project" which has come together to discuss strategy for socialists in Scotland. The session was addressed by Cat Boyd a young trade-unionist and RIC leader, Frances Curran former MSP for the SSP and John Wilson who recently left the SNP over their commitment to NATO.

Frances talked about her time in the parliament and the need for strong organisation and commitment to face



up against the pressures of parliament. She confirmed that the SSP executive had agreed to participate in the Left Project – saying “Let’s talk.”

The conference ended with speeches including Tariq Ali, who indicated that the RIC conference was one of the

best events he had ever attended. Playwright Alan Bisset read out the ‘People’s Vow’.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZrtOM7CicM>

The Vow called for a people’s budget against austerity, opposition to

fracking and for a green alternative, for radical land reform, for equality and for opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons.

The Yes campaign has seen a renewal of radical politics in Scotland. The show is not over for the movement birthed by the referendum.

## Can South Africa’s Anti-Capitalist Left Rise to the Occasion?

15 December 2014, by **Amandla!**

The facts are both clear and unkind to those who would suggest that twenty years of ANC rule has gone any significant distance towards overcoming the toxic legacy of capitalist apartheid. We publish in this issue an excerpt on unemployment from AIDC’s forthcoming booklet, *The State of Labour at 20 Years of Democracy*, by researcher Niall Reddy; it provides a harrowing overview of the state we’re in:

**Unemployment:** The main employment trend to be noted since 1994 is a shift towards the ‘tertiary sector’ of retail and service jobs. Manufacturing employment has grown only slowly during the period, while the primary sector – mining and agriculture – has actually declined. Overall growth in job numbers has not kept pace with that of new entrants to the job market. The evidence also shows that many of the high-growth sectors offer lower wages, while sectors that contracted as a proportion of total employment are associated with higher pay.

**Wages:** The data show that even the minimal promises made by advocates of “free markets” have not been met since the end of official apartheid: Workers in the bottom half of the earnings scale have received only a fraction of total wages. Overall increases in average wages have been driven entirely by increases for higher earners – specifically those at the very

top of the distribution (e.g., CEOs and other senior managers, who misleadingly are counted as ‘workers’ in the statistics). Lower skilled workers actually saw stagnant real wages, while semi-skilled workers saw wage declines early in the period before a small increase beginning in 2011. Skilled workers saw moderate gains between 2001 and 2007, after which their wages declined. Only highly skilled workers at the top of the income distribution and the managerial elite have seen significant increases.

**Job Quality and Security:** During this period, the proportion of workers employed through labour brokers has risen massively. The use of labour brokers makes it difficult for workers to take action against the companies that direct their work and determine their work conditions, because the company will argue that the worker is technically employed by a third party – the labour broker. Because of this confusion, relatively few workers actually identify themselves as being employed by labour brokers, but the available data suggest that at least one million workers are involved in such employment relationships. Some experts estimate the real figure is more like two million. This gives companies enormous advantages over workers, and can be seen as part of a wider set of mechanisms through which capital disciplines labour in order to keep wages down.

**Labour Laws and Institutions:** The negotiated settlement and its associated ‘social compact’ gave rise to a number of legal provisions and bureaucratic mechanisms ostensibly intended to ensure stable, productive, and eventually ‘emancipatory’ labour relations after 1994. Bargaining councils as well as institutions like NEDLAC, CCMA, and Section 27 of the Employment Equity Act, were supposed to provide workers with opportunities to secure their interests without undermining ambitious hopes for economic expansion. The Marikana massacre, massive wildcat mining strikes, and the farm worker rebellion in the Western Cape have left no doubt such mechanisms are in crisis, and arguably have failed.

**Unions:** Between 2001 and 2011, rates of unionisation have decreased in all sectors, in most cases between 2 % and 5 %. In the services sector, the decline has been even steeper, at 5.71 %. Employment growth has generally been faster in sectors with lower union involvement. Employment in manufacturing – which includes a large proportion of unionised workers – grew by only 2.84 %. Surveying the carnage outlined in chalk by this empirical evidence, even the ANC’s most loyal supporters among the working class must feel the need to ask whether the ANC and the alliance have served the interests of poor and working South Africans, and whether

it can offer a way out of the desperate crisis facing the country's majority.

Given the legacy of South Africa's working class movement, it is actually quite surprising that it has taken so long for the ANC-led alliance to unravel. But we have clearly now entered a new period, in which the alliance is unquestionably unravelling. This affords both dangers and opportunities.

As if the deepening social crisis described above were not sufficient reason for alarm, we must also face the fact that the global economic system seems clearly to be peering into the abyss of another massive crisis. As Brussels based economic historian and journalist Benny Asman argues in his contribution to this issue, there are "definite signs that the world economy is in for a new crisis". Falling global prices for raw materials and oil, austerity-induced stagnation in the Eurozone, slowing growth in China, rising inequality in the US and elsewhere, and other signs point overwhelmingly to another looming contraction, possibly severe. Even the praise-singers of recovery have mostly fallen silent.

And yet, even that is not all. Writer, historian and long-time climate activist Jonathan Neale reviews the recent US-China deal - portrayed in the mainstream press as a major, binding commitment to reduce greenhouse gases - and finds it to be "appalling". This corrupt deal is just the latest elite attempt to ensure that nothing changes - another symptom of the complete capture of institutions of governance by the toxic logic of extractivist, fossil-fuel-driven capital accumulation.

This poses a major strategic question for working class activists: how to rebuild an anti-capitalist politics that doesn't repeat the failed formulas of the past, but takes into account the profound transformations that have taken place not only in South Africa but globally - through interlocking processes of globalisation, financialisation, shifts in labour composition, and social differentiation within the working class.

When compared with the task of

unifying COSATU, which has received so much attention in the press and amongst the chattering classes, the task of building real working class unity is massively more challenging. The divisions within COSATU reflect on a small scale the social divisions that exist within the working class, both in South Africa and abroad.

This challenge - of building real working class unity - is made more complex by the unravelling of a non-racial consciousness within the movement since at least 1994, and the emergence of deep, reactionary divisions based on racial, cultural and "ethnic" identities. In the face of an increasingly fierce struggle for scarce resources and scarcer opportunities, identity has become a powerful and tempting motivation for both economic aspiration and political ambition. It is a double-edged and often a toxic weapon - one that can deepen divisions within the working class, undermining prospects for both political unity and practical solidarity.

The monumental challenge we recognise even by posing the question of unity just between the so-called "coloured" and "African" working class communities provides an insight into the depth of the problems that we face. These challenges cannot be avoided, nor the solutions be taken for granted.

And the mighty task we have been handed - of attempting to overcome identity-based factionalism in the name of working class unity - lies squarely at the feet of the ruling party. Not even two years ago we celebrated 100 years of the formation of the ANC - an organisation that once set out boldly on the road to overcoming "tribal" divisions. Today, the fact that the ANC has become so dominant in the KwaZulu Natal region is largely due to a fatal capitulation to Zulu nationalism often chauvinism.

It is in relation to this latter challenge that we must understand the call for a new "United Front". While we must resist any temptation to simply mimic the UDF of the 1980s, there are also valuable lessons to be drawn from that experience, and we should actively recall them and consciously refresh our recollections, while also striving

for new insights into the strategic question of building class alliances, and into crafting a political programme around which a broad alliance can be built that can advance the interests of the majority. The irony of our reality is that it still remains the task of the working class to forge national unity - yes, to build the nation.

However, the lesson of the last twenty years told so eloquently by the statistics quoted above regarding the state of the working class in South Africa, is that this nation cannot be built without the radical redistribution of wealth. It cannot be built on capitalist foundations.

It is for this reason that any movement serious about providing a serious left alternative must revisit the national question. Above all, this means how a class-based left can successfully challenge non-class-based identities, when the latter are often so dominant amongst many working and poor people.

The call for a united left, which NUMSA is in effect leading, must also respond very concretely to the need for livelihoods for the 8 million South Africans who are unemployed, and must forge ways to do so with wreaking ecological havoc on the country through accelerated resource extraction.

As the impacts of climate change become increasingly evident, it is clear that competition over food and water resources will be a source of intensifying conflict. As this issue of *Amandla!* goes to press, we read of police shooting unarmed people in Mzamba who were gathering rice from an overturned lorry, reportedly killing at least two and wounding several more. Without a decisive shift from the politics of enforced scarcity out of respect for the profit making system, such violent confrontations over increasingly privatised, commodified and monopolised resources are sure to become more frequent.

We cannot expect quick or definitive answers to these questions, but they must become entrenched at the heart of the debate amongst those who are

looking for a political alternative.

These are daunting tasks. Together, they constitute the challenge of our

lifetimes. We must rise together and meet them if we are to have any chance of pursuing a genuinely emancipatory politics through South

Africa's accelerating political realignments.

*Amandla* No. 37/38 December 2014

# Call to Action ! Reject REDD+ and Extractive Industries to confront capitalism and defend life and territories

## 13 December 2014

The United Nations' climate agreements have failed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, the mechanisms and policies that have emerged from these agreements – including REDD+ – have allowed for the continuation, legitimization and intensification of destructive activities such as mining, oil, gas and carbon extraction, tree plantations and agroindustry, among others. These industries, which are the main causes of the climate crisis, have adopted discourses on 'sustainability', 'zero deforestation', 'socio-environmental responsibility', 'decoupling' or 'low-carbon projects' under the umbrella of the "green" economy. But we know that despite the propaganda used to doctor their image, the extractivist model and institutionalized global capitalism always result in the pillaging of Mother Earth, as well as the violent eviction and criminalization of communities and peoples, as well as the destruction of land and territories.

Advocates of the 'green' economy try to make us believe that 'sustainable economic growth' is possible and can be 'decoupled from damage to nature' under capitalist forms of production; or that it is feasible to 'compensate' or 'mitigate' contamination or destruction in one place by 'recreating' or 'protecting' another. Using an unjust and colonialist framework, the 'green' economy subjugates nature and autonomous peoples by imposing

restrictions on the use of and control over their territories in order to fill the pockets of a few, even when communities possess the deeds to their land.

One of the fundamental pillars of the new global capitalism is 'environmental services'. This involves the further financialization and commodification of nature, and signifies subjugating and enslaving it to capital. The carbon market, biodiversity offsets and water markets are part of this kind of capitalism. 'Environmental services' are dependent on the hegemonic economic model.

There are many kinds of environmental services, such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), commodified conservation, 'sustainable forest management' and programs to increase carbon 'reserves' (REDD Plus or REDD+) and more recently, so-called 'climate smart' agriculture. The promoters of REDD+ hope that COP20 in Lima will establish the basis for its inclusion in the next international climate agreement in 2015 during COP21 in Paris. Such projects and programs have existed for years and are in constant expansion. Numerous corporations, NGOs and governments, as well as the World Bank and the UN's carbon funds are committed to advancing this business.

In practice, given that forests are found mainly on indigenous lands and

the lands of the peasants who feed the world, such schemes turn indigenous territories and agricultural lands into both carbon dioxide 'sinks' and water or biodiversity 'banks'.

From the perspective of those who defend forests, such mechanisms are absurd: the more deforestation and threats to forests there are, the greater the number of REDD+ projects that can be justified and implemented with the goal of selling 'scarce' carbon and other 'nature' commodities. With REDD+, forests' and soils' capacity to absorb carbon and retain it, and plants' capacity to grow, photosynthesize, conserve water, grow and generate biodiversity are being quantified, monetized, appropriated, privatized and financialized, just as with any other commodity. The 'environmental services' trade also fuels the impunity of polluters and destroyers: instead of complying with laws that prohibit polluting and deforestation, they can 'compensate' for these ills. This trade also diverts attention from combatting climate change, as it does not address the cause. The urgent need to stop extracting fossil fuels and halt industrial agriculture and monoculture plantations, and to guarantee respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, dependent forest people and peasants to manage and control their territories, is not on the negotiating table. As a result, the spiral of destruction continues and grows.

One clear example of how harmful REDD+ projects can be is the agreement signed between the states of California in the United States, Chiapas in Mexico and Acre in Brazil, which aims to allow industries in California to continue polluting in exchange for carbon credits purchased through REDD+ projects in Acre and Chiapas. Although Acre is usually presented to the world as a 'model for the green economy', the reality is different: carbon trading which facilitates timber exploitation has been devastating territories and violating the rights of forest peoples [7], as the DHESCA human rights network has reported, following its 2013 mission to Acre. [8] Other examples include the case of the N'hambita community in Mozambique that signed a contract with the British corporation Envirotrade on the trade of REDD+ carbon credits. According to the contract, the inhabitants of the community will have to 'cultivate carbon' on their territories, instead of food, for 99 years. [9] Other examples in Kenya [10], Congo [11], Papua New Guinea [12], Cambodia [13], Brazil [14], and elsewhere, illustrate how REDD-type projects can lead to forced evictions, arrests and the dispossession of territories.

Numerous communities have been pressured or tricked into signing contracts that involve the loss of their rights over their land and ancestral territories. [15] Moreover, REDD-type projects do not guarantee that extractive corporations do not enter their territories. For example, 'Socio Bosque' (Forest Partner), the REDD-type program in Ecuador - where the communities are obliged to take care of forests for 20 or 40 years so that the State can ensure that 'environmental services' are conserved and can be traded - allows oil or minerals to be extracted in these areas. [16]

REDD+ claims its objective is to combat deforestation, guarantee local participation, improve forest management, improve the local population's living conditions and contribute to their development, and, occasionally, even implement territorial rights. It also alleges that it will fight climate change. Yet, the numerous national and subnational

programs, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and REDD+ projects developed worldwide increasingly show that these are lies and that the real objective is to accumulate more capital and control territories. Communities affected by REDD+ projects either directly or indirectly - by the polluting companies that benefit from the carbon credits generated by such projects, by the State or by other agencies - have not truly been informed what this kind of contract means. REDD+ projects are already defined by their promoters before they are presented to communities - which, in practice, takes away the communities' right to accept or reject the project. At other times, communities are simply tricked and fall into the 'REDD' trap. Promises are often not kept.

Likewise, instead of being a solution to climate change, so-called 'climate smart' agriculture is just another attempt by biotechnology and agribusiness corporations to patent and control seeds and farmlands.

This mechanism, promoted by the FAO and the World Bank, among others, tries to get peasants to adopt certain cultivation practices and use 'climate ready' genetically-modified seeds, dispossessing farmers of their fields, autonomy, food sovereignty and ancestral knowledge. La VÃa Campesina denounced 'climate smart' agriculture as the continuation of a project that began with the Green Revolution in the 1940s and continued on in the 1970s and 1980s through the World Bank's poverty reduction projects. These projects decimated peasant farmer economies, especially in the South, which provoked the loss of food sovereignty and made these countries dependent on the North to feed their population. [17] Today, a World Bank program in Kenya seeks to generate carbon credits by demanding 'sustainable land management practices', which include the use of a hybrid variety of corn seeds sold locally by Syngenta, pressuring peasants to abandon their native species. [18] Supporters of this dangerous false solution want to convert fields, soils and crops into carbon credits, which will lead to an increase in land grabbing and dispossession.

Even tree monoculture plantations are being camouflaged as 'climate smart'. The advance of large-scale eucalyptus, pine, acacia, rubber and oil palm plantations is, in fact, a part of process to advance capital accumulation driven by corporations. The plantations are considered carbon 'sinks' and therefore, eligible for carbon credits. In Aceh, in the north of Indonesia, a REDD+ project covering 770,000 hectares was developed by the International Fauna & Flora NGO, the Carbon Conservation carbon broker company and the then governor of Aceh. The project's document affirms that one way to 'compensate' for the loss of forests in the area designated under REDD+ was through oil palm plantations, whose 'capacity to absorb carbon' has been estimated in order to anticipate how many carbon credits the project can generate. As for the local communities in the project's area, they have affirmed on several occasions that they were not duly consulted on the project and have not received any benefit from it. On the contrary, the tenure of their land continues to be a serious problem that has yet to be resolved. [19]

Corporations like Shell Oil or Rio Tinto mining corporation; tree plantations and pulp and paper producers like Green Resources and Suzano; agribusiness firms like Wilmar, Monsanto and Bunge; multilateral agencies like the UNDP and FAO; conservation transnationalists like Wildlife Works, WWF, The Nature Conservancy or Conservation International; consulting firms, public and private banks and many governments elaborate, support and fund REDD+ and 'climate smart' agriculture projects and programs. These mechanisms undermine the real solutions to climate change, as they serve as a distraction from changes to the modes of production and consumption and towards economies and societies that are free from fossil fuels.

We must not allow ourselves to be fooled by the lies of vulgar propaganda. We know that climate negotiations, which are increasingly controlled by corporate power, do not try to save the climate, nor protect forests and soils, eradicate poverty or



respect indigenous peoples' rights. On the contrary, they cravenly protect predatory corporations and reinforce a destructive and patriarchal model. What is worse, they manipulate information to put the blame on small farmers and the peoples who depend on the forests. They accuse them of being the main cause of deforestation and climate change, since they create parcels of land for subsistence agriculture. In reality, however, the traditional inhabitants of the territories are precisely the ones who have guaranteed the conservation of the forests, water sources and ecosystems.

We cannot allow false solutions to climate change - including REDD+ and the so-called 'climate smart' agriculture - destroy the balance on Mother Earth.

We must oppose these types of programs and 'environmental services' that seek to perpetuate capitalism regardless of the damage they cause.

We must continue pushing for the transformation of the current production model and fighting against policies imposed on the peoples that prioritize the reproduction of capital over the reproduction of life. The struggles of indigenous peoples, peasants, urban dwellers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, women, men and youth to defend their rights and territories lead the way. It is the peoples' opposition to oil extraction and mining, environmental services, industrial agriculture projects and monocultures which are taking the right steps on climate change. These people must be respected, and not criminalized, and their efforts to contribute to global change must be recognized.

We must organize to support the defence of indigenous territories and forest dependent communities, their autonomy and control over their territories and the protection of Mother Earth.

For these reasons, we say YES

- to the defence of territories,
- to the defence of the peoples and communities who depend on, live in and are part of the forests, to their

autonomy over their territories and

- the defence of the rights of nature!

NO MORE EXTRACTIVIST PROJECTS!

NO TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES!

TO FIGHT AGAINST REDD+ IS TO ALSO FIGHT CAPITALISM!

NO TO THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE PEOPLES WHO DEFEND THEIR TERRITORIES! JOIN THE PEOPLE'S SUMMIT MARCH!

Signatories:

Abantu for Development  
 Acción Ecológica, Ecuador  
 Adéquations, France  
 Aktionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt, Berlin, Germany  
 Aliança RECOs - Redes de Cooperação Comunitária Sem Fronteiras, Brazil  
 All India Forum of Forest Movements, India  
 Alternativa Intercambio con Pueblos Indígenas, Spain  
 Alternatives au Développement Extractiviste et Anthropocentré (ADEA) Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance Against Mining), Philippines  
 Asamblea Nacional Ambiental (ANA), Dominican Republic  
 Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales, Mexico  
 Asia-Pacific Network for Food Sovereignty (APNFS)  
 Asociación Conservacionista YISKI, Costa Rica  
 Asociación de Conservación Ecológica "Tumbes Silvestre", Peru  
 Asociación de Ecología Social, Costa Rica  
 Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos del Valle del Cauca, Colombia  
 Associação Brasileira dos Estudantes de Engenharia Florestal (ABEEF), Brazil  
 Associação Huni kui do Hene Bariã Namakia (AHHBN), Feijo-Acre, Brazil  
 ATTAC, Argentina  
 ATTAC, France  
 Beyond Copenhagen Collective, India  
 Bia ?lii, Asesoría e Investigación, A.C., Mexico  
 Biblioteca Popular Bernandino Rivadiva, Chaco, Argentina  
 Biofuelwatch, UK/US  
 BIOS, Argentina  
 Bios Iguana A.C., Colima, Mexico  
 Bosques Sin Forestales y

Organizaciones indígenas por el Bosque Ancestral, Chile  
 CADTM - AYNÁ

Campaña Mesoamericana para la Justicia Climática

Carbon Trade Watch

Ceiba / Friends of the Earth, Guatemala

Censat / Friends of the Earth, Colombia

Centro de Investigación, Documentación y Asesoría Poblacional (CIDAP), Peru

Centro de Mujeres Aymaras Candelaria, Patacamaya, Bolivia - South America

Cesta / Friends of the Earth, El Salvador

Clan Hitorangi - Rapanui, Chile

Coalición de los Pueblos por la Soberanía Alimentaria

Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network (CLEAN), Bangladesh

Coeco Ceiba / Friends of the Earth, Costa Rica

Colectivo de Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, Ecuador

Colectivo VientoSur, Chile

Colectivo Voces Ecológicas (COVEC), Panama

Comité Nacional de Estudios de la Energía, A.C. Mexico

Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (Copinh), Honduras

Conselho de Missões entre Povos Indígenas (COMIN), Acre e Sul do Amazonas, Brazil

Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI), Brazil

Coordinación Campesina del Valle del Cauca (CCVC), Colombia

Coordinadora Latino Americana de Organizaciones de Campo (CLOC-VC)

Coordenação Nacional de Comunidades Quilombolas (CONAQ), Brazil

Coordinación por los Derechos Indígenas, Spain

Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)

Counter Balance

Earth Peoples

ECA Watch, Austria

Ecologistas en Acción, Spain

Ecomunidades, Mexico

Ecosistemas, Chile

Ecotierra Internacional

Escuela de Pensamiento Ecologista (SAVIA), Guatemala

ETC Group

FASE, Brazil

Federacao do Povo Huni kui do Acre

(FEPHAC), Acre, Brazil	Earth, Mozambique	de El Salvador (RACDES), El Salvador
Federación Ecologista de Costa Rica	Justice in Nigeria Now (JINN), Nigeria	Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad
(FECON), Costa Rica	Labour, Health and Human Rights	Red De Ecologistas Populares,
Finance & Trade Watch, Austria	Development Centre	Ecuador
Focus on the Global South	Les Amis de la Terre / Friends of the	Red Latinoamericana contra los
Food & Water Watch, US	Earth, France	Monocultivos de árboles (RECOMA)
Fórum Mudanças Climáticas e Justiça	Mesa de Cambio Climático, El	Reddeldia Chiapas, Mexico
Social, Brazil	Salvador	REDES / Friends of the Earth,
Forum Ä-kologie & Papier, Germany	Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas	Uruguay
Friends of the Earth Latin America	(MMC), Brazil	Redmanglar Internacional
and the Caribbean (ATLAC)	Movimento dos Atingidos por	Regional Latinoamericana de la UITA
Friends of the Earth, Argentina	Barragens (MAB)	Réseau CREF, Democratic Republic of
Friends of the Earth, Brazil	Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores	Congo
Friends of the Earth, Colombia	(MPA) / VÃa Campesina, Brazil	Rettet den Regenwald e.V. - Rainforest
Friends of the Earth International	Movimento Mulheres pela P@Z!	Rescue, Germany School of
Friends of the Siberian Forests, Russia	Movimento Sem Terra (MST), Brazil	Democratic Economics
Fundación Beteguma, Chocó,	No REDD in Africa Network, Africa	Sindicato dos Trabalhadores e
Colombia	NÃcleo de Estudos em Movimentos e	Trabalhadoras Rurais de Xapuri -
Fundación Centro de Estudios	Práticas Sociais (NEMPS), EspÃrito	Acre, Brazil Sindicato Ãšnico de
Ecológico de la RepÃblica Argentina	Santo, Brazil	Trabajadores de la Universidad de
(FUCEERA)	Nucleo de Pesquisa e Estudos	Guadalajara, Mexico Social Justice
Global Forest Coalition (GFC)	Itinerários intelectuais, imagem e	Centre from the University of British
Global Justice Ecology Project	sociedade (NEIIS), Brazil	Columbia, Canada StopTheInstitute,
GRAIN	NÃcleo de Pesquisa Estado,	Vancouver, Canada
Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), India	Sociedade e Desenvolvimento na	Terra de Direitos, Brazil
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance	AmazÃnia Ocidental (UFAC), Brazil	The Indigenous Environmental
GroundWork / Friends of the Earth,	Observatorio ciudadano de servicios	Network (IEN) Timberwatch, South
South Africa	pÃblicos, Guayaquil, Ecuador	Africa
Grupo de Estudos em ProduçÃo do	Observatório dos Conflitos no Campo	The Corner House, UK
Espaço Amazônico (UFAC)	(OCCA), EspÃrito Santo, Brazil	The Gardens Institute, US
Grupo de Investigación de Suelos y	Observatorio Petrolero Sur, Argentina	The International Institute Climate
Aguas, Universidad de Los Andes,	Oilwatch Latin America	Action and Theory Transnational
Venezuela	Oilwatch International	Institute (TNI)
Health of Mother Earth Foundation	ONGd AFRICANDO	Ts'unel Bej, Mexico
(HOMEF), Nigeria	Organización Fraternal Negra	Unidad Ecológica SalvadoreÃa
IBON International	HondureÃa (OFRANEH), Honduras	(UNES), El Salvador Union Paysanne,
ICRA International	Organización mapuche SabidurÃa del	Québec, Canada
India Resource Center, India	LaKutuN, Chile	Unión Popular Valle Gómez, Mexico
Indonesian Environmental Forum	Otros Mundos Chiapas / Friends of the	Unión Universal Desarrollo Solidario
(WALHI), Indonesia	Earth, México	VÃa Campesina
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Cone Sul (PACS), Brazil	Programa Democracia y	World Rainforest Movement (WRM)
International Analog Forestry	Transformación Global (PDTG), Peru	
Network	Proyecto Ecosocialista UNELLEZ	
Just Transition Alliance	Proyecto Gran Simio, Spain	
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## People's SAARC challenges regional elite's agenda

11 December 2014, by **Farooq Tariq**

Kathmandu was a showcase of what has happened repeatedly in the three decades since the birth of the SAARC. Leaders make rhetorical speeches and spend time on expensive retreats and sightseeing – then head home forgetting what was said in the summit hall.

“SAARC remains largely ineffective, hostage to the political polemics of member-nations particularly India and Pakistan,” said Professor Imtiaz Ahmed of the International Relations department of Dhaka University.

A People’s SAARC summit was held as an alternative in Kathmandu from November 22-25. About 5000 social and political activists took part its opening ceremony on November 22. There were 71 workshops held to discuss an alternative agenda for SAARC heads of the state to consider.

It was organised by People’s SAARC Steering Committee, made up of 14 leading activists from all eight countries of the region. [20]

Three agreements were supposed to be signed at the 18th SAARC summit to improve road and rail connections, and integrate power trade in the region.

The eight-member countries of SAARC are India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Since its inception in 1985, SAARC signed a number of agreements and conventions, but faltered in translating ideas into collective actions.

For an instance, the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was inked in 1987, within two years of the group’s birth. Extra protocols to the convention updated the strategies in 2004. But, in reality, it was not effective, as several South Asian nations have seen a rise in terrorism.

There are other examples as well. The SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement, which was finalised in 1993, came into effect in 1995. It was followed by the South Asian Free Trade Agreement in 2004. But those remain unimplemented, as issues of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers are

yet to be addressed.

Moreover, the SAARC Food Bank Agreement was signed in 2007, but it is yet to be implemented. SAARC Development Fund was constituted in 2008 and SAARC Seed Bank in 2011, but none of those has seen much success.

Two of the important SAARC countries, Pakistan and India have been close to war on several occasions during the last 30 years of its existence. Border clashes have become a norm in recent months particularly since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has come into power in India.

Pakistani Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif and Modi both shook hands and spoke informally for five minutes. That was all what they had to offer each other. The two nuclear-armed nations have already broken the thread of negotiation earlier this year after some clashes at the border of Kashmir, a territory both countries claim as their own.

The SAARC summit failed to address the growing threat posed by religious fundamentalists groups. The ascendance of religious extremism and intolerance is a serious challenge to democracy in the region.

Pluralism and diversity, which are the hallmark of the region, are under threat from such groups, which often enjoy overt or covert patronage from the state. Women’s rights and other freedoms are the first to be targeted by extremist groups.

The region is fraught with conflicts. Security is diminishing and governments’ militaristic response, far from resolving these conflicts, is undermining the rule of law and increasing insecurity.

The number of conflict-induced internally displaced persons and refugees in the region have spiraled.

People’s rights have deteriorated in recent years, in particular, to freedom of association, freedom of expression and the right to protest.

Freedom of press remains threatened and the independence of the media is

seriously compromised by the growing influence and control of vested interests, including the corporate sector.

The preparation for this SAARC summit was going on for months in one of the poorest country in the region. In Kathmandu, there was a big drive to clean most roads on the way to venue. The ruling elite in all SAARC countries very fond of the impressionist strategy of cleaning the roads prior to such meetings.

It will be business as usual after the event is over. I personally saw soldiers cleaning the roads of Kathmandu three days before the main event. This is a rare scene in most countries of South Asia. Soldiers are normally there to rule, not clean the streets.

The People’s SAARC summit issued a joint declaration after holding all of its seminars, workshops and other events to formulate a joint strategy and point of view. It reaffirmed commitments to justice, peace, security, human rights and democracy in the region on the basis of equality for all and the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

The declaration said that peoples must unite to challenge the systematic and structural marginalisation and exclusion of people through the dominant neoliberal economic model.

This model is violently restructuring the region’s economic policies and cultural life, and undermining and devaluing the values and institutions of democracy.

We have come together to resist the threat to democracy from chauvinism, sectarianism, and communalism. Increased securitisation and militarisation of states and society in the name of combating terrorism and defending national security and increasing arbitrary detention, torture, custodial rape and extra-judicial killings have reduced space for democratic dissent and freedoms.

We have come together to respond to new challenges that have emerged in the form of climate change and environmental degradation which are of transnational dimensions;

extraction of natural resources; food, water and energy crisis; and resource grab by governments and corporates.

We must fight growing violence against women and girls, lower caste members, various tribal groups and indigenous peoples. Must must oppose discrimination against all minorities, including religious, sexual, linguistic, cultural and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees.

The systematic and structural processes and practices of discrimination further reinforce and reconstitute traditional forms of exploitative and oppressive structures. This includes patriarchy and caste, which are recreated in new forms, in the name of progress, modernisation and reform.

The People's SAARC noted the renewed focus on SAARC by member countries and believes its stated goals of "deeper integration for peace and prosperity" is possible only when this cooperation goes beyond the interests of regional elites and corporations.

It must allow socio-economic empowerment and enable the people of South Asia to build their regional identity. It must push just and

sustainable development towards reshaping the democratic institutions.

The official SAARC summit issued a long statement filled with empty word on issues of regional cooperation, combating terrorism, poverty alleviation, development goals, food security, the environment, women's rights and access to health and education.

The South Asian region features some of the world's worst human development indicators. According to conservative estimates, 44% of the population of India lives in poverty on less than US\$1 a day.

In Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the statistics are slightly better " at 38%, 31% and 29% respectively. In Bhutan and Afghanistan, where data is unavailable, the proportion of people living on US\$1 a day or less is likely comparable with India in Bhutan's case and much higher in Afghanistan. Internationally, South Asia has the worst indicators for female illiteracy and has very poor rates of child mortality.

The reason is simple. All the countries of South Asia are implementing neoliberal agendas. They are busy in privatising and taking loans from

International Monetary Fund and World Bank that come with neoliberal conditions.

Capitalism in all the countries has ensured there is a great divide among the population. Some of the world's most most rich people can be found in India as well as the most poor. Feudalism remain intact in various forms, while religious fundamentalism has emerged one of the region's most threatening challenges.

In India and Pakistan, there is race to increase military spending and other countries are not far behind. There is no education for all, but Indian and Pakistani rulers are proud to be part of so-called nuclear nation club.

The SAARC process has become a laughing stock despite the high expectations the summit built after the friendly gestures from all the head of the states.

It is the process of the People's SAARC that can have a positive effect by bringing together the real representatives of the people. An integrated, nuclear-free, nuclear free South Asia is still a dream to be realised.

*December 6, 2014*

## **The Mexican Crisis Deepens**

**10 December 2014, by Dan La Botz**

Then, in early November, the media discovered that, in a flagrant conflict of interest, President Enrique Pe  a Nieto and his wife Ang  lica Rivera had a \$7 million home in the exclusive Lomas neighborhood [21] "the president's wife call it "their real home"  "a modern house that belonged to a subsidiary of Grupo Higa, a company that had done hundreds of millions of dollars of business with the State of Mexico when Pe  a Nieto was governor and which had just signed a contract on November 3 with a Chinese-led consortium to build a \$3.7 billion high-

speed railroad between Mexico City and Queretaro. The president and his wife quickly announced that the house was not a gift but that she was buying the home and the government canceled the contract for construction of the railroad.

The killing and kidnapping of the students in Ayotzinapa on the orders of local government and carried out by the local police  "against a backdrop of eight years of the war on drugs that has taken 110,000 lives, seen as many as 20,000 others disappeared, and left over one million displaced  "has led

to massive protest demonstrations over the last two months by students, teachers in Guerrero, in the Mexican capital, and in several other states.

While the current crisis is very serious and the mostly peaceful protests have been inspiring and militant, so far the movement — without a strong organization itself and without having created a political leadership — will be challenged to bring significant reform to the Mexican government and to society at large. The movement is large, angry, and in motion, but it does not appear to be big enough yet



to move the powers-that-be, who have indicated their willingness to use police and military repression to stop any threat to the government and the economic establishment.

Though many Mexicans throughout the country are concerned and angry about the disappearance of the students and the government and police role in it, the protest movement so far has been concentrated in Guerrero where the crime took place, Mexico City, and other a few other western, central and southeastern states such as Michoacán, Morelos, and Oaxaca. The large and less populous states of the north, distant both geographically and culturally, have also seen some significant protests. The dominant groups at the center of the movement have been teachers and students, with some participation from middle class and working class groups. Most Mexicans have yet to take a stand and the working classes with few exceptions remain observers. With the left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) implicated in the crime, the new Movement of National Renovation (MORENA) party still in formation and committed to an electoral strategy, and the public fed up with politics as usual, there seems to be little chance that this movement can find a political vehicle to give expression to the movement.

Peña Nieto's government has been embarrassed by the revelations of the president's conflict of interest, the government at the highest levels and shaken by the wide-spread criticism and massive protests. Still, it has shown few signs of division and little lack of confidence in dealing with the crisis.

Realizing the depth of the crisis, the extent of the public disaffection, and the size and significance of the movement, on November 27 Peña Nieto took for himself the movement's slogan "We are all Ayotzinapa!" In a remarkable official statement showing that the government has been shaken by the crisis, he said, "The unfortunate events in Iguala have shown that Mexico has deficiencies and conditions to overcome. The shout 'We are all Ayotzinapa' is a cry to continue transforming Mexico. The shout

'We are all Ayotzinapa' is an example of a nation that has come together in solidarity in difficult moments. As a society we should have the capacity to channel our pain and indignation into constructive propositions. Facing the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we will demonstrate again the unity, the character, and the determination of the Mexican people. The road for Mexico should be peace, unity, and development." At the same time, Peña Nieto proposed the creation new anti-corruption system, government take-over of crime-controlled municipalities, and special economic zones to help the country's most backward regions.

The president, his interior minister, the attorney general, and the head of the army and navy have taken a clear stand indicating their preparedness to use a heavy hand against protestors who become a threat to the established order. Still, should new crimes such as took place in Ayotzinapa continue to be committed or should there be new revelations of presidential corruption, the movement could grow and spread. Or if Mexico's independent labor unions were to throw themselves into the balance on the side of the protest movement that could be decisive. And we have seen some very tentative moves in that direction. But for now it seems the government is intent on dragging out the investigations, accompanied by pledges of its concern, sincerity, transparency, and seriousness, until December 12 when the Christmas season begins, lasting until January 6, no doubt believing that by then Ayotzinapa will have become history.

## Two Months of Protest

The protests over the murders and disappearances that began in late September continued throughout October and reached a peak on November 20, anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution when tens of thousands"some say hundreds of thousands"marched and rallied in the zócalo, the national plaza. Beginning in late September, protestors, striking out at symbols of

government and politics burned the Iguala city hall, the Party of the Democratic Revolution state office in Chilpancingo, and in a large protest on November 8, burned the door of the National Palace in Mexico City. The tense atmosphere and the authorities' tendency to use a heavy hand can be seen in the police incursion into the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City and a military unit's entrance into the Autonomous University of Coahuila in Torreon, Coahuila"reminiscent of the military take over of UNAM in 1968 and again in 1971.

The parents of the 43 disappeared students made a pilgrimage through neighboring states on their way to Mexico City for the November 20 demonstration, continuing their demand that their children be released and returned to them alive. While the movement's slogan has been "They took them alive, and alive we want them back," many believe that the students must already have been killed. The Mexico City demonstration was by far the largest, but there have been dozens of others, some protests of thousands in several Mexican states. A number of university campuses have seen not only protests but also strikes by students, faculty, and workers. And in the demonstration in Mexico City on October 28 unions that form part of the National Union of Workers (UNT) joined the students. Yet, at the same time it should be noted that the leadership of the large public employees union (ISSSTE) simply ignored the student disappearance and the scandal of the presidential residence and expressed its continued support for Peña Nieto, for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and for the government.

As a result of the November protests in the zócalo in Mexico City, eleven protestors were arrested and charged with criminal association, mutiny and attempted homicide of a police officer. Amnesty International and many Mexican organizations have called the charges highly exaggerated. The arrests have led to another protest movement especially among university students calling for their immediate release. Therefore, there are now in

Mexico two parallel protest movements, one calling for the 43 students kidnapped at Ayotzinapa to be returned alive and the other calling for the release of the 11 students arrested for protesting the Ayotzinapa disappearances. The missing Mexican students, their families, friends, and the movement have received tremendous international solidarity from groups of all sorts around the world, with protests staged at Mexican embassies and consulates in several countries. Many human rights organizations in Mexico and around the world have decried the Mexican government's failure to adequately respond.

## **The government united**

The revelations of the presidential couple's occupation of a home owned by Grupo Higa which had done hundreds of millions of dollar deals with Peña Nieto when he was governor and which stood to be involved in a multi-billion dollar deal with him as president caused some embarrassment and discomfort for the president, but it failed to open up any rift within the high levels of the administration. The conservative National Action Party (PAN) in particular went after the issue, but that was of course to be expected from the opposition party. Peña Nieto and his cabinet appeared absolutely united around a hard line toward violent protest accompanied by declarations of their commitment to see justice done.

President Peña Nieto speaking on November 20, the 104th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution, established the government's position and the tone of official statements. "Mexico is wounded, but the only way to alleviate this pain is justice and peace," he said. Mexicans, he told a special meeting of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, want the law to be observed and want order to be established." Violence, he said, was absolutely unacceptable, stating that both the government and the society reject it. At the same time, he asserted the "loyalty, nobility, and professionalism" of the armed forces.

Similarly, Juan N. Silva Meza, president of the Supreme Court, asserted that Mexico's Revolution of 1910 had left the country with institutions and laws so that it could avoid in the future an event as bloody as the Mexican Revolution. In these turbulent times, he said, all branches of the Mexican government should be united. The Secretary of National Defense, Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda, speaking on the same occasion and receiving an award for fifty years of service, said, "Violence of any kind is unacceptable" but added that the country needs a "plurality of voices." Solving the problem of violence, said the Secretary, was not just a problem of the state but of the entire society. What these statements suggest is that while protest has surged from below, it has had little impact on the government which has dedicated its energy to developing a narrative of the crime and a story about how it is handling the issue which will calm critics and placate the public.

## **The fabrication of an official story**

Since our last report on these events [22], the government and the media have worked to establish an official story with the goal of proving that they have uncovered the wrongdoers, that they are seeking justice, and that the matter can soon be considered a closed case. Yet, because the Mexican public knows that the police generally use torture to obtain confessions that often prove false, few believe the official story.

The official story goes like this: Ayotzinapa Mayor José Luis Abarca Velázquez and his wife María de los Angeles Pineda Villa, both affiliated with the leftist opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), were responsible for the police attack and for then turning over the students to "Guerreros Unidos? (United Warriors), a criminal gang that, according to authorities and the media suffocated 15 and then killed the rest one way or another, threw their bodies into a pit, poured on gasoline and burned them, and finally threw the ashes in a river. The Mexican army officers at a local base claim to have somehow remained

unaware of the mayhem taking place in Ayotzinapa.

The mayor and his wife, who had been fugitives, as well as police officers have been arrested. The governor of the state, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, also of the PRD, had already resigned on October 3.

Many doubt this quasi-official narrative of the events, having no faith in the government or the police. One reason for the widespread doubt is that Mexicans know all too well that the military and police act with impunity and that confessions extracted through torture always produce statements that corroborate an official narrative concocted by the authorities to cover up wrongdoing.

## **Mexican justice: torture to support confession of an official story**

For decades both Mexican and international human rights organizations have documented widespread torture in Mexico. On Sept. 4 of this year Amnesty International released a report entitled "Out of Control: torture and Other Ill-Treatment in Mexico" stating that "...torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment play a central role in policing and public security operations by military and police forces across Mexico. These practices are widespread and are frequently condoned, tolerated or ignored by other law enforcement officials, superior officers, prosecutors, judges and some human rights commissions. The result is almost total impunity for abusers and a real fear among the population that arrest for any reason is likely to result in torture.

The U.S. State Department's "Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2013" for Mexico similarly concluded, "There were frequent reports of citizens and foreign nationals beaten, suffocated, tortured with electric shocks, raped, and threatened with death in the custody of arresting

authorities. According to the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Institute for Security and Democracy (INSYDE), other torture practices included hanging individuals from their feet, fingers, or neck.” This kind of torture used by the police in the process of their “investigations” means that one can have no trust in anything said by the police or their supposed “suspects.”

One of the independent Mexican human rights organizations, CentroProdh, has raised the slogan, “Torture is not justice. Stop the fabrication of guilty persons.” Their website carries a graphic that clearly shows the “cycle of torture,” the system by which the police and military extract false confessions and fabricate narratives to explain crimes for which the police themselves are, not infrequently, responsible. The website recounts the sad stories of men and women tortured by soldiers and police officers.

This scenario is well known, as Amnesty International wrote in its Annual Report on Human Rights Practices 2013, “There was widespread use of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment to obtain information and confessions from suspects under interrogation. The CNDH reported receiving 1,662 complaints of torture and ill-treatment during the year. There were no reported convictions for torture during the year.” At the same time, says Amnesty in the same report, 98 percent of real crimes go unpunished.

Mexican civilian authorities, the military, and police count upon the passage of time to take care of all of these problems. That is, as time passes crimes become more difficult to solve. Witnesses die, or are killed. Evidence decays or is lost. The media loses interest in old crimes as it moves on to new ones, with new photos of beaten and bruised men, looking terrified, holding guns in the glare of the flash. What was news becomes history.

The most famous example of this strategy, of course, is the story of the femicides, the killing of young women in Ciudad Juárez across the border from El Paso. Since the 1990s

hundreds of girls and young women in Juárez have been abducted, their bodies disfigured, and murdered, while others disappeared completely. Many of the murder victims bore the scars of what had apparently been ritual, sexual, sadistic murder. The authorities concocted various narratives over the years, arresting and charging a number of individuals for one or more of the murders representing only a small percentage of all of those killed. All of this takes place in the shadow of the multinational corporations’ maquiladoras where many of the young women worked. There have been hundreds of journalistic articles, academic studies, national and international investigations as well as the documentary “Señorita Extraviada” (Missing Young Woman). What emerges from any serious look is, at best, the incompetence of the police and, at worst, their complicity in a cover up and perhaps in the murders themselves.

We used to think that Juárez with its 400 or more dead girls and women was as bad as it could get. Then came President Felipe Calderón and his drug wars of 2006-2012. Calderón dispatched tens of thousands of federal police, mostly to the northern border region of Mexico, to fight the drug cartels. The result — in struggles between police and drug dealers and between rival drug lords — was the killing of over 100,000 people, the disappearance of 20,000, and the displacement of an estimated 1.6 million. Investigation of the more than 100,000 homicides committed led to conviction in only 1 to 2 percent of the cases.

There are plenty of atrocities. Mexico has a long history of massacres, many of them political. There was the Aguas Blancas massacre of 17 farmers in Guerrero on June 28, 1995, members of Organización Campesina de la Sierra Sur (South Mountain Range Farmer Organization). Then, too, the Acteal massacre of 45 poor farmers, members of Las Abejas, a pacifist peasant organization carried out by a paramilitary organization in Chenalhó, Chiapas on December 22, 1997. Those were political massacres. Then came the drug war period. In June of 2010 Mexican authorities found a mass

grave in Guerrero containing at least 55 bodies and perhaps as many as 100, apparently the victims of a mass execution (although we don’t know why). That same month, a grave in Nuevo Leon in the north of Mexico was found containing 70 bodies, also apparently a mass execution, reason unknown.

One can go on and on with these lists: 193 bodies in a common grave in San Fernando, Tamaulipas in April of 2011. That same month, 340 in a mass grave in Durango. And many other mass graves of 30 or 40 since then. Also, of course, the 19 mass graves found while investigating the disappearance of the 43 students. The dead were mostly not important people. Many, no doubt, were drug dealers, but there were also workers, farmers, students, mothers, children, old men and women. So the police did not think that their cases called for a serious investigation. Their names went on a list, their photos in some cases appeared in the newspaper. They have been dead a long time now, and so, of course, the witnesses have moved, or died, or perhaps themselves been killed. Evidence has decayed or disappeared. The Christmas holidays have come and gone. They will have become part of history, and their investigation will be not police work, but work for historians.

## The role of the United States

The United States government and American business exert enormous power on the Mexican government in many different ways. U.S. corporations invest billions in Mexico and exert economic and political influence there as well as having a tremendous impact on Mexican society. The American president, U.S. diplomats, government officials, Senators and Congressmen also develop ties to their Mexican counterparts and exert influence affecting policies. The U.S. Military, intelligence agencies, and various police forces such as the DEA, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and others also collaborate with and sometime become directly involved in Mexico.

Washington has spent \$3 billion in the last six years on the Mérida Initiative, a border security, counter-narcotics, and counterterrorism program established by the George W. Bush administration in 2008. The U.S. Defense Department also spends millions of dollars to train the Mexican military. Both the U.S. government and U.S. corporations have millions of dollars that can be distributed in Mexico to help to lubricate the machine of government to manufacture the results they desire.

President Barack Obama repeatedly lauded the government of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and its war on drugs and has, in the last two years, praised President Enrique Peñón Nieto, even as tens of thousands of Mexicans were killed in the drug wars, thousands more disappeared, and hundreds of thousands were displaced. Yet, it would be a mistake to argue, as John M. Ackerman does that President Barack Obama and the United States Congress are directly responsible for the tragedy of the 3 missing students, and likely massacred student activists in the Mexican state of Guerrero and for the political crisis that has followed."

While subject to enormous pressure, Mexico is not a puppet state run by the U.S. government, but an independent capitalist state with its own government, rival political parties, and policies. The Mexican capitalist class and la clase política together with the political parties and the state bureaucracy are principally responsible for what happens in Mexico, although clearly the U.S. support for the Mexican government and military dramatically magnifies the level of violence and damage to Mexican society.

## **The crisis of the Party of the Democratic Revolution**

While the disappearance of the 43 students has challenged the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)

of President Enrique Peñón Nieto, it has had a devastating impact on the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The PRD, founded in 1989 by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and other leader of the PRI, former Communist Party members and other leftists, adopted a social democratic program, affiliated with the Socialist International, and became a major left-of-center political force, although because of corporate media and electoral fraud it was never able to win a presidential election.

Whether the presidential candidate was the more statesman-like Cárdenas or the more populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the PRD was a force to be reckoned with. Kept from claiming the presidency, the PRD over the years had a substantial congressional delegation in both the Senate and the House, governed several states, and presided over many municipalities. Despite corrupt political leadership and proof of fraud within the PRD itself, the party continued to win the support of about a third of the Mexican people. The party, however, is now in crisis. The events at Ayotzinapa—a town governed by a PRD mayor in a state headed by a PRD governor—could lead to the crumbling of the party.

Cárdenas, the founder, three-time presidential candidate (1988, 1994, and 2000), the symbolic leaders and the moral authority of the party announced on November 25 that he was resigning from the PRD. Cárdenas, now 75 years old, made the announcement of his resignation after meeting with other historic and current leaders of the PRD who have said that they too may leave the PRD. Cárdenas declared that the PRD was "on the verge of dissolving, or ending up a simple political-electoral franchise subordinate to interests alien to those of the broad base of its members." Cárdenas' difference with the party leadership have to do not only with Ayotzinapa, but with the PRD's having signed the Pact for Mexico, joining with the PRI and the conservative National Action Party (PAN), and for all practical purposes supporting President Peñón Nieto's neoliberal economic program. Cárdenas continues to fight to preserve the Mexican state's

ownership of the oil industry—originally nationalized by his father President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1938—and for keeping oil exploration, production, and refining out of foreign hands.

Not surprisingly, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who not long ago resigned from the PRD to establish the Movement of National Renovation Party (MORENA), said that Cárdenas had done well to resign. Yet López Obrador, who was the PRD's presidential candidate in 2006 and again in 2012, has also been linked to the PRD establishment in Guerrero. As a presidential candidate of the PRD, López Obrador campaigned alongside the PRD state governor and Iguala mayor in Guerrero, and his opponents have suggested that López Obrador and MORENA are also tainted, a charge denied both by him and leaders of MORENA.

## **Constituent Congress? What does he mean?**

Just days before his resignation, alluding to the events at Ayotzinapa, Cárdenas called for the convening of a constituent congress to write a new Mexican Constitution as the only way for the country to escape from the crisis in which it finds itself. Historically in Mexico and other nations, a constituent assembly or congress has usually arisen from a revolution, a deep political crisis, some major social upheaval leading to a new balance of forces and a new leadership group. Such a constituent congress, even if remaining a capitalist system, often completely changes governmental structures.

Over the last two decades the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and other leftist organizations or social movements have also called for a constituent congress but with the notion of the total revamping of the government. Cárdenas, however, seems to see a constituent congress as leaving the country's fundamental institutions intact while providing a space for democratic discussions. It is quite doubtful that there exists a large



enough, broad enough, and deep enough social movement at this time to force the calling of such an assembly by the government or to call such an assembly on its own accord.

## What are the movement's prospects?

The current situation is probably the deepest crisis since the events surrounding the 2006 presidential election, believed by many to have been illegal and fraudulent. At that time, Andrés Manuel López Obrador's followers organized demonstrations of up to one million people and occupied the major thoroughfares of Mexico City for weeks. The current demonstrations, large and militant as they have been, have not reached that level.

Still, the movement calling for the students to be returned alive and in protest against government at all levels has been growing. Should the movement become larger and stronger, the government will be prepared to use such massive repression that it is crushed, the leaders jailed, and the public demoralized. The precedents for this can be found in 1959 railroad workers strike, 1968 student movement, 1976 electrical workers strike.

## The Mexican state: divided, corrupt, tending toward crisis

The combination of angry protests from below over the murder and disappearance of the students and the scandal at the top have made this the most significant Mexican political crisis since the 2006 elections when protests over election fraud brought a million to the capital and protestors blocked streets for weeks. The President of Uruguay, commenting on the disappearances, called Mexico "a failed state [23]," a remark he almost immediately retracted after Mexico

protested. His comment however raised again the question posed only a few years ago by Janet Napolitano, when she was Secretary of Homeland Security, and said that Mexico's drug dealers posed an "existential risk" for Mexico. Many others have suggested over the past several years that Mexico is a failing state. And others have asked, if it is not a failing state, then what what sort of state is Mexico [24]?

The suggestion has been made by various analysts that it is a "narco-state" controlled by the drug lords, most recently in *Le Monde Diplomatique* [25]. One might draw from a narco-state analysis that the goal should be a return to capitalist rule of law, perhaps as the first stage of a broader struggle. The conclusion that Mexico is a narco-state, however, is fundamentally wrong. Mexico remains a capitalist state representing the great financial and corporate interests of the country—"some of which are those of drug dealers"—but divided into political fiefdoms, riddled with corruption, and facing tremendous centrifugal forces as a variety of forces from drug cartels to self-defense groups to indigenous movements attempt to achieve autonomy at the expense of the central government, creating the tendency toward a permanent crises of governability.

The government serves the interests of the wealthiest Mexicans and of the largest domestic and foreign corporations, allowing the continued deterioration of the lives of middle class, working class, and poor Mexicans. The power of the state is used principally to enhance the wealth and power of legitimate business, even if it is true that it has also become deeply intertwined at many levels with the drug dealers. Mexico's politics do not revolve around drugs, they revolve around capitalist finance, production, and trade. The trade policies such as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994 and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) now under negotiation are the result of collaboration between politicians, government functionaries, and corporate leaders.

Similarly, the neoliberal economic

"reforms" of the last two years that have brought labor, education, and energy production and the oil industry more into line with demands of national and international capital. The labor reforms in particular have increased the power of business and reduced the already limited power of unions and workers to organize, strike, and negotiate.

Drug dealing, it is true, represents a multi-billion dollar business, but it is only one of several sectors which bring billions of dollars to the foreign or Mexican corporations in Mexico. Drugs are more or less of the same magnitude as the other large and important sources of earnings, namely tourism, manufacturing, petroleum, mining, and remittances from workers abroad. In rather rough round numbers the role of these sectors in the country's earnings are:

Manufacturing exports - \$110 billion  
Drugs - estimated between \$13 and \$50 billion  
Petroleum - \$32 billion  
Remittances - \$22.4 billion in 2012  
Mining - 19.4 billion in 2013

The Mexican billionaires who control these sectors dominate the Mexican state, and most of them are not drug dealers. The problem is that the federal government's ability to maintain the monopoly of violence and to control the society tends, because of the drug dealers powerful economic interests, to face a constant, but never realized, crisis of potential disintegration.

There is no doubt that the illegal nature of the drug business leads drug dealers and those they work with in government, military, and the police to adopt an extralegal approach—often brutally violent in their dealings with the citizenry. It should be pointed out that Mexican authorities often used such brutal methods of repression long before drugs became so significant, although it is true that the situation is much, much worse today.

The involvement with drug dealers and other criminal gangs of politicians of all parties, as well as of the government, the military, and the police authorities, at all levels from top to bottom in most Mexican states,

does give the government the character of a political mafia that is prepared to use extortion, kidnapping, rape, and murder against the citizenry. Consequently citizens, who never had any confidence in the police, have increasingly little confidence in government of any sort.

Yet, at the same time, to use a term more often applied to Turkey, "the deep state," that is the "state within the state" remains a fundamentally capitalist state controlled by high finance, major corporations, the

political party leaderships, the highest level government officials, the military command, and the top level police officials. The function of this deep state is to protect and enhance the interests of capital over and against those of the Mexican people.

Tens of thousands are in motion throughout Mexico, demanding justice from the government, and many around the world support them. The struggle today is not simply for what government officials and the media call "the rule of law," that is capitalist business as usual, but for a genuinely

democratic society and a government committed to social justice. As the call for a constituent congress suggests, many in Mexico believe that the government such as it is now constructed around the interests of Mexican and foreign banks and corporations could ever achieve such a goal. The struggle is for a society where the people come before the politicians, the wealthy, and profits and it is a fight that deserves our full support.

*November 29, 2014*

## How is this not murder?

9 December 2014, by **Danny Katch**

In August, officer Daniel Pantaleo strangled Eric Garner to death, using a banned chokehold, in broad daylight on a sidewalk in Staten Island. As news of the latest travesty of justice spread on Wednesday, hundreds converged on Union Square in Manhattan — the same gathering point for the marches and protests just a week ago following the non-indictment of the Ferguson, Missouri, cop who gunned down Mike Brown. By 9 p.m., more than 1,000 protesters were gathered at Rockefeller Center in midtown, where the annual holiday tree-lighting ceremony was taking place. Other demonstrators held a die-in at Grand Central Terminal, and hundreds more took over the West Side Highway.

Even larger numbers of people are expected for a long-planned response rally set for the day after the Staten Island grand jury decision — they will gather at 5:30 p.m. at Foley Square on Thursday, December 4, before a planned march over the Brooklyn Bridge.

**THIS ONE is on video.** That's what Eric Garner's friends and family in Staten Island told themselves when they heard the terrible news that a grand jury in St. Louis County had failed to indict the Ferguson, Missouri,

police officer who murdered Mike Brown.

Sure, Ferguson was a travesty of justice — but in the case of the strangling of Eric Garner by NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo on July 17, the crime was captured from beginning to end on a video taken by Ramsey Orta, a bystander.

"You'd have to be blind or prejudiced to say there's no probable cause," Garner's mother Gwen Carr told Staten Island Live [26] after the Ferguson grand jury decision. Twan Scarlett, who lives in Garner's neighborhood of Tompkinsville, agreed, adding: "I will go crazy [if Pantaleo isn't indicted]. The video is the key in this situation." [27]

But the video wasn't the key. As in Ferguson, the real key was the unspoken rule of the criminal injustice system: Killer cops are above the law — and they can get away with murder.

There is no other conclusion to draw about the announcement on Wednesday that another grand jury let another killer cop go free. Richmond County District Attorney Daniel Donovan declared that he couldn't get Daniel Pantaleo indicted on a single

charge.

It's hard to imagine a more open-and-shut case of a police officer illegally using deadly force. The coroner's office ruled Garner's death a homicide, caused by Pantaleo's use of a chokehold that is banned under the official guidelines of the NYPD.

There were no claims that Eric Garner was acting violent or had committed any crime other than selling loose cigarettes on the street. Pantaleo only encountered Garner because he was responding to a police call about a fight—which Garner himself had intervened in to break up by the time Pantaleo arrived on the scene.

But above all, there was the video, which showed that police initiated the confrontation with Garner and almost immediately resorted to a chokehold against him. The video captured the words Garner gasped, which soon resonated across New York City: "I can't breathe."

With the video, there could be no claims that Eric Garner posed a threat to the cops, no Ferguson-style testimony from the Pantaleo or anyone else that he "looked like a demon" or started a "bull rush" toward a crowd of heavily armed cops.

Earlier this week, President Barack Obama announced that his response to the outrage in Ferguson would be a plan to outfit 50,000 police officers across the country with body cameras. [28] This is supposed to ensure that allegations of police violence will be resolved impartially.

But within a few days, we learned that it doesn't mean a thing if deadly and totally unwarranted police violence is captured in its entirety on video—because Daniel Pantaleo walked free anyway.

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Some people hoped for a different outcome to the grand jury deliberations in Staten Island because of the contrast between New York City and Ferguson.

Last year, Bill de Blasio was elected mayor of New York, in part because his campaign criticized the racial bias of the "stop and frisk" police policy promoted by his predecessor Michael Bloomberg.

But one of de Blasio's first moves as mayor was to make William Bratton his new police commissioner. Bratton was commissioner in the 1990s under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, when he introduced New York City to the "broken windows" strategy—which calls for aggressive policing and arrests for minor crimes and "quality of life" violations.

When Daniel Pantaleo and his fellow cops began the harassment of Eric Garner on a street corner in Tompkinsville on July 17, they were following the "broken windows" playbook of de Blasio's handpicked commissioner.

Meanwhile, the prosecutor in Staten Island, Daniel Donovan played the same waiting game as his counterpart in Ferguson, dragging out the grand jury process for months in the hope that the initial anger over Garner's death might calm down.

But Donovan can move pretty quick

when he wants to—as we know from the case of Ramsey Orta.

Orta is the reason the world has seen the image of Eric Garner being strangled to death—he took the video of the murder. And during the months that New Yorkers were waiting to hear whether Daniel Pantaleo would be indicted for Garner's murder, Orta was arrested, indicted, prosecuted and put in prison on a gun possession charge—even though his fingerprints weren't found on the gun he was convicted of possessing.

Orta and his supporters say he was targeted for prosecution by police because of the video. "They're bringing up his past," said Orta's wife Chrissie Ortiz. "They should be bringing up the officer's past." [29]

Ortiz is absolutely right.

Before killing Eric Garner, Officer Pantaleo had been brought up on civil rights charges for two separate incidents. In the first, which the city settled for \$30,000, Pantaleo was accused of strip-searching two men in broad daylight. In the second, which is still pending, he is accused of arresting someone for no good reason. In both cases, Pantaleo is accused of lying in his reports. [30]

Yet despite this record of dishonesty and the video evidence showing Pantaleo strangling a defenseless man, prosecutor Daniel Donovan couldn't come up with an indictment.

"People thought we were being extreme," said Rev. Al Sharpton told the New York Times, referring to his call for a federal prosecutor to handle the Garner case, instead of Donovan. "But now, I think you can see [why] we have no confidence in the state grand juries, whether in Ferguson or in New York, because there is an intrinsic relationship between state prosecutors and the police. They depend on the police for their evidence, they run for office and depend on the unions for endorsements." [31]

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Sharpton is right about the cozy relationship between prosecutors and police, but the problem runs much deeper than that. It goes all the way to the racist foundations that the U.S. was built upon—with an entire "justice" system, from beat cops to Supreme Court justices, that upholds the idea that police have a right to use whatever force they deem necessary to protect themselves against anyone they deem threatening.

Ramsey Orta's video provided proof positive that Daniel Pantaleo murdered Eric Garner. But for Daniel Donovan and the criminal injustice system, it isn't a matter of proof, but perspective. Eric Garner was a large Black man, angry at being repeatedly hassled by police. That made him a threat in the eyes of the cops—and so maximum violence is justified.

It will take a far-reaching movement to challenge the racism and injustice that runs so deeply in the U.S. government. The protests that erupted after the deaths of Mike Brown and Eric Garner—and that revived with even greater numbers after the grand jury system failed to produce the slightest evidence of justice—are a start.

As in Ferguson, the media and politicians will focus on the tone of protesters in New York City, and how many windows they break—not on their cries of pain and demands for justice.

"I'm not with the riots," Eric Garner's mother Gwen Carr told a reporter after the Ferguson grand jury failed to indict the cop who killed Michael Brown. "But I feel like I'm exploding inside." [32]

Anger is boiling up against the racist injustice of the criminal justice system. The question is when it will boil over, and what will happen then.

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# The Real Face of US Elections

3 December 2014, by Jeff Mackler

The Democrats and Republicans spent an unprecedented mid-term, if not all-time, election total of \$4 billion, roughly \$2 billion each. The giant corporations that footed the bills for their chosen candidates undoubtedly will get trillions of dollars in return, as is always the case in capitalist elections. The working class, which creates all wealth, will continue to pay regardless of who officially runs the country.

Indeed, working people continued to lose ground in wages and social conditions during the Obama administration's entire reign since the 2008 elections, at which time the Democrats won control of both houses. At the time, Obama won the largest percentage of the white vote ever, almost all of the votes of Blacks, and close to 86 percent of Latinos.

This year, now that his poll figures have sagged deeply, Obama was invited to stump for fellow Democrats in only a handful of locations. Speaking in Philadelphia on Nov. 1, Obama poured on the populist rhetoric, pointing out: "The biggest corporations, they don't need a champion. The wealthiest Americans don't need another champion, they're doing just fine."

But the Democratic Party candidates, Obama declared, would be the champions of working people, "the middle class," the "hard-working single mother" and the "first-generation college student." Is there any reason at all to believe Obama's promises? Let's look at the numbers:

Obama gifted only \$30 trillion or so to the corporate elite in bailouts of every sort. During 2012-13 he granted the great banks through the Federal Reserve's "Quantitative Easing" or "economic stimuli to the rich" policy only \$89 billion per month. The same crooked banks, the largest in the country, sold the government essentially worthless mortgages. They

were eventually fined several billion, a mere "slap on the wrist" fraction of what they stole. No jail for anyone! In contrast, George Bush only granted the corporate elite a mere \$1 trillion or two during his reign.

Obama's policies brought the stock market to record highs since the economic meltdown. Ninety percent of the population was smashed, while the top ten percent flourished in the context of the largest rich-poor gap in the modern era. George Bush was a miser to the corporate elite by comparison.

Obama raised the war and surveillance budgets to record highs, today approaching \$2 trillion a year. Bush was far behind. Yet it was Obama, after all, who was elected as a "man of peace and democratic rights!"

Obama started, continued and/or secretly organized seven wars at once: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt and Ukraine, plus lots of covert wars across the globe—drone wars, death-squad privatized army wars, and more. George Bush was a pacifist by comparison.

"Champion of the working class" Obama created six million new jobs since 2009, 76 percent of which were low-wage (50-65 percent less than full time jobs), non-union, no benefit, part-time or temporary work at substandard conditions. Meanwhile, one million full-time jobs per year, largely union jobs, were offshored to distant lands to increase the super-profits of U.S. multi-national corporations.

Obama reduced the official unemployment rate to slightly less than seven percent today. But the Bureau of Labor Statistics doesn't include in its figures the 8 million "discouraged" workers who have dropped out of the employment market. They have no work but are not "unemployed" according to the

government's number crunchers. In truth, close to 35 percent of the U.S. workforce today has no job!

Obama passed the Affordable Health Care Act, which gifted the health-care and pharmaceutical monopolies a cool trillion dollars more than they had stolen previously, while simultaneously robbing millions of union workers of health-care benefits won in struggle. Yesterday's "Cadillac plans" have also been on Obama's chopping block.

Obama's promised Comprehensive Immigration Reform disappeared. In its place he deported two million immigrants, exceeding the total of all the presidents before him. He even attempted to circumvent the law that mandates that immigrants receive a fair hearing before being thrown out of the country. Here he took aim at the 50,000 children who massed at the U.S. border believing that they could enter the U.S. to escape the U.S.-imposed poverty and exploitation of Latin America.

Obama's NSA surveillance policies and his "interpretation" of the Patriot Act made George Bush look like a civil libertarian. Bush never organized 1.3 million security-cleared NSA and other spy agency operatives to record all electronic communications of all U.S. citizens and, indeed, those of the whole world. Moreover, Obama prosecuted more people under the Patriot Act and related legislation than all previous presidents combined. Obama is the world's number-one shale fracker, poisoning the nation's waters and raising global temperatures with abandon.

Weeks before the election, when pollsters everywhere predicted major Democratic Party defeats and loss of its Senate majority, the party's top strategists embarked on a campaign to close the gap by a massive effort to turn out Black and Latino voters.



In the Southern states that Obama won in 2008, via unprecedented Black participation, huge sums were expended in mid-October 2014 to place radio and newspaper ads in local Black community media. The ads, highlighted in a late October issue of The New York Times, warned that Republican victories would mean "more Fergusons" and "more Trayvon Martins," as if the nation's racist criminal justice system were restricted to police brutality, murder, and mass incarceration in the largely Republican South. Indeed, "liberal" Blue State California leads the way in these matters, perhaps second only to Texas.

Southern Republicans, the modern-day heirs to the racist Dixiecrats (Southern racist Democrats, themselves heirs to the former slave owners, Klansmen, and White Citizens Council terrorists who ruled the South after the smashing of Reconstruction) cried foul and accused the South's post Nixon-era remnant Democrats of "race-baiting."

The Democrats looked to a 2013 Census Bureau report indicating that in 2012 a higher percentage of African Americans than whites voted in a presidential election for the first time in history. This was the matchup between President Obama and Republican nominee Mitt Romney, in which 66 percent of eligible Blacks voted, as compared to 64.1 percent of whites. Similar statistics apply to Latino voters.

But polls before the current election predicted a significant decline in illusions in either of the two capitalist parties among oppressed nationalities. A national poll a week or so before the election recorded that the Latino voter participation would decline by at least 10 percent, with one in three Latinos stating that they knew of at least one family member or friend who had been deported "under Obama's rule. The percentage of Latinos who indicated "significant confidence" in the Democrats dropped to 14 percent.

Fully 43 percent of those who were not likely to cast ballots, according to a Pew poll a week before the election, were Hispanic, African American, or other racial and ethnic

minorities," roughly double the percentage among likely voters (22 percent).

Hoopla aside regarding any significant transformation in U.S. politics that will accompany the Republican election victory, Obama's Democratic Party strategists once again signaled that the corporate agenda would be advanced with full force. A front-page story in the Nov. 2 New York Times entitled, "Braced for a Shift in Congress, Obama Is Setting a New Agenda," reported that the president's "top aides" are "mapping possible compromises with Republicans to expand trade, overhaul taxes and build roads and bridges."

Translated to the language of the ruling class, this means further lowering wages of U.S. manufacturing workers to increase U.S. corporate competitiveness abroad, while continuing to export U.S. jobs, granting deeper tax cuts for the rich at home, and lowering corporate taxes on the trillions of dollars made abroad to encourage major monopolies like Apple Corporation to repatriate its behemoth profits with minimum taxes.

For the workers, setting aside a relative pittance to repair bridges and roads will be part of fostering the false illusion that U.S. capitalists might be considering significant government spending to create jobs.

On the Republican side, the new Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell, admitted a few days before the vote that his party's pledge to repeal the Affordable Health Care Act would go nowhere "and not only because the Republicans had not achieved the required 60 Senate votes to accomplish it, or that they can utilize the special "reconciliation" procedure that requires only 51 votes, or the fact that Obama can veto any such attempt.

In truth, the year-long "debate" over this health-care legislation, which preserved and qualitatively expanded this inefficient and inadequate nearly monopolized industry, which is run for private profit of the elite insurance companies and associated financial institutions, adds additional trillions to their coffers at the expense of working people. Obama's bill, and the Republicans' too, are based not on

"taxing the rich" but rather on the "Robin Hood in reverse" thesis that workers must pay.

Obama, as is expected, can technically veto any and all appeal efforts or legislation presented to him for approval. The Republicans, in turn, have their own "strategy" to supposedly advance their agenda. They intend to offer endless amendments to any "spending bills" that might secure bipartisan support. The latter are often a requirement to avoid "shutting down the government" entirely—that is, not paying federal workers on the basis that funds to do so have been withheld. This strategy was effectively employed several times over the past years.

In such circumstances the ruling rich never fail to appoint special panels of equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans to resolve supposed differences of opinion. These are the "blue ribbon" and direct representatives of the corporate elite who truly run the country. They are the bipartisan panels of capital that engage in trading billions and trillions in taxpayer dollars among themselves to advance their corporate and banking interests at the expense of the vast majority.

The same holds for the U.S. Supreme Court, the Federal Reserve, the Internal Revenue Service and all other top institutions of the capitalist state, where daily decisions are made in the exclusive interests of the ruling 0.1 percent. That was the scene in 2008 when the nation's financial system faced imminent collapse. The top corporate and banking leaders met in private with the Treasury Secretary and the chair of the Federal Reserve to devise an unprecedented bailout, which was in a matter of a week or less, approved nearly unanimously by Congress.

The working class and its representatives are excluded from all capitalist institutions. The U.S. is an advanced capitalist state in which the fundamental institutions of corporate capital dominate public, economic, and social life in accord with their interests only.

U.S. elections, today nearly year-

round propaganda vehicles for the parties of the corporate elite, are little more than orchestrated “contests” aimed at convincing the “people” that they live in a democratic society. A recent poll indicates that 60 percent of the American people prefer a new party to emerge on the political scene, presumably one that represents their interests as opposed to those who currently govern.

They increasingly understand that there are no significant differences between Republicans, with their more overt reactionary babbling Tea Party wing, and the Democrats, with their

own “Blue Dog” wing advocating ideas and policies that are similar to those of right-wing Republicans. In the end, this charade that passes for politics devolves into backdoor decision-making on every critical issue, whether it be to wage yet another trillion-dollar war or to grant trillions more to this or that section of the corporate power structure.

The need has never been greater for working people to break from the parties of capital and build their own working-class political party based on a reinvigorated and fighting trade-union movement, as well as on the hundreds and millions more who will

be organized in new unions, all in alliance with the oppressed nationalities, immigrants, and youth. These are the kinds of institutions that the vast majority can organize, finance, participate in, control, and use to advance their interests in the political arena.

These institutions can and must also become the political expression of a fighting working class that takes on capitalist exploitation and oppression in the workplace, in the communities, and everywhere where working people fight for their basic rights.

[Socialist Action](#)

## Creating a new left

**1 December 2014, by Frances Curran**

Only certain generations get that chance. It depends on how the economic, political, social and cultural planets align.

The referendum campaign produced a newly politicised generation hungry for a society which heralds equality, ends the huge wealth inequality and gives us power and a say over our own lives.

Since Thatcher we have lived through an incremental failure of both the Labour Party and the trade unions in Scotland to effectively jam the breaks on neo-liberal policies and the deep wounds of cuts, job losses and poverty.

Despite the No vote Scotland feels like a different country. A country full of possibilities, there has been a generational shift.

Despite the No vote Scotland feels like a different country. A country full of possibilities, there has been a generational shift.

The SNP and the Yes movement have been adept at challenging the political establishment and the concentrated political power in London. Drawing

back the curtain and shining a light on a self-perpetuating elite who pass each other power, like a game of pass the parcel.

From the Commons, to the Lords, to the lobbyists, to the bankers, to the City, to the BBC, and the music starts again.

Independence offered a chance to shatter that cosy game. We may have lost this time but we have changed the rules of the game. Almost a hundred thousand people have joined Yes political parties in the weeks following the referendum. Many more have joined organisations like Women for Independence and the Radical Independence Campaign.

They are purchasing a front row seat for the dawn of a new Scotland.

Amongst such optimism Scotland is still a country that stands in the middle of a global collapse of neo-liberal capitalism facing decades of cuts and austerity.

The fight for independence will continue, but, that’s not enough.

Who is going to challenge the

economic establishment, the economic power concentrated in unregulated global corporations, the economic elite who continue to accumulate wealth as we see less of it in our daily lives?

Who is going to fight the cuts which threaten to reach so deep into our communities and public services they will make foodbanks look like a luxury?

How do we shift wealth and power to ordinary people and create a new economic model through politics and parliament and through empowering people at the grass roots? If we want that country, the one we dreamed of and aspired to, the one that mobilised hundreds of thousands into politics, we will need to do more than vote for Independence next time. We will have to fight neo-liberal capitalism on our land in the here and now.

That’s what the Scottish Left Project is about. Tens of thousands of people consider themselves to be left, to be anti-capitalist, interconnected across the Yes campaign, Women for Independence, Radical Independence, the Scottish Socialist Party, The Common Weal, The Green Party, and many more places. Can we create a

new left, learning the lessons of the past and co-operating for the future?

Let's talk, the planets are moving into alignment.

[The Scottish Left Project](#)

# Peña Nieto is on the ropes - what next?

**1 December 2014, by Héctor Márquez**

The extent of the mobilization is completely new. Every day, the ineptitude, the corruption, the cynicism and the social indifference of Peña Nieto and his government to the service of the multinationals and of Washington become more and more obvious and provoke popular anger. How could it be otherwise in a country that since the 1980s has been subjected to savage destruction of the social, economic, political and cultural heritage of the Mexican Revolution? The Mexican ruling classes, like Washington, are starting to distance themselves from their embarrassing servant. We guess that on that side they are starting to think how to save what they can. As Pepe Mujica, the Uruguayan president, said the Mexican linked to criminal elements. Under

these conditions, the risk of brutal repression which would impose terror as it did in 1968 and 1969, although real and wished for by some, would be as an adventure whose political cost would probably exceed the advantages.

## What solution to the crisis of the regime?

The risk of a replacement of Peña Nieto ensuring the continuity of the regime is quite real. A rotten solution in which the current institutions and institutional parties (PRI, PAN, PRD)

would try to sell the convocation of anticipated elections or the cold convocation of a new Constituent Assembly must be avoided at all costs. It is the very broad popular movement which must take the initiative and sweep away the debris of a regime in collapse. What was possible in Bolivia, Ecuador or in Venezuela is also possible in Mexico. The great movement of 20 November must support the unity between the student movement, democratic trade unionism, the community police and the innumerable urban and rural expressions of popular self-organization. It is the coming together of all the fightbacks resistances which will make it possible to impose the social transformations that Mexico cannot wait for any longer.

# Support grows for BDS among grassroots of US Labor movement

**1 December 2014**

Compared to its international counterparts, the U.S. labor movement has been slow to embrace BDS. Michael Letwin, co-founder of the solidarity group Labor for Palestine, suggests this is the product of the American labor movement's historical and continuing institutional support for Israel. The major US trade unions, Letwin says, have hundreds of millions of dollars in pension funds that are invested in Israel. Senior union leaders, in fear of alienating the Democratic Party and other political

allies, frequently denounce BDS and criticize their counterparts around the world who support it.

On the grassroots level, however, things look different. This summer, hundreds of US labor leaders and organizers signed on to Labor for Palestine's BDS statement. To add to these inspiring developments, on December 4th, UAW 2865, a union that represents 13,000 student workers across nine University of California campuses, will become the first U.S. union to hold a membership

vote on joining the BDS movement. Similarly encouraging are recent solidarity actions in the San Francisco Bay Area, which show that, despite the ambivalence among some union leadership, rank-and-filers do not hesitate to stand in solidarity with the oppressed.

This August, during five days and four nights of demonstrations at the Port of Oakland, a diverse group of pro-Palestine and social justice activists under the banner of the Block the Boat coalition picketed several berths

where the Israeli cargo ship Zim Piraeus attempted to dock. Activists returned to the port whenever workers were dispatched to unload it—in some cases in the middle of the night. Their numbers, which fluctuated between dozens and thousands, were not always sufficient to physically block all entrances to the vessel. Yet the action succeeded due to the support of Oakland's longshoremen, members of the International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU) Local 10, who refused to cross the community picket lines. Even when police surrounded and split protestors on multiple occasions, workers refused to proceed and unload the ship. The ship eventually left port, unable to unload most of its cargo.

Israel's massacre of more than 2,000 Palestinians this summer enraged Samantha Levens, an ILWU marine division rank-and-file member. Upon hearing that community members were organizing to block the Israeli liner, she prepared information fliers and distributed them to the longshoremen. "We weren't saying 'don't handle the cargo,'" Levens says. "We were just giving information about the issue: what happened during the South African apartheid, the history of ILWU honoring community picket lines, and the position of international unions on the situation in Gaza." The longshoremen's reaction was positive. Even on the third and fourth days of picketing, she says, when members were eager to go back to work, "I mostly saw people becoming more supportive."

Lifelong longshoreman, ILWU member, and activist Clarence Thomas explains: "I can't be silent on these issues. I'm sure that there are longshoremen in Gaza who haven't been doing work in decades. Isn't it ironic that ships can go as they please into ports in Israel, but can't come into Gaza?" Solidarity, Thomas says, is a key value in labor activism: "Politics is one thing, but the aspiration and the communality of the working class is something else," he says, citing numerous solidarity actions ILWU has taken since the 1930s against oppressive regimes throughout the world. "As an African American man, I

don't have any difficulty relating to the plight of the Palestinian people," he says. "I know what it means to be racially profiled and to be targeted by a militarized police. I've been pulled over many times. I had police guns pointed at me. I understand this phenomenon."

The strong parallels between state and racial oppression in Palestine and the US, respectively, are at the foundation of ILWU Local 10's policy of not crossing community picket lines. "We will not work under armed police escort—not with our experience with the police in this community," said Local 10 president Melvin MacKay, referring to the police's violent dispersal of anti-Iraq war pickets in 2003. "This action was always about building worker-community solidarity," assesses Reem Assil, one of the organizers of the port actions. "We hope to use it as an impetus for us to deepen work in educating workers about the issue and connecting it to their personal conditions."

Following the successful pickets in August, a second ship, the Zim Shanghai, again encountered community picket lines when it docked at the Port of Oakland on October 25. Once again, ILWU longshoremen stood down. As the first shifts to unload the Zim Shanghai were being met with pickets, all but one longshoremen refused to even take a job working the ship. The Shanghai left port without loading or unloading any cargo, thanks to the decision of ILWU rank-and-file members to once more respect a community picket line. When the Zim Beijing, a third ship scheduled to unload at the Port of Oakland, faced similar plans by the Block The Boat coalition in October, the ship diverted to avoid another humiliating defeat at the hands of a determined coalition of social justice activists and rank-and-file union members. With Block the Boat actions now spreading to other ports, it's difficult to see how Israel will weather the growing storm of BDS.

Palestine solidarity is gaining traction among academic workers too. This July, UAW Local 2865, which represents over 13,000 University of California student workers, took an

important step towards joining the international BDS movement. In a public letter posted on the union's website, the UAW 2865 Joint Council (which includes 83 elected officers) declared its commitment "to support our Palestinian counterparts." The joint council pledged to bring a comprehensive BDS proposal to a general membership vote this year, a proposal that would include a call for academic boycott of institutions profiting from Israeli occupation and human rights abuses. In addition to soliciting its members' commitment to cut contact with such institutions, the union would also call on the UC system and UAW International to divest from companies complicit in the occupation.

This endorsement comes as no surprise: in the past few years, UAW 2865 has joined numerous struggles against oppression, including Occupy protests, UC student protests against fee-hikes, and last year's strike by UC custodians. Recently, it negotiated unprecedented protections for its undocumented immigrant members, queer and trans members, parents, and others.

In the midst of Israel's bombing of Gaza, the union's social justice committee carefully worded the call for BDS, outlining in detail the different dimensions of the Israeli occupation. They cited Israel's refusal to recognize Palestinian refugees' rights as indigenous people (specifically, their right to return to their land), the system of apartheid that Israel enforces in the West Bank and Gaza, and the second-class status of Israel's Palestinian citizens. The letter also mentions the connection between Israel's military industry and ethnic cleansing, the suppression of popular movements, and the oppression and criminalization of people all over the world. Concluding by quoting Desmond Tutu's "hope for a time when there are universal rights for all humans regardless of ethnicity, gender, or national origin," the letter emphasizes that BDS does not target the Jewish people but instead targets Israel as "a colonial-apartheid state." The letter further highlights the unequivocal support BDS receives from Jewish organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and the

International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network. In fact, a few days after the letter's publication, more than forty current and former Jewish UAW 2865 members publicly endorsed this BDS call.

The date for the general UAW 2865 membership vote has been set for December 4th. The official ballot language adopted by the Joint Council includes a single yes or no vote on whether the union should call on the US government to end military aid to Israel, and call on the University of California and UAW International to "divest...from Israeli state institutions and international companies complicit in severe and ongoing human rights violations as part of the Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people". The ballot also includes a checkbox where members can pledge to refuse to "take part in any research, conferences, events, exchange programs, or other activities that are

sponsored by Israeli universities complicit in the occupation of Palestine and the settler-colonial policies of the state of Israel". The Joint Council also adopted several documents to educate members about the issues and explain the rationale for the vote; these include a BDS FAQ page, an academic boycott fact sheet, and a labor movement statement.

As in other social justice struggles, mobilization for BDS concerns not just Palestinian rights, but also the right of workers to act and express themselves politically. Purporting to represent UC Jewish students, several Zionist organizations have petitioned UC President Janet Napolitano, alleging that the Joint Council's solidarity with Palestine creates "a hostile anti-Semitic environment" for Jewish students. Many Jewish students, however, find such allegations to be spurious and see the claims as dishonest attempts to silence criticism. The BDS movement is a

fundamentally anti-racist movement, one that opposes racism in all of its forms, including and especially anti-Semitism. The President's office has yet to respond to the petition, and one can only hope that Napolitano's tenure will not add to her abysmal human rights record both as Governor of Arizona and Homeland Security Secretary.

The success of Oakland's Block the Boat makes clear the centrality of organized labor to the global movement for Palestinian freedom. This, and the upcoming UAW 2865 vote on BDS, signal a sea change in US labor's willingness to be complicit in apartheid and ethnic cleansing. As the larger Palestine solidarity movement picks up steam, we can expect the grassroots labor mobilization for Palestine to bear greater and greater fruits, until Israeli apartheid is no more.

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