



IV481 - February 2015

IV481 - February 2015 PDF

28 February 2015, by **robm**

IV 481 February 2015 PDF magazine available to download

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The current political situation

28 February 2015, by **Raymund de Silva**

Ninety days after the President signs the BBL into law, there will be plebiscite for the qualified voters whether they agree or disagree with the BBL in the identified Bangsamoro territory. Both the Aquino administration and the MILF with their Peace Negotiating Panels have been hopeful that the peoples in those areas will vote for the approval of the BBL. They (Aquino government and the MILF) do not even consider an alternative formula for peace just in case the BBL will not be approved by the peoples.

It seems that everybody is enthusiastic to set up the transition mechanism for the Political Entity - Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). The BTA will be the MILF's way of preparing themselves for establishing the regular Bangsamoro government in June 2016. The MILF has already set up its electoral machinery called United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) to participate in the May 2016 National and Local elections.

The voices of those who have been opposing the version of BBL as submitted in Congress, especially the Indigenous People (IPs) within the core territories of the Bangsamoro, have been stifled and even forcible silenced by assassinations of IP leaders. As of this writing there were nine (9) leaders and members who have been murdered. Seventy two (72) more are known to be on the hit list.

The overwhelming support of the Aquino Administration and its allies in Congress has drowned other voices who dared to raise their opposition to a non-inclusive peace of the Aquino government and the MILF.

But the January 25, 2015 bloody encounter between the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police (SAF-PNP) and the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) has changed substantially the views of politicians in Congress (including the Aquino

supporters) and the attitude of peoples towards trusting the MILF in the peace negotiations with the government.

The SAF-PNP had tried to serve the warrant of arrest for the international terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir or famously known as Marwan and his assistant Basit Usman in the middle of a territory claimed by the MILF and where the BIFF (MILF breakaway) as their camp. The international terrorist - Marwan was killed during the operation but forty four (44) SAF-PNP, eighteen (18) of the MILF-BIAF and five (5) civilians were also killed in the said operation.

Two vital issues have surfaced and became subject for big debates on the continuing police function of the PNP and the peace talks with its agreement on the mechanism of the proper conduct of ceasefire between the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF.

The January 25, 2015 violent encounter in Mamasapano, Maguindanao have caused indefinite postponement of the Congress' deliberations on the BBL. It has stalled the peace talks between GPH and MILF. It has also exposed the direct and indirect role of the US in the counter-insurgency campaigns of the Aquino government. It has opened up dynamics between the PNP and the AFP in terms of their different functions vis-à-vis the peace talks. It has created unfavorable space for peace and the immediate threat of a break-up of war between the GPH and MILF and lastly but not the least is that the incident in Mamasapano has rekindled the biases and mistrust between and among the three peoples in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the President has been further affected and so with the peace talks which has been closely connected with his term and his popularity. President Aquino has only more than one year left in his term as President but no one from his party or allies has been identified to replace him.

All geared towards May 2016 Elections

Before the Mamasapano, Maguindanao bloody police operation, Philippine media have been pre-occupied with issues on graft and corruption hitting politicians and personalities who have made themselves available for the 2016 elections. The object of the anti-graft and corruption campaigns is the incumbent Vice President of the country who consistently topped the surveys after declaring himself available to run for the Presidency. Currently, three (3) sitting Senators are detained because of accusations of pocketing their Countryside Development Fund (CDF) known also as pork barrel fund. It is not an accident that all the three Senators belong to the opposition. Two of them are identified with the Vice President and the other has expressed his intention to run as President under the political party of the former

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who herself is currently detained in a hospital because of corruption issues during her term.

The biggest problem of the Aquino administration is that they do not have a credible and winnable candidate who will continue the programs of the President. The chosen one at least by the Liberal Party - the ruling Party - Secretary Mar Roxas - the current Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government - has consistently logged behind in all the surveys. This is in spite, making all the available resources of his department and the government machineries in general at his disposals and presidential projection.

The period of first quarter is already critical for the Presidential race because in the last quarter, there will be filing of candidacies for the national elective positions. During this period, it is expected that political and electoral positions and machineries have been set up. Political movements and re-alignment should be seen on the ground for strengthening of the rank and file of those running for elected positions. There should be rallying activities around a Party/Coalition with prominent figure as their candidate in order for the local candidates to prepare themselves for the coming elections.

Meanwhile, Vice President Binay, leads and continue to strengthen the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) a coalition which will be the electoral Party for his Presidential bid. But for several months now, he (Binay) has been the subject of non stop Senate investigations (with full media coverage) on his alleged corruption activities since when he was a Mayor of Makati City (Commercial Center of the country) more than 20 years ago. His popularity rating has consistently gone down because of these daily attacks but he has remained on the top of all these surveys. This means that all those who have been subject for surveys (including the Administration's chosen one) have not improved their ratings either.

There is another candidate, who is busy going around setting-up his machinery nationwide using his

advocacy for federalism to perform these activities. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte is a well known Mayor of Davao City (Mindanao) because of his no nonsense treatment of the criminals in his city. He has been known of using extrajudicial method in dealing with criminalities in his City. He has been posturing not too be interested in the Presidency but the reason is obvious - he will be the object of criticisms, especially his known records for human rights violations. But his actions speak louder than his words. He does not declare himself as a candidate but the people identified with him have been going around and setting up machineries for his presidential candidacy.

There is a neophyte Senator (got the number one slot in the Senatorial elections 2013) who showed high popularity rating (second only to Binay) in surveys in spite of her non-declaration of her interest to the highest elected position. She is the daughter of the late and famous actor who was the opposition's bet against President Arroyo in 2010 Presidential elections. Everybody knew that Fernando Poe, Jr., the father of Senator Grace Poe, could have won the elections but was cheated by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Unfortunately he (Fernando Poe Jr.) had died after elections.

At this point, when it is only more than a year left for the term of President Aquino but his popularity rating has consistently gone down. His not being directly involved in graft and corruption practices in the government helps a bit but people have began to have questions in his capacity to govern and manage the affairs of the country. The Mamasapano fiasco has magnified such Presidential weaknesses.

The Aquino Resign Movement

There is a group which called themselves National Transformation Council (NTC). This is composed of religious leaders and personalities. Their advocacy is to transform the government starting with the

resignation of President Noy Aquino, the Vice President and all the Cabinet members of the current Administration.

The NTC will act as caretaker government until a regular election will take place. The acknowledged head of the Council is former Defense Secretary and National Security Adviser of the former Arroyo government Norberto Gonzales who is also currently the head of Partido Demokratiko-Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP). The NTC with the active participation for several Catholic Archbishops is calling for the President and his cabinet to resign even before the Mamasapano incident. The call has intensified after the failure of the police operation in Maguindanao.

The role of the Church (eighty percent (80%) of the country's population are Catholic) has been heightened during the visit of Pope Francis in the first weeks of the year. The Pope's concerns on the glaring social inequality in the country has put on the line the program of the President on the poor and his "matuwid na daan" (straight path) banner program. The Pope has struck down the pro-poor program when he linked corruption issues to the deteriorating situation of more than half of the country's population. His famous saying..." that corruption has deprived the poor of the resources needed for them to live with decency and dignity..." has been as if directed to the Aquino administration.

The Pope did mention the value of families and the urgent need to safeguard them against social disintegration because of the high social cost paid for by families who are forced to work outside the country because of the need to earn a decent living. The Pope has pointed out the need to have dignified and humane employment which should be made available by the government.

The Pope has also pointed out that a peace in the South (Mindanao) can only be successful and sustainable if it is inclusive. The Pope had emphasized that the issues and concerns of the Indigenous People should be given due consideration in building peace in

Mindanao.

The visit of the Pope is considered a big success that in effect it has given the Church a renewed energy for its evangelization work with the so-called poorest of the poor. Even after the Pope has long gone back to Vatican his much appreciated visit has been the talks and topics in town. Serious concerns have been raised on how the Aquino administration thru its Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) tried to gather all the street children and their families and hide them inside expensive resorts. This was done so that the Pope would not see them along the roads he had to pass. This kind of news had seemed to eclipse even the record breaking of the six (6) millions who gathered for the Pope's public mass. And it has put the current administration into defensive is normal because of its attempt of hiding the concrete realities from its important visitors such as the Pope, while pretending that everything is normal. This is reminding people of typical of the Marcos dictatorial period when beautiful fences were built to cover up and hide the houses and shanties of the thousands of urban poor along the road where dignitaries and visitors would be passing.

Peace Talks with the MILF and the Mamasapano Encounter

President Aquino plans to end his term in June 2016 with the MILF Peace talks consummated. This means that the Bangsamoro government will be already installed and becomes functional.

The January 25, 2015 Mamasapano bloody encounter has definitely delayed if not all together frustrated the Presidential plan.

The mission of the PNP/SAF to serve the warrant of arrest to an international terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir alias Marwan and his assistant Basit Usman in the middle of the claimed MILF territory could not simply be

done without affecting the ceasefire and current peace agreements between the two parties (GPH and MILF).

The MILF has plenty of explanations to do why it allows those two famous terrorists to stay in their claimed territories. Given the nature and the dynamics of the MILF and its communities the reason of it not knowing the presence of Marwan and Usman would not simply hold water.

The Aquino government has plenty of explanations to do as well when it plans and implements its mission to make the arrests in a complex situation in Mamasapano. It (government) knows fully well that aside from the MILF there are other groups like the BIFF and private armed groups (Ampatuan) in the area. The PNP/SAF could not simply enter and serve its mission and get out without getting serious reactions from those armed groups. It would be understandable that it (SAF) would not coordinate with the MILF in accomplishing its mission.

The Aquino government would like "to have its cake and eat it too..." as the saying goes.

When the armed confrontation heightened and intensified, the PNP/SAF were practically left on their own to die serving their mission. The very slow or even lack and late reinforcement during the decisive period when they (SAF) were still alive was a clear and deliberate sign that the Aquino government would prefer to save the peace talks with the MILF rather than save the lives of PNP/SAF. The timely intervention of the Armed Forces of the Philippines 6th Division and the more than three hundred (300) SAF members just very near the clash site would have saved the lives of the forty four (44) SAF men but because there was no clear order to make the reinforcement those 44 SAF were simply butchered by the combined forces of the MILF, BIFF and private armed groups. And in fact, there was an order (direct from President Aquino) which they (government officials) not to escalate the military clash by introducing reinforcements so as not make MILF think that we are attacking them -

thus, endangering the peace talks.

The remaining SAF officers and men were simply saved because the US which have been active from Day One of OPLAN EXODUS (the oplan to get Marwan and Usman) had to intervene so as to get the cut off finger of Marwan for DNA testing. That was why after the remaining officers and men of SAF were off the encounter ground, the SAF had to directly deliver/hand over the Marwan specimen to the FBI agents waiting at the nearest airport.

The MILF would claim that the Mamasapano clash was a mis-encounter because the PNP/SAF did not coordinate their operation with them. But their (MILF) not able to explain the presence of Marwan and Usman in their territory and the manner in which the SAF were butchered (finished off at close range) while recording the killings and sending these videos to the families of the SAF and to social media could hardly stand up the mis-encounter justification of the bloody armed clash.

Blaming the BIFF for the carnage is not helping either with regards to the MILF's defense of the so called mis-encounter. In fact, the MILF has to give satisfying answer on why it is allowing the BIFF moving around freely in the MILF claimed territory. Does the organizational solution on the previous massacres done by the leaders of the BIFF who were once the leaders of the 105TH base command of the MILF? The 105th base command was once led by Umbra Kato who did the massacres on the civilians especially against the Christians and the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) as their reaction when the Supreme Court declared the Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 as unconstitutional. The MILF's leadership was strongly asked to investigate Umbra Kato and Bravo (Lanao provinces) about those criminal acts. Kato simply has founded the BIFF and the MILF lost jurisdiction over him. Kato's second in command took over the leadership of the 105th Base Command with the same membership. It should be important to factor in the dynamics of people in this part of Maguindanao. Many of them are related with each

other by affinity or by marriage.

There has been no justice serve on the victims of the massacres of the 2008 MOA-AD and Umbra Kato since then operate freely in the MILF claimed territory until he was struck down by sickness.

The Aquino government and its peace panel should have pursued this case because it surely has big impact in the peace negotiation. But the President and his peace advisers and panel intentionally became blind to this situation justifying their act as looking at the bigger picture.

There are obvious signs that the Aquino government should have been alarmed by the MILF and BIFF relationship. The fact that the MILF leadership has been comfortable having their arms manufacturing activities in the areas where the BIFF also operates is saying an important message and that is both have trusted each other. The government and its panel should have been seriously alarmed that the BIFF has openly declared thru its spokesperson - Abu Misry Mama - that the BIFF is affiliated with the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and willing to send fighters to places where ISIS has been fighting or willing to do their (ISIS) bid in the country. In the Mamasapano massacre the pictures of the ISIS' style execution of its victims (beheadings) can be related to the butchering done by the combined forces of the MILF and BIFF to the wounded SAF lying helpless on the ground.

Such acts should be part of correcting the historical injustice which has been the battle cry of the MILF. Giving justice to the victims of the recent past should be delivering a positive message to the present generation that there is no selective justice in pursuing peace in Mindanao.

The extreme and very emotional reactions of peoples, especially the relatives of the SAF victims to the inhuman acts inflicted on their loved ones should be understood in this context.

In fact, an important reality which has unfolded from this unfortunate event

is that peoples throughout the country have suddenly become interested in the peace talks between the GPH and MILF. Before the Mamasapano massacre, only those directly involved and people from Mindanao were interested in the peace talks but now it seems that everybody has to participate to make sure that the government will not sell out to the MILF. This phenomena can be observed from the North (Luzon) and in Visayas (Central) but most especially from Mindanao, even those who are outside of the identified Bangsamoro territory.

On the other hand those personalities and non government organizations and institutions who have been acting like non partisans during the pre Mamasapano incident have been exposed of their interests to have the peace between the GPH and the MILF even if it is very obvious that it(peace) is non inclusive and not done based on justice. Their self serving interest has been uncovered and that they have been after the peace dividends and they are making sure to get from the funds coming in for the peace agreement.

The murdered 44 SAF have been considered heroes and were given heroes welcome and burial in their respective municipalities throughout the country.

Peoples have put the blame on the present Aquino government for the deaths of the SAF men. This is the main reason why even if the President himself appeared twice in national television to explain what had happened in January 25, 2015 and what was his role in it nobody would believe him especially the relatives of the 44 SAF officers and men.

Trust and confidence have been greatly affected in that single event. Peoples have lost their trust for the success of the peace talks with the MILF. The Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) which will lay down the legal foundation for the establishment of the Bangsamoro government has been put on hold (Philippine Congress had been deliberating on it for its promulgation) indefinitely. And since much has been put on the President's trust and popularity, it has gone down

now. The peace talks have gone down together with the popularity and peoples' trust with the President.

People throughout the country, have now become active stakeholders of the peace process between the GPH and MILF. They are delivering strong messages that the peace which should be established will be the one based on justice, especially on the SAF murdered in Mamasapano and it should be inclusive not only the MILF but other Moro groups as well and the Indigenous Peoples and the Christians (Migrant Settlers).

The BBL and the Peace Process on Suspended Animation

Other groups like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have raised some questions on the correctness of creating a new law like the BBL for establishing the new Bangsamoro political entity. For these groups the Republic Act 9054 - a law which created the expanded Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) should only be enhanced. ARMM is the result of the 1996 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF.

The Aquino government and the MILF have considered the ARMM as a failed political experiment and this kind of status quo could not remain in establishing the Bangsamoro political entity.

In the agreed BBL version of the government and the MILF panels, lessons from the ARMM's failure were not included. The socio, economic and political set up of the region should be studied deeper. The role of the Indigenous Political Structures should be factored in vis-à-vis the role of the elected political leaders based on the local government code. Even the influence of State machineries and its functions in the barangay or even municipal levels should be analyzed.

In many areas in the ARMM, the elected political officials could not be seen except during election or when

they received their Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) which many of these officials considered as their personal budget. There are no banks or functional financial mechanism from the State machineries and therefore the main financial transaction are done through an informal economy and financing which are controlled by the local rich traders. Many of these informal businessmen are the government officials themselves or their puppets in the areas.

As stated above all of these government cum businessmen do not stay in their municipalities but have bought and built big houses in the cities and even in Manila.

These people/politicians stay and maintain their power because they also have arms and weapons and they have unwritten agreement with groups like the MILF to respect each other. Civil and Criminal cases are resolved through the Shariah courts. But it is the Council of Elders - respected peoples in the village of the municipality who would often times resolve the problem/conflict because the peoples trust and could freely go to them.

These facts could be seen from the ARMM experiences and they should serve as lessons to be learned and be put into BBL. The MILF is mainly political-military machinery and its structures do not have the civil society having a prominent role in its functioning.

The MILF has just formed the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) as its main electoral and political mechanism towards direct governance of the Bangsamoro government. In the composition of its official, the leadership and the key MILF leaders have taken up positions starting with Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, the Chair of the MILF has also become the head of the UBJP. Most likely he will be elected as the Chief Minister of the Bangsamoro government. This multi-task of the MILF leadership and personnel will be replicated down to the basic level of governance. Already the traditional politicians have shown interests to the new electoral/political party. They will soon have strong if not have total control of the

Bangsamoro.

At this stage, a menu is prepared for a sure failed political institution.

The Mamasapano situation is a case in point here. The mayor does not have control over his municipality. He could not even go to all his thirteen (13) barangays. Aside from the municipal building there are schools in big barangays but no other government instrumentalities in town. The Mayor can stay in power because he belongs to the Ampatuan clan (grandson of the former governor of Maguindanao - Datu Andal Ampatuan) The mayor's brother - a suspect of the 2009 Maguindanao massacre - just like Datu Andal except that he avoided the arrest and now he led more than 200 fully armed group in Mamasapano both hiding from the arresting law enforcers and protecting the brother who is the Mayor. The MILF and the BIFF cannot touch the Mayor. In the same manner, the Mayor cannot go to the areas of the groups.

Important lessons from the MNLF-ARMM experience were never considered. Valid criticism were made to Professor Nur Misuari - the Chair of the MNLF when he got multi role after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. He maintained his chairmanship with the MNLF. He accepted being the governor of the ARMM, he became the Chair of the Southern Philippine Center for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and held other various posts. He never shared important positions and tasks with other members of the MNLF leadership. He could not do all the tasks and roles at the same time as proven by concrete experience.

The indefinite postponement of the discussion of the BBL in Congress can give everyone the additional and needed time to deeply review its content in the light of what had happened in Mamasapano. The concepts of territory, citizenship, governance, resource sharing and generation, police and security, justice, etc will be analyzed by both houses of Congress without the pressures from the President and the executive just like in the pre-Mamasapano incident.

At this stage, it is definite that the

BBL which will be passed by Congress will not be the version agreed upon by the GPH and MILF panels. The MILF Chair had already given a some sort of warning to the leadership of Congress that the MILF will not accept a watered down version of the BBL.

Representatives of the MILF had already delivered to the leadership of the IPs the message that they should trust MILF to consider their issues on Ancestral Domain and governance as long as the IPs would back down with their advocacy campaigns to have their autonomy within the Bangsamoro government.

After the Mamasapano bloody encounter, the MILF together with the Aquino government with its peace panel have become defensive. The families and relatives of the forty four (44) SAF/PNP strongly believe that their loved ones were sacrificed in the altar of peace of GPH and the MILF.

Peoples from the North to the South of the country do not believe the explanation of the President about his role and responsibility in the January 25, 2015 incident.

Definitely the popularity of the President and his government has become so low that the support of the peace talk with the MILF has been dragged with it.

Everyday, it has become crystal clear that the next President will be the one to handle the continuation of the peace process unless there will be extra constitutional move from within or outside the Aquino government to either continue his term or his government will be replaced by a transitory government.

In the coming days, people will celebrate anniversary of the People Power uprising. Definitely calls for the resignation of the President and his government will be highlighted. There will be merging of different political and social movements to rally around the issue of Resign All - the stepping down of the President, Vice President and all his cabinet members. The Peace talks with the MILF will definitely be set aside at least for the moment.

Reactions from the MILF will be expected to be in the form of the Military actions (just like the 2008 MOA-AD). Proportionate reactions or moves will be implemented by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Movements on the ground towards this reaction can already be observed from the two forces.

Meanwhile, the investors will have a "wait and see" attitude and if the situation of war will intensify they (investors) will simply pull out and wait for another opportunity.

The Role of the US

In the last few years, China has been making its presence more visible in the Asia-Pacific Region. Together with its becoming the second biggest economy in the world (second from the US and displacing Japan) it tries to impose its presence in the Spratly islands claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam and other Southeast Asia countries and it is establishing its military bases in those islands e.g. construction of airports.

With this development, since last year, the US has declared its Asian pivot - which simply means that it will make its presence more than visible while it maintains its seventh fleet in the region. It will try to maintain its presence in places like Okinawa in Japan amidst intensifying protests by the Japanese people. With the re-election of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Abe as its Prime Minister, at least the US bases in the area will be secured for now.

In the case of the Philippines, the US has been able to continue its stay and is even able to enhance its presence in the country with stronger legal foundation. The already existing arrangement based on the mutually agreed document called the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) where it (US) does not have to build and maintain its military bases in the country but is able to go anywhere in the country for military purposes.

Now, the US is able to enhance its presence in the country through the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement or EDCA, where the US

forces can be involved in indirect war against terrorism and other external threats to the Philippines. Both countries are able to provide legal protection to the US forces' presence and be embedded in the camps of the AFP. This is also to advance the implementation of the already agreed Mutual Defense Treaty. Such agreement includes inter-operability, capacity building, strengthening of AFP external defense, maritime security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

US Involvement in the Mamasapano Incident

The police operation to get a Malaysian terrorist who is believed to be the bomber of the Bali resorts in Indonesia and series of bombings in the Philippines and his Filipino assistant - is called OPLAN EXODUS. The US forces' hands are everywhere from offering the prizes of their heads - Marwan has \$6 Millions and Usman \$3 Millions. The US provided the direct training activities of the selected Special Action Force Seaborne Company in a resort in Zamboanga City.

In the actual operation it has been known that there were four members of the US forces who stayed with the Operational Command in the nearby municipality of Sharrif Aguak, Maguindanao.

Unmanned drones had been used to monitor the areas days before the implementation of the OPLAN Exodus.

And when finally the remaining 84th Seaborne SAF Company was extracted- the US through the FBI agents make sure to directly get the specimen of Marwan for DNA testing.

It was very clear that the US is only after the proof that the one killed was the terrorist Marwan- and nothing to help save the lives of the SAF/PNP personnel.

During the hearings of different Investigative bodies, especially the Congress, the President thru his

Cabinet and generals have been trying to cover up the decisive role of the US.

But since the US role in the failed police operation from the point of view of the high number of SAF/PNP casualties but success in the US interest - Marwan's death was confirmed - the peoples have become aware of how the Aquino government has defaulted his basic role to protect its citizens and sovereignty to the US. The consequence of this treason like action of the President can never be underestimated.

The Meaning of Some Indicators of the Philippine Economy

The Aquino Administration has been boasting that last year (2014) it got high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with 6.1% which accordingly second only to China. It got 6.9% in the last quarter of last year and was able to pull up the annual average of its GNP. The prime movers of the GNP increase were government spending using the money from what it (Aquino government) termed as Development Acceleration Program (DAP). This is the pooling together of different savings from the approved General Appropriated budget and spends it base on the Presidential discretion. Last month part of this DAP has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The government spending includes the various construction activities and the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) which is the dole out spending of government where money is literally distributed to the identified as poorest of the poor.

The second biggest source of the GDP is the remittances of the country's migrant workers which is becoming bigger everyday. These migrant workers who can be located in almost all countries of the world have an average monthly remittance of more than 2 Billion USD which is more than \$24 Billion in a year or comprising almost 50% of the country annual budget for 2015 (P2.6 Trillions).

More than 50% of its labor forces of 45 millions out of 100 million total number of its population is either unemployed or underemployed.

More than 30 millions of its people considered themselves living below the poverty level if it will be based on the UN Standard of poverty level - \$1.50 daily earning.

The below 5% inflation rate is more a result of the decreased of the prices of oil and other petroleum products rather than the results of higher purchasing power of its consumers.

The other factors which contributed in the increased of the country's GNP are the service sector, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Manufacturing and Agriculture.

These contributions will surely be affected by this year (2015) opening of market of members of South East Asian countries as part of their Regional Market Unification and Development.

Even the big amount as contribution of the migrant workers will surely be affected by the very unstable conditions of several host countries, especially in the Middle East.

In brief the economic indicators can hardly sustain for the basic reason that they are not founded on industrial base capacity of the country. Its industries are mainly semi-process and extractive.

But what is clear is that the more the Aquino government announces the improvement of the economy the more number of the country's population are living below poverty level. In short, the more the Philippine economy has been said to improve the more people have suffered extreme poverty.

This is typical neoliberal capitalist in action in a country like the Philippines.

Conclusion

The unfortunate event in Mamasapano has provided a much needed wake up call for peoples not only Mindanao but the whole country as well.

Just as the peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the MILF is about to be finalized by the approval of the BBL which will become part of the law of the land - the Mamasapano bloody incident happened.

The questions of trust and confidence on the MILF have been put in the open. Its (MILF) real role in the SAF/PNP massacre has triggered up debates in the sincerity and intentions of the MILF in achieving genuine and sustainable peace in Mindanao.

The coming in of investors even before the peace agreement in consummated is a concrete sign that what is at stake here is really the very rich natural resources in Mindanao which the national government needs to open up to foreign investors to further propel its neo-liberal project for development.

The peace agreement of the government and the MILF (if consummated) is getting the right to exploit what is left to the natural resources of the country in Mindanao. This is the main reason why the right of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) over their ancestral domains and the very rich natural minerals in them has never been considered. Their (IPs) opposition to their exclusion to the peace that the MILF and the government is bulding, has been considered as works of peace spoilers.

It took the forty four (44) lives of the SAF/PNP to stop the peace momentum engineered by the Philippine government and the MILF.

Revolutionary and progressive organizations and groups should take this rare opportunity to organize and rally the three peoples in Mindanao in particular and the country in general in supporting the right to self determination of the Bangsamoro which will not hinder and diminish the right to self determination of the Indigenous People.

Programs and activities should be geared towards the elimination of the national oppression without neglecting the full realization of the rights of other minority nationalities. Solidarity among the poor and the toiling masses of the majority

nationality and minority nationalities should be established and

strengthened.

durable and sustainable peace in this part of the world.

This is the only sure way to build

‘Going on this way can only mean defeat’

24 February 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

What is the symbolic importance of Syriza’s victory?

Syriza’s victory represents a historic turning point. It is the first time in European electoral history that a party of the radical Left – that is, to the left of social democracy – has won the elections and entered government.

Up till now, the only times that parties from this political family exercised governmental roles they were part of wider coalitions, and even that was in very particular circumstances. This unprecedented success undoubtedly marks a turning point, one that is all the more important in that Europe is in the grip of a social and economic crisis that has led to growing political turmoil.

Some have noted that in the countries of Northern and Central Europe far-Right forces and the radicalised Right are the ones benefiting from this. Conversely, in the peripheral countries, which have been subjected to the harshest austerity policies, it is instead the forces of the radical Left that seem to be raising their head. We see this in Greece but also in Spain and Ireland.

And that places heavy responsibilities on Syriza’s shoulders?

Yes, indeed, it has very serious responsibilities. And this means that if it were to fail, that would have a really serious effect on the balance of forces in the period to come.

Since Syriza did not win a parliamentary majority, on the day after its victory it announced a coalition with the Independent Greeks (ANEL), a split from New Democracy.

What explains this coalition, how has it been put together, and what do the electorate think of it?

There are two misunderstandings about ANEL that we ought to shake off right away. Firstly, it is not a far-Right party, as many media wrongly suggest. It is effectively a faction of New Democracy that has combined with a few people who have defected from other political forces, some of them from the Left.

In France we would call this kind of party ‘sovereigntyist’, though we should also bear in mind that sovereigntyist and patriotic ideas do not have the same meaning in a major power like France with a history of imperialism and colonialism, and a country like Greece that has been dominated throughout its history.

ANEL is a party that has taken a position against the Memorandum and against austerity policies – and it has done so on a patriotic basis. But it also represents a ‘social’ tendency that was once a constituent part of New Democracy, which, let’s not forget, was up till recently a mass party with a popular electorate and a significant base among trade unionists.

The second thing to note is that there is no grand strategy, here. It was a pragmatic choice, corresponding to the given constraints of the current moment. Syriza knew that it would face a very difficult situation, and it needed a majority in Parliament.

Since the Greek Communist Party (KKE) has for many years refused any sort of political coalition with Syriza, the only possible allies were on the Right or centre-Right. And Syriza was sure to avoid the trap of allying with

To Potami. This party is totally a creature of the system. It presents itself as a ‘joker’, ready to participate in absolutely any governing coalition.

Moreover, that is why foreign media constantly posed To Potami as an alternative, thinking that this party would force Syriza to make concessions. That is precisely what Syriza wanted to avoid, and that is why it chose to ally with a party that would not cause it any difficulties in its negotiations to get rid of the Memorandum. So if Syriza makes any retreats – as is the case at the moment – then it only has itself to blame.

The whole media campaign against Syriza presenting ANEL as a far-Right and xenophobic party – speaking of a ‘Red-Brown’ coalition, like [the Le Monde journalist] Mr. Quatremer, for example – sought to punish Syriza for refusing to ally with To Potami and thus to conform to the system’s demands.

The reaction in Greece has been very positive, though. It ought to be understood that the opposition between supporters and opponents of the Memorandum has become the central dividing line in Greek political life, even though it has not erased the division between Left and Right. It made a lot more sense to ally with ANEL than with To Potami.

It’s now a month since the election. What is your assessment of Syriza’s record so far?

The new government has announced a first set of measures, expressing its desire for transparency and increased democracy. The changing of the nationality code – handing automatic

Greek citizenship to immigrants' children born in Greece - is a considerable shake-up of Greek society's definition of nationality, citizenship and even national identity.

Another objective of these measures is media transparency, putting an end to the entanglement of political personnel and business interests linked to the state - a combination that often includes media moguls. That is not anything particular to Greece, as Berlusconi in Italy and Bouygues in France demonstrate, but in Greece it has reached really huge proportions.

The distribution of cabinet portfolios shows that Syriza was not going to give up any ground, at that level. Notably, the Interior Ministry was handed to a leading figure in the anti-racist movements, involved in struggles supporting immigrants; and the new president of the Greek Parliament, Zoe Constantopolou, is well-known for her fight against corruption and her involvement in the struggle for individual freedoms. So that sends a strong message.

From a social and economic perspective, the re-establishment of workplace rights - which the previous governments had got rid of - is another important measure that Syriza has announced, as are the re-hiring of laid-off civil servants; the re-connection of electricity for households that had previously been cut off; and the re-establishment of the ERT (public radio and TV). These announcements seek to demonstrate the new government's break with the previous governments' policies serving the Memorandum.

This set of measures - which correspond to Syriza's mandate and are meant to put an end to austerity policies - has quickly come up against the demands imposed by the European Union and the Troika. These latter have forced the Greek government into a series of retreats, paralysing the implementation of Syriza's programme. Only just after having been elected, the new government has run into difficulties that give us a glimpse of what a grave situation we will face if it fails.

What does the accord signed on 20 February tell us?

The agreement insists on the full and timely repayment of Greece's debts. Most importantly, it foresees the existing programme being followed through in full, which means the country agreeing to remain under the supervision of the Troika - or as it's now called, 'the institutions'.

Indeed, the Greek government has committed to not taking any unilateral measures that might endanger the budgetary objectives laid down by the creditors.

This accord thus neutralises the Syriza government's activity and its capacity to implement its programme. We ought to be clear - it keeps almost the entire Memorandum framework in place.

What explains such a rapid defeat?

Firstly, right from the start the European institutions exercised enormous pressure. This began on 4 February when the European Central Bank announced that it had stopped the refinancing of the Greek banks - because it no longer accepted Greek debt bonds - at the same time as there was massive capital flight out of the country.

Having been around €2bn a week, according to reliable sources capital flight hit around €1.5bn every 24 hours in the last few days. My information from Athens is that the Greek banks could not have opened on Tuesday if Greece had not come to an agreement with Europe. The ECB has blackmailed Greece in exactly the same way as it did Cyprus in 2013 and Ireland in 2010.

The Greek government is being strangled, exploiting its weakest link, namely, the banking system. There was increasing pressure on Greece during the Eurogroup meetings, in an effort to force it to accept the terms of the Memorandum. If Germany was the most vindictive country - and there is a degree of theatre at moments like this - the others were no different. No one took a stance against Germany.

Greeks saw some hope in France when François Hollande was

elected. Did that country absolutely refuse to come to Greece's aid?

If you took a superficial view, you might have expected that. But you can't implement austerity and vote through the Macron bill [for economic liberalisation] and at the same time offer political help to a country that wants to break with austerity.

What are Syriza's responsibilities now?

We ought to be clear. Some of the debates that we have had in Syriza have now been resolved in a negative way. The idea that we could break with austerity policies and yet avoid confrontation with the European Union has been refuted in practice. The majority tendency in Syriza avoided giving a clear answer to what would happen if Greece's creditors refused to negotiate.

Those who upheld this position also thought that our European partners would be obliged to accept Syriza's legitimacy and thus accept the Greek government's demands. And we can clearly see that this is not the case. The dominant tendency in the Syriza leadership has the illusion that it is possible to change things even within the existing European Union framework.

These institutions have shown their true face, which is the imposition of extremely harsh neoliberal policies and other policies leading to the economic and social marginalisation of entire countries.

What explains these 'illusions'?

There is a real stumbling block, not just a psychological barrier but also one that concerns political strategy. Like almost all the European radical Left, Syriza believes in the idea that it is possible to reform and transform the existing European institutions from within.

That's the whole problem. Syriza ever more clearly dug itself into a position refusing not only to break from the Euro but even to consider this a possible threat it could make during the negotiations.

And indeed we have seen that neither Tsipras or Varoufakis ever made use of this possibility. This tendency refuses to take full account of what the EU institutions and the integration process consist of - yet this is a process that has neoliberalism in its DNA.

These institutions were created in order to entrench neoliberal policies and liberate them from any kind of popular control. We cannot break with austerity policies and the Memorandum measures unless we mount a confrontation with the European Union, and leave the Eurozone if need be. During the negotiations Greece showed that it feared 'Grexit' more than its interlocutors did, and that was a fatal error.

What conclusions ought we draw from this accord?

We could describe it as a major defeat for Syriza, possibly even a fatal one, and this failure affects each and every one of Syriza's components. The Left did not succeed in imposing its point of view, having been defeated by the leadership's strategy, ever since the 2012 elections, of shifting closer to the centre. The idea was that since we had already won as many votes on the Left as we could, what we now had to do was go in search of centrist voters.

This electoralist logic is mistaken, because given the extent of the social crisis the tendency of public opinion is not at all the strengthening of the centre ground. On the contrary, it is radicalising, and it is this radicalisation that explains the audience for Golden Dawn as well as for Syriza.

There is a really fundamental error of analysis, here. For a political force of the anti-austerity Left to give up on essential points of its programme can only lead to defeat. And sadly that is precisely what we are seeing play out at the moment.

The Syriza government will thus have no choice other than to administer the Memorandum framework. The small changes it can make will certainly be improvements, but they will not succeed in transforming the totally disastrous economic and social situation. This will disappoint the hopes and expectations that the popular electorate placed in Syriza.

Going on this way can only mean defeat. I think it is possible that Syriza could disintegrate, and that there could be a reconfiguration of the current political alliances. If Syriza continues with this policy then there is no reason why pro-Memorandum forces should go on refusing to collaborate with it. To Potami, PASOK and even a wing of New Democracy could do so - and it was precisely this latter that Syriza was giving a nod and a wink to when it chose Pavlopoulos, a leading figure of New Democracy's centrist wing, for President of the Republic.

How might the Greek people react?

Syriza's victory gave the Greek people hope again. After the ECB started with its blackmail we saw people spontaneously heading into the streets to give their support to Syriza. The current retreat risks putting a stop to all this, leading to very severe disappointment.

Should we fear disappointed voters turning to Golden Dawn?

The current success of far-Right parties in Europe essentially owes to the fact that very large sections of public opinion see them as genuine anti-systemic forces. They seem more credible and more radical than the Left.

Thanks to the extent of the mobilisations between 2010 and 2012 the electorate that has broken from the traditional ruling parties has mostly turned to the Left.

Nonetheless, the possible recomposition of politics entails the enormous danger of us abandoning the terrain of challenging the existing order to the far Right.

Syriza has been forced to accept continuing with Troika supervision of Greece. This feeling of national humiliation is very important to understanding the breakthrough that Golden Dawn has made. Its rise is really a regressive nationalist reaction to this feeling of national humiliation, combined with economic and social breakdown.

European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker recently declared that 'There can be no democratic choice against the European treaties'. Are our societies - in Greece as well as elsewhere in Europe - really democratic?

The Juncker quote sums up the reality that we face. Since the 1980s the construction of the European Union has been the vehicle of neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism is in its DNA, it is written into its treaties. Its underlying logic is constitutively anti-democratic.

It seeks to dissolve the instances of national control, establishing a detached supranational order freed from any mechanisms of popular control. And this is what has driven oppositional political forces to paralysis. Syriza's defeat faced with the European Union is the most striking illustration of this - and also the saddest.

For any force that wants to oppose the dominant economic policy decisions, it is indispensable that they break with this construction.

23 February 2015

Translated by David Broder for [Verso](#).

See the original piece [here](#).

PEGIDA - an ultra-reactionary, Islamophobic and racist movement

24 February 2015, by **Manuel Kellner**

After this, an initiative in the name of PEGIDA ("Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes" - "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West") was launched by one Lutz Bachmann, of Dresden, who became its spokesperson. At first only a few hundred came to the "Monday demonstrations" in this town in Saxony in eastern Germany, chanting among other things "Wir sind das Volk" ("We are the people"), a conscious allusion to the mass demonstrations in 1989 against the SED regime in the GDR. Then it became thousands, and by mid-December it was 15,000 (and even more according to some estimates). There were around 6,500 counter-demonstrators. The initiative spread to other towns and regions, and the movement was quickly at the centre of public political debate in Germany. Some politicians like Chancellor Angela Merkel distanced themselves from PEGIDA, seen as bad for Germany's world image. But many others said that "people's concerns should be taken seriously". What concerns? Unemployment, precariousness, increasingly grotesque social inequality, the destruction of our natural bases of survival? No, the concern with being flooded by an ocean of foreigners with Muslim "preachers of hate" and Islamic terrorists.

Lutz Bachmann has published a platform ("Positionspapier der PEGIDA") with 19 points of which points 1, 3 and 5 and partially 10 have the obvious function of an alibi: to welcome refugees, house them humanely, assign more social workers to them and the affirmation of not being against "well integrated" Muslims living in Germany. But these points are not articulated by PEGIDA speakers at demonstrations, others

are. Among others: the duty of "foreigners" to integrate themselves, a more equitable allocation of refugees inside the EU, more financial resources for the police to monitor them, the consistent application of asylum laws and expulsions, zero tolerance for criminal asylum seekers and immigrants, safeguarding and protection of Western Judeo-Christian culture and so on, and opposition to "gender mainstreaming" and the imposition of a "politically correct" language.

Far right organisers

In the public discourse and comments of the participants, all is much more robust. Refugees, Muslims, immigrants are the target of hate speech. The political world of the established parties is attacked as complicit with the Islamists and "foreign" elements. Refugees, according to Lutz Bachmann, live in luxury, while German mothers can no longer buy Christmas presents for their children. And Katrin Oertel, another member of PEGIDA's organising committee in Dresden, says that immigrants should "adapt to German norms, mores and culture" - which is line with the positions articulated by the last congress of the Bavarian CSU.

Lutz Bachmann is not too well placed to agitate against "criminal immigrants". He has been prosecuted himself several times - among other things for burglary, drug dealing, driving without a licence and having fled German justice by going to South Africa. In the organizing personnel of PEGIDA we find several well known far rightists, including neo-Nazis. The organising committee of KÄ-GIDA,

PEGIDA's subsidiary in Cologne, includes one Melanie Dittmer, a fascist since early youth, who believes the Holocaust to be an invention of the victors of the Second World War, and wishes to save Germany from a nightmare like that of London, where she claims the most common name for newly born children is Mohammed. The leader who announced the KÄ-GIDA demonstration of January 5 officially to the police, Sebastian Nobile, has long been active in neo-Nazi structures like the banned "German Defence League", which has good contacts with the murderous "Blood and honour" group, and in other far right organizations.

The counter-mobilisation

It should be said that even in Dresden, the number of PEGIDA demonstrators seemed to drop and the number of counter-demonstrators increase, and in other German cities, like Berlin, Munich, Münster and others, the number of counter-demonstrators was much greater. It was January 5 in Cologne which symbolized the reversal of things.

On that evening the Kölner Dom, Cologne's cathedral, was not illuminated. The lights were turned off for other churches, also, and for the chamber of industry and commerce, the big hotels and the Rhine bridges. The KÄ-GIDA demonstrators were only a few hundred, in the shadows of night, but the counter-demonstrators were thousands, at least 10,000 but probably more like 25,000 (the figure given by internal communications of police on the spot).

The difficulty in giving exact figures stems from the massive police

intervention massive against the counter-demonstrators, dispersing them, erecting metal grills blocking the immense crowd seeking to approach the small group of KÄ-GIDA. But the mechanical pressure of the crowds was so impressive that ultimately the police advised the KÄ-GIDA demonstrators not to march across one of the Rhine bridges as planned and in the end not to march at all.

This was a catastrophic setback for KÄ-GIDA, to the point that its organizers said they would henceforth not demonstrate in Cologne. It is not by chance that after the Charlie Hebdo killings, KÄ-GIDA reversed this decision and said it would demonstrate every Wednesday in Cologne near the cathedral - while the organizers of the counter-mobilizations said they would respond with the biggest demonstrations possible.

A problem to think about

In Cologne, there are two united action committees which prepare actions against PEDIGA and any other racist and xenophobic demonstration. There are anti-fascist initiatives and left organizations, as well as trade unions like the DGB and the SPD. But it is the political (apart from the far right), associative and institutional world as a whole which appears as a united front on these occasions, including the traditional bourgeois parties and the employers' organisations.

And in Dresden, after the Charlie Hebdo attack, there was a demonstration of over 20,000 for tolerance, against violence, PEDIGA and racism, called by virtually everyone, including the regional government led by the CDU.

Of course, we can celebrate the fact that many more people were ready to mobilise against racist and Islamophobic acts than to follow the calls of PEGIDA and its ilk. But these PEDIGA demonstrations articulate a radicalisation of a whole layer of the population, often among the middle classes, who respond enthusiastically

to the denunciations of the "lying state press", the "parties of the bloc" (a subtle illusion to the legal parties grouped around the "leading party", the SED, in the GDR), the "corrupt bureaucrats and bigwigs" who do not respond to the aspirations of ordinary German people.

We should then discuss the possibilities of giving a more specific class and internationalist content to the anti-fascist mobilisations. It is the political forces defending the established order and the interests of big capital which daily create the reasons for reactionary radicalisations. More precisely: who, by an inhuman policy and unacceptable words create themselves a propitious atmosphere for right populism and racist campaigns.

Apart from the vaguely humanist "politically correct" discourse, the politicians of the established pro-capitalist parties oppose PEDIGA and racist radicalizations with considerations on the importance of "well qualified" immigration for the German economy, to finance pensions and pay taxes - but PEDIGA itself talks about "good" well integrated immigrants.

While formally placing himself within the context of the great movement of national unity against PEGIDA and similar movements (he cannot contradict his own party leader who is moreover chancellor of the German government), Saxony's interior minister Markus Ulbig (CDU) has announced to the applause of the PEGIDA demonstrators the creation of new special police units "against criminal asylum seekers" and other "notorious malefactors" ("IntensivtÄxter").

An ultra right potential

This recalls the first half of the 1990s, when attacks on asylum seekers multiplied, solemnly condemned of course by a political world which nonetheless implemented the main demands of the racist crazies and transformed the right of exile incorporated in the "Grundgesetz",

effectively Germany's constitution, into a "right" granted only grudgingly. Something similar is being prepared now: a rhetoric of fine words which accompanies a hardening of the already extremely restrictive treatment of the small number of refugees who succeed in getting to Germany despite the murderous fortress put there to keep them out.

The PEDIGA mobilizations did not fall from the sky. Before them, in Germany, there were a great number of racist actions and mobilizations directed against refugees. From January to November 2014, the figure for refugees in Germany rose to 130,000. Even if the data show that the disposition to racist radicalisation does not depend on the amount of refugees or their share of the population (in Dresden, for example, both figures are especially low), it is true that there was in 2014, a great number of actions against the lodging of refugees in wealthy neighbourhoods as well as poor ones, in the west as in the east of Germany. Often, they were mounted together by the German inhabitants of the neighbourhoods and organized far right and neo Nazi forces.

The association "Pro Asyl" counted 220 mobilizations directed against refugees from January to November 2014, and in the same period 31 acts of vandalism against them, 24 incendiary attacks against their places of habitation and 33 physical attacks against specific refugees.

Opinion polls show the rise of racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic prejudices in the German population. In 2011, 25.8% were strictly against a less restrictive treatment of asylum seekers, in 2014 it was 76%. In 2011, 30.2% felt themselves "a foreigner in their own country" because of the large number of Muslims; in 2014 it was 43%. Now, a majority of 55.9% think that Roma have criminal tendencies, while in 2011 it was still a (significant) minority of 42%.

One can estimate at 12% the hard core far right potential in Germany (and the Die Linke party and other smaller left parties and organizations have about the same potential), ready to mobilize in demonstrations, if they

are not too far from their respective residences. Only a part is ready to vote for the ultra-conservative, ultra-neoliberal and right populist AfD (which according to the Forsa institute, is polling about 5% in terms of voting intentions). Some members of this party seek to collaborate with PEGIDA, and its leader Bernd Lucke (an ultra free market economics lecturer) has said on his Facebook

page that PEGIDA's demands were "legitimate". But both he and his associate Olaf Henkel (former president of one of the two big employers' associations), are taking their distance in relation to PEGIDA, for fear of losing their serious image among bourgeois liberal and conservative voters. Others to their right in the AfD revolt against this distancing, and this gives a crisis of leadership in the party.

PEGIDA is an attempt to break the isolation and dispersion of the far right to achieve significant mobilisations and break from the image of right wing extremism to appear as a force rooted "in the midst of German society". It is quite possible that this initiative will ultimately founder - but it will certainly not be the last one.

Where does Pegida come from?

24 February 2015, by **Manuel Kellner**

According to a study carried out by a team around the political scientist Hans Vogtländer of the Technical University of Dresden [1], the typical Pegida demonstrator lives in Dresden or Leipzig and is aged around 50, draws an income slightly above the average and does not feel linked to a specific religious grouping or political party. The representative nature of this study is doubtful, since two thirds of those questioned chose not to reply to the questions.

According to sources originating from the Antifa milieu (far left and radical left), the NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, a well organised party of the traditional far right) gave the signal not to talk to the press - the "lying press" ("Lügenpresse") and "the system" are the current expressions taken from the historic Nazis used by far right circles as well as by a number of the organisers and participant in the Pegida demonstrations. If so, that confirms the influence of the far right within Pegida. However, it also invalidates the results of the study in question, since only a minority responded to the questions.

The extremism of the milieu

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of December 24, 2014 evoked a more

profound study on Islamophobia in Germany based on a representative telephone poll carried out by Heinz Bude and Ernst-Dieter Lantermann from the university of Kassel in 2011 at the initiative of the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* [2]. All those of a clearly Islamophobic tendency were particularly proud of their German ancestry and are particularly mistrustful of the state and its institutions. But within this there are three distinct groups with different characteristics.

The first group represents the "extremism of the milieu" for the authors of the study. Those in this group are sure of themselves and believe they have realised their aspirations in life. 38% of them have impression of being among the "winners" from the economic development of recent years (against 14% who see themselves as losers). However, more than half are pessimistic about the future. They want a society again based on the traditional values of discipline, security and professional performance and a return to clarity in social life, without disturbance from those who think and live differently. Satisfied with themselves, they judge others harshly, and fear their situation could deteriorate. 50% of those in this group are aged 50 or more, 14% 30 or less. This group represents 9% of the population.

Those in the second group live in precarious social and financial situations, with little training or education and are less sure of themselves. They have not realised what they wanted in life and more than two thirds of them believe they never will. More than half of this group think they have lost out in relation to recent economic development. Those in this group fell socially marginalised and fear becoming victims of a growing "foreign" part of the population. 63% of them are over 50, 11% less than 30. This group represents about 13% of the population.

The members of the third group are well educated and trained. They feel themselves socially recognised, but nonetheless live in precariousness. They have the impression that they have done gained what they deserve. 43% of them feel they have lost out from economic development, and 72% are profoundly pessimistic about the future. They are "open" to other cultures, but not to the Muslim world. 71% of those in this group feel that Muslim culture has no place in the Western world, nearly half wish to limit Muslim immigration and nearly a third wish to ban any public demonstration of the Muslim religion in Germany. In this group, half are aged 50 or more and 17% 30 or less. 13% of the German population are in this group.

Radicalised petty bourgeoisie

The social base of the historic Italian fascists and German Nazis was primarily petty bourgeois. It isn't necessary to be poor and precarious to be part of the potential for populist mobilisations of the right and far right. But precariousness and the fear of social decline play their roles. Also there is a specificity to racist prejudices against the Muslim world.

The middle classes tend to be in the camp of the probable winners. It is then a workers' movement on the defensive for decades and the continuing crisis of credibility of socialist and emancipatory responses to serious social and economic problems which feed the potential of far right initiatives and reactionary radicalisations. The price to pay for the decline of revolutionary hope is the rise of counter-revolutionary despair.

It is true that some déclassé elements inside the working class have joined the camp of petty bourgeois revolt, and it is true also that in Germany neo-Nazis have attempted to break through among unionised youth milieus in a number of industrial enterprises. However, the fundamentally petty bourgeois character of the far right potential remains.

It is then important that the fight against this tendency combines the broadest possible unity of action against the far right and right populist mobilisations with an explicit critique of the established policies with

relation to the treatment of refugees and immigrants as in the social and imperialist foreign policy areas. We should stress the true conflicts of interests and contrast them with the purely ideological and illusory conflicts.

Specificity of Dresden?

It is true that in Dresden the Pegida movement has had some spectacular successes in mobilisation. Why? Germans call Dresden "the valley of the ignorant" ("Das Tal der Ahnungslosen"). This is because West German television could not be received in Dresden at the time prior to the overthrow of the GDR. Leipzig saw the mass demonstrations every Monday against the regime of the SED (the single ruling party under the GDR). In Dresden, passivity was the norm.

Juliane Nagel, the sole Saxon deputy for the Die Linke party, who won his seat in the state parliament by direct election in his constituency, has attempted an explanation [3]: The inhabitants of Dresden experienced the rule of the SED, and then after 1990 the uninterrupted rule of the CDU at the head of various coalitions. It was also quite an authoritarian regime, characterised for example by a more severe repression against far left anti-fascists than elsewhere in Germany. For Nagel, this created propitious conditions for the development of the Pegida/Legida movement.

The CDU is especially right wing in Saxony. The minister-president of the Land of Saxony, Stanislaw Tillich, has proclaimed the need for "dialogue" with the Pegida demonstrators, while responding to chancellor Angela Merkel's statement that Islam was part of Germany (a statement she was quick to relativise) that if so, it wasn't part of Saxony. Also Dresden has for a long time been the scene of very strong far right mobilisations on February 13, the anniversary of the Allied bombing of the city near the end of the Second World War.

The official government policy has already decided to implement a number of the demands of the Pegida demonstrators. For example, the Saxon minister of the interior has stated that Tunisia will be declared a "safe" country so as to deny any claim for asylum for refugees from that country. Also the general secretary of the CDU in Saxony has said it is necessary to "revise" asylum rights as a whole.

Juliane Nagel points to a manifest cooperation of the Pegida movement with the right populist AfD in Dresden. The leadership of the AfD in Dresden is opposed to the federal AfD leadership represented by Bernd Lucke. It does not wish to reduce the party's profile to opposition to the Euro, and wants to exploit the themes dear to those radicalising to the right: action against refugees, against "unassimilated" immigrants and against Muslims. There is a manifest continuity, at least in Saxony, between the right wing of the CDU, the AfD, Pegida, the NPD and militant Nazi circles.

Hungary's war on women

23 February 2015, by Andrew Ryder

A public service announcement (PSA) produced by the Hungarian government has provoked worldwide outrage by placing the blame for sexual assault on survivors. The video

depicts young women dressing provocatively, drinking and dancing, with the consequence of an attack by a stranger, before ending with the words, "You are responsible. You can

do something about it."

The media initiative coincided with a statement issued by police in Vas County on November 25, the

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, warning women that flirting might be expected to "elicit violence."

Justifiably outraged, Hungarian feminists were quick to respond. Keret, a consortium of Hungarian women's rights organizations, issued a letter of protest titled "Clothes Do Not Make the Victims!" In this statement, Keret says that the broadcasts are produced by "misogyny and contempt for women," that the video propagates misconceptions, and that the government's claims are incompatible with international human rights standards and Hungary's commitments to these.

SlutWalk Budapest organized a November 30 demonstration that began at 3:30 in the afternoon at Déak Ferenc Square with scores of protestors demanding that the Hungarian government abandon its deplorable campaign and replace it with one that raises awareness about the facts regarding rape and the rights of survivors.

SlutWalk is a movement of protest marches that first occurred three years ago in Toronto, Ontario, in response to comments by a police officer who suggested a woman's choice of dress was a primary cause of sexual violence. Demonstrations inspired by the Toronto protests have subsequently taken place in cities all over the world.

These protests explicitly counter the message conveyed by the Hungarian PSAs that victims of assault are themselves responsible for the acts of violence committed against them, simply as an effect of their dress or behavior. As Jen Roesch wrote during the initial outpouring of SlutWalk events:

We should reject outright the victim blaming that says a woman "asked for it" if she dresses a certain way or has had previous sexual partners. But we must go further and build an anti-sexist movement that can empower women to confidently accept or refuse sex according to their own desires—and create the kind of culture in which men understand and respect the difference.

The content of the videos is so blatant in its illustration of what feminists have named "rape culture" that many viewers initially react with disbelief. It is actually somewhat rare to find such an explicit attempt to force women to police themselves—all under the guise of protecting them. For this reason, it is worth considering the ideology that the Hungarian state wishes to disseminate, and how this is related to its larger political agenda.

FIRST, THE video presents the perpetrator of violence as an "outsider." This provides a valuable function for the right-wing populist worldview developed by the ruling party of Hungary, Fidesz. The state has an interest in encouraging fear of those who are different or unfamiliar. As Roesch explained in this speech:

When rape and sexual assault become defined primarily as issues of criminality, it becomes exceedingly difficult to define that outside the boundaries of how society defines it. The typical criminal once again becomes the stranger on the street, usually black, brown or poor.

However, the main purpose of the video seems to be regulating and disciplining the behavior of women. But why has this become a state priority at this particular time? The video must be placed in the context of the conditions facing women in Hungarian society as a whole. For example, between 2006 and 2014, Hungary's place in the World Economic Forum's gender-equality ranking fell from 55 to 93.

Responsibility for this decline lies squarely with the policies of the ruling party, which has maintained a two-thirds supermajority since 2010. Fidesz's rule has resulted in savage cuts to the system of social provisioning, amounting to what economist Zsuzsa Ferge has justly described as a "war on the poor."

In the words of Tithi Bhattacharya, "the changes that take place in the dynamics of social provisioning and the extent to which it can or cannot take place within the enclosure of 'safe' spaces also determine the

contours of gender relationships." The state's refusal to provide basic needs for food and shelter effectively outsources these requirements to women, who are expected to "naturally" provide care labor without cost to capital.

In order to achieve this, the state must advocate an ideology of traditional femininity, according to which women are "responsible" and "self-sacrificing." For this reason, it won't come as a surprise that the elimination of social provisioning by Hungary's right-wing populists also coincides with a fervent new push for "Christian values," interpreted by the party in highly traditional, chauvinist and patriarchal terms. The PSAs, then, are a propaganda effort by the state-owned media to enforce this role by means of terror.

In recent months, a series of popular protests have countered the initiatives of the Hungarian state. Protesters first got a taste of their power when they forced the government to abandon its plans for an Internet tax. Subsequently, large demonstrations have taken place against corruption and against cuts to retirement funds.

For this reason, the gap between state policies and the actual needs of the Hungarian people is especially evident. The popular resistance to the government's backwards campaign against sexual violence is a further example of a growing anger at Hungary's authoritarian capitalist state. The victim-blaming television spots are of a piece with other governmental abuses of power, because they are part of a unified strategy of centralized authority and indifference to the social costs of capital accumulation.

In response, it is necessary to build solidarity among all of the popular movements that reject the authoritarian populism that presently monopolizes state power in Hungary. These struggles can only achieve their goals by recognizing a common affinity. Five years ago, G.M. Tamás, a Hungarian Marxist intellectual, put it this way:

Reaction is teaching East Europeans how these struggles hang together.

We are learning our lessons the hard way. We don't need to be told that socialists and feminists, gay and lesbian activists, minority-rights

campaigners and trade unionists belong together because we all are being clobbered by the same enemy.

December 3, 2014

[Socialist Worker](#)

Is Syriza Retreating?

23 February 2015, by Stathis Kouvelakis

To use a worn-out cliché, “the times are critical.” In fact, they are more than just that: we are at the edge of a crucial temporal sequence. The whole endeavor of a Syriza government will be judged by its reaction to the unprecedented blackmail and ultimatums it is receiving from its tragically misnamed European “partners.”

And the news from the frontline is not pleasant. To be sure, it is very difficult to have a clear view of the current status of the negotiations — “negotiations” being an oxymoron given the sheer asymmetry in the balance of forces, and the fact that one side has a gun (the European Central Bank’s) pointed at its head. What is clear, however, is that the Greek government has backtracked on crucial aspects, especially concerning its commitments towards the people that brought it into office.

Before examining the substance of the request for an extension of the “Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement” submitted on Wednesday by the Greek government to Brussels, let’s have a closer look at the “Moscovici document” leaked by the Greek government during the Eurogroup meeting last Monday, which it has declared itself willing to sign.

This document rules out “unilateral action,” sets primary surpluses of an undefined volume as a budgetary target, and recognizes the entirety of the debt. All future adjustments made concerning the restructuring of the debt will have to be in line with the Eurogroup’s decisions in November

2012.

Essentially, the implementation of the fundamental measures of Syriza’s Thessaloniki election program is made subject to the prior approval of the lenders, effectively amounting to the program’s annulment. Additionally, it recognizes the odious terms of the lending agreements, thereby further weakening the Greek negotiating position on the matter. It is obvious that by accepting such a framework as a supposedly “honorable compromise,” the Syriza government is having its hands tied.

The request for an extension of the Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement includes all of the above-mentioned points and adds to those — for the first time — the recognition of “the supervision under the [European Union] and ECB framework and, in the same spirit, with the International Monetary Fund for the duration of the extended Agreement (point f).” In other words, the troika is back but with a different name. The Greek media has already started talking about “the Institutions.”

But even that is not enough for the EU and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Having understood that the Greek side — eager to avoid any rupture and even any unilateral move — is on a constant path of retreat, the “partners” have opted for total surrender as their primary aim.

By teaching the Syriza government a lesson, they simultaneously issue a warning to Podemos and any other force in Europe that may attempt to

challenge austerity, the memoranda, and debt peonage. The German side has either way rejected the Greek request for the Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement, apparently aiming for further Greek concessions and the full humiliation of the Greek left-wing government.

And herein, maybe, lies hope. It can’t be ruled out that the escalating demands of the EU and the lenders will be rejected by a government that has undertaken some basic commitments to its people. And, more importantly, that they will be rejected by a people that is believing in hope again and taking to the country’s streets and squares. A retreat should not be treated as unavoidable, and the Greek government deserves support to the extent that it holds firm in the war unleashed against it.

Whatever the conclusion, one thing is certain. All the reassuring arguments that have circulated in the past few years — about a European “bluff,” about the possibility of overthrowing austerity within the eurozone framework, of separating lending agreements and memoranda, of solutions in the lines of the 1953 London conference on the German debt (that is, of a favorable restructuring for the borrower agreed by the lender) — in other words, the constituent elements of the narrative of the “good euro” — have all collapsed.

At some point, we are owed explanations about all this as well.

19 February 2015

[Jacobin](#)

Syriza and Podemos: the way towards power for the People?

23 February 2015, by **Éric Toussaint**

In fact, the question is faced by any left-wing movement that forms a government in a capitalist society. When an electoral coalition or left-wing party arrives in government, it does not hold the real power: economic power (via the possession and control of financial and industrial groups, the major private media, large-scale commerce, etc.) remains in the hands of the capitalist class, the "richest 1%" (not even!, it is less than 1% of the population). Moreover, this capitalist class controls the State, the legal apparatus, the ministries of the Economy and Finance, the central bank, etc. In Greece and Spain, as in Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela or Chile [4], a government determined to carry out real structural changes has to enter into conflict with the holders of economic power in order to weaken and then do away with the control by the capitalist class of the major means of production, services and communication, and of the State apparatus.

Let us attempt a historical comparison. After 1789, when, by means of the Revolution, the Bourgeoisie took over political power in France, it already held the economic power. Before achieving political power, the French capitalists were the King of France's creditors and owners of the main levers of economic power (banking, commerce, manufacturing and some land). After coming to political power, they expelled the representatives of the former ruling classes (the nobility and clergy) from the State apparatus, and dominated them or merged with them. The State became a well-oiled machine serving the accumulation of capital and profits.

Unlike the capitalist class, the People is not able to take economic power if it does not accede to government. It is

not possible for the People to repeat the progressive ascension towards power achieved by the Bourgeoisie in the context of Feudal Society or small-scale merchandise production. The People does not accumulate large-scale material wealth, and does not direct the industrial firms, banks, major commerce or other services. It is on the basis of political power (i.e. government) that the People can endeavour to transform the economic structure and begin the construction of a new type of State based on self-management. By holding the reins of government, the Left can access the institutional, political and financial levers required to initiate profound changes in favour of the majority of the population. The essential preconditions for the whole process are the self-organisation of the People, and self-activity in the public sphere and in the workplace.

In order to carry out real structural changes, it is of fundamental importance to set up an interactive relationship between the left-wing government and the People.

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The latter needs to increase its level of auto-organisation and construct grass-roots organisations of popular power and control. This interactive, dialectic relationship can become conflictual if the government hesitates to put in place the measures demanded by the grass roots. The People's support for promised change and the pressure the People can exert are vital for convincing a left-wing to further pursue the process of structural

change, involving the radical redistribution of wealth in favour of those who produce it. It is also vital for defending the government from creditors, from the holders of the previous regime, from the owners of the major means of production, and from foreign governments. Achieving structural changes involves ending capitalist ownership in key areas such as finance and energy by transferring them to the public sector (public services under citizen control) and also supporting or reinforcing other socially beneficial forms of ownership: small private properties (particularly for agriculture, small-scale industry, shops and services), cooperative ownership, and collective ownership based on free association [5].

In two of the three South American countries mentioned above (Venezuela in 2002-2003 [6] and Bolivia between 2006 and 2008 [7]), the government was in open conflict with the capitalist class [8], but the decisive structural changes to the economic system have not (yet) been carried out. The societies of these countries remain clearly capitalist [9]. There has been obvious real progress in favour of the People: adoption in all three countries of new constitutions resulting from profoundly democratic constitutive processes (election of a constitutive assembly by universal suffrage; drawing up of a new constitution adopted by the constitutive assembly after broad national debate; referendum to approve the new constitution); broad-based public re-control of natural resources [10]; increased taxation of the very rich (particularly in Ecuador) and major national and foreign private companies; significant improvements to public services and their objectives; reduction of social inequalities; strengthening of the rights of indigenous peoples; recovery of

national dignity with respect to the great powers, in particular the United States.

We can only understand the politics of these countries if we take into account the great popular protests that have punctuated their history. In Ecuador, four right-wing presidents were forced to abandon power between 1997 and 2005 due to large-scale protests. In Bolivia, major battles against water privatisation took place in April 2000 and late 2004. Protests concerning the privatisation of natural gas in October 2003 led to the fall of President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who fled the country (to the United States). As early as 1989, Venezuela was swept by considerable popular struggles, which inaugurated the major combats against the International Monetary Fund that shook the planet during the 1990s and early 2000s. But there were even more spectacular events to come, with the huge popular protests of 12 April 2002, spontaneous demonstrations of the rejection of the putsch against Hugo Chavez. These protests led directly to Chavez returning to the Miraflores presidential palace the very next day.

The democratic political changes in these three countries are systematically left unmentioned in the press of the most industrialised countries. On the contrary, a denigration campaign is systematically orchestrated in order to present the three countries' heads of state as populist and authoritarian leaders.

The experiences of these three Andean countries in adopting new constitutions are highly pertinent. They should be a source of inspiration for the peoples and political movements of other countries. Just compare the situation with that of Europe, with the lack of democratic procedure concerning the adoption of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 or the TSCG in 2014. That said, the new approaches being tested out in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador are also subject to contradictions and significant limitations, which need to be analysed [11].

Major popular protests are a decisive factor for the existence and survival of left-wing governments. We could of

course also speak of the great popular protests of 1936 in France, which led Léon Blum - who would otherwise have contented himself with "managing honestly" the system of the Bourgeoisie - to implement truly socialist measures, not to mention the protests in Spain during the same period, or those that shook much of Europe after the Second World War.

Back to Syriza and Podemos

If governments, currently directed by SYRIZA and in the future by Podemos, really want to break with the austerity and privatisation policies being implemented throughout Europe, they will immediately enter into conflict with powerful conservative forces at both national and European Union level. Simply by stating that their government wishes to apply measures desired by the population, who reject austerity on a massive scale, SYRIZA now and Podemos in the future, are encountering very stiff opposition from European bodies, the majority of European Union governments, and the directors and shareholders of the major private companies, not forgetting the IMF.

Even voluntarily limiting their programme for change, they are encountering strong opposition because the propertied classes and European bodies (which are intimately linked and mutually supportive) want to push further the most formidable attack, coordinated at European scale, against the economic and social rights of the People, not to mention the desire to limit severely the exercising of democratic rights [12].

It would be an illusion to think that it is possible to convince the European authorities and the heads of the (mainly financial and industrial) major companies to abandon the neo-liberal course that has been reinforced since 2010. We should underline that François Hollande and Matteo Renzi, who timidly propose slightly loosening the bridle of austerity, are at the same time seeking to apply the German model in their respective countries: further casualisation of collective negotiating rights and the advances achieved by employees [13]. They are no allies to Syriza today or Podemos tomorrow.

Another element to be taken into consideration when we compare the situation of the left-wing government in Greece today (or others in the future) with that experience by Hugo Chavez (as from 2004), Evo Morales or Rafael Correa. Starting in 2004, the considerable increase in the price of the raw materials (oil, gas, ores ...) that their countries export, enabled them to greatly increase tax revenues, which were used to implement vast social programmes and major public investment projects. The governments of these three Andean countries applied a model that could be characterised as neo-Keynesian developmentalist [14]: heavy public investment, increase in working-class consumption, raising of low salaries, nationalisations (in the case of Venezuela and Bolivia) accompanied by generous compensation for national owners and foreign parent companies.

The living conditions of the poorest people in these countries were considerably improved, as was their infrastructure, and the profits of local capitalists were not affected (in the financial sector, private profits even increased). It is easy to see that a left-wing government in a peripheral European Union country cannot have the same room to manoeuvre as the governments of the three Andean countries mentioned. The countries on the fringe of the European Union are crushed by an unbearable burden of debt. The European authorities intend to exert all the pressure they can, as was shown by the reaction of the European Central Bank with regard to Greece in early February 2015.

The inevitable conclusion is that there is no easy way to implement an economic and social programme that breaks with austerity and privatisation. Left-wing governments will have to disobey creditors, the European authorities and the IMF (who are largely mixed up together) in order to be faithful to their electoral promises.

Left-wing governments will have to disobey creditors, the European authorities and the IMF in order to be faithful to their electoral promises.

They have immense legitimacy and support both in their own countries and at international level, given the extent of the rejection of austerity and of European Union diktats. The refusal to pay a substantial part of the debt will be a key element in the government strategy [15], as will the decision not to continue with privatisation and to fully re-establish the social rights affected by austerity policies. This combination is vital because, amongst the creditors, there is the intention of raising the voices of those who propose reducing the Greek debt burden in return for the continuation of the policies of reform (for which read counter-reform,

privatisation, casualisation of work contracts and social rights ...).

It is difficult to see how a left-wing government can avoid socialising the banking sector (in other words expropriating private shareholders and transforming the banks into a public service controlled by the People), taking strict measures to control the movement of capital, imposing a crisis tax on the wealth of the richest 1 %, refusing loans from the Troika conditional upon the continuation of austerity and privatisation, and refusing to reimburse a debt that is largely illegitimate, illegal, and unbearable in

terms of human rights, even odious. One of the numerous instruments available to a left-wing government to encourage participation and popular support while at the same time reinforcing its position vis-À-vis illegitimate creditors, is to audit the debt with active citizen participation in order to identify the part of the debt that they must refuse to pay and which must be repudiated. From that point, everything becomes possible at last.

Translated by Adam Clark-Gimmig

CADTM-><http://cadtm.org/Syriza-and-Podemos-the-way-towards>]

The soaring Swiss franc and class politics

22 February 2015, by **Jean Batou**

The 99 per cent will pick up the bill

Why such a decision? First, to avoid having to buy extra billions of euros to counter the foreseeable soaring ascension of the franc. In reality, the appeal of the Swiss franc is based, at least in part, on a very low level of debt of Swiss public administrations, which has been steadily decreasing since 2004, while that of the eurozone has exploded since 2008. In 2013, public debt accounted for only 36.3 per cent of Swiss GDP, against 92.6 per cent for the eurozone. Furthermore, the quantitative easing announced by the ECB will further increase this differential.

This turn, decided at the discretion of the three members of the managing board of the SNB, will have a negative impact on the daily lives of millions of people, first of all in Switzerland, where it will serve as a pretext for job cuts, as well as for lower outlays by businesses (on wages, taxes, social security contributions) which will justify further cuts in public spending

and benefits. Abroad too, where many local authorities, in particular in Germany and France, are going to be affected because they denominated their loans in Swiss francs, and will see interest payments on their debt explode from 3 per cent to 12 per cent or even 17 per cent. The same is true for hundreds of thousands of households in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, etc.) whose mortgages were fixed in Swiss francs.

A family quarrel

No matter! The SNB president, Thomas Jordan, is a dogmatic monetarist, a paranoiac about inflation, coupled with a Eurosceptic of the first hour, whose doctoral thesis in 1993 already criticized the proposed creation of a single European currency. That is why his appointment as head of the SNB in 2012 was applauded by the *Weltwoche* and by Christoph Blocher (nationalist right). His decision to abolish the ceiling exchange rate against the euro is that of the ruling circles in Switzerland, who intend to play their own role on the

international stage. For them, to provide support, even indirectly, to the policy of monetary easing of Mario Draghi was inconceivable. This counterstroke, however, has nothing to do with the defence of the general interest.

In Switzerland, employers' circles are brandishing the threat of layoffs and relocations in order to obtain new privileges from the state, as well as new concessions from the trade union apparatuses and the Swiss Socialist Party (PSS). For their part, the leading circles of the PSS and the USS (Swiss trade union confederation) deplore the decision of the SNB and call for action to mitigate the rise of the franc. In reality, their principal intention is for the authorities and employers to negotiate with them the nature of the potion that they are about to prescribe for the people. All this looks like a family quarrel, since no one challenges the fundamental policy choices of the SNB. Besides, is the president of its bank council not also the socialist former head of the NeuchÂtel cantonal government, a champion of lower corporate taxes?

A hyper-competitive economy

In 2013, with the euro at 1.20 Swiss francs, Switzerland's balance of trade showed a record surplus of 28.6 billion Swiss francs (12 per cent), which has grown steadily since 2005, despite the continued appreciation of the franc. Even better... leaving aside the eurozone, where Switzerland exports more than half of its products, its trade surplus was 45 per cent! It therefore seems reasonable to postulate that Swiss industry is able to withstand a further revaluation of the franc by 10 per cent against the euro, if it stabilizes at $\hat{=}$ -1.05 to 1.10 Swiss francs (which is the objective of the SNB). It will also be weaker - by between 5 and 10 per cent - compared to the US dollar and the Chinese yuan. It should be noted that two thirds of Switzerland's imports, from the eurozone, will be significantly cheaper, while the more than half of its exports which are destined for the rest of the world will suffer less severe price increases. If we take into account services, income and transfers, the current account balance of Switzerland is three times greater than its trade surplus! This achievement bears witness to the outstanding competitiveness of its economy, which has been for several years number one on the World Economic Forum's ranking.

The French economist Paul Jorion is therefore mistaken when he says on his blog that "the Swiss are resolving to sacrifice their last agricultural and industrial activities so as not to be Swiss are resolving to sacrifice their last agricultural and industrial activities so as not to be swept away financially by the mechanical collapse of the eurozone (...)" (January 18). On the contrary, industrial output per capita in Switzerland is still the highest in the world. By maintaining the ceiling rate of 1.20 francs to $\hat{=}$ -1 for more than three years, the SNB also gave respite for industry to face up to the rise in the value of the franc - by nearly 30 per cent against the euro between the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2011 - and for it to be

able to approach the upturn from a position of strength. However, since the long-awaited recovery did not materialize, the SNB took note of the fact that a further decline of the euro was inevitable. It also considered that Swiss industry could deal with a new rise in the value of the Swiss franc, of probably less than 10 per cent over all its export markets, especially since a large part of its activities is already located abroad, where it suffers no disadvantage because of the exchange rate and will on the contrary be able to strengthen its position by taking over competitors cheaply.

Employers' blackmail

Employers expect the authorities to improve the "framework conditions" of the economy. This involves accelerating the third reform of corporate taxation, which should ensure for private companies a new tax saving of 3 to 4 billion francs per year, while reducing unit labour costs, as Federal Councillor Johann Schneider-Ammann, following many others, recently advocated in Davos. To ensure the triumph of their interests, employers can rely fully on divisions among workers, particularly after the vote on February 9 against "mass immigration". Are German, French and Italian border workers not already stigmatized because they gain from the exchange rate? That is why the most exposed sectors of business, particularly in the field of tourism, will seek to make the foreign labour force play the role of variable adjustment.

It is probable that the most fragile sectors of the Swiss economy will experience difficulties, which they will seek to pass on to workers. However, it is not workers who should foot the bill for the decisions of the SNB and the high level of the franc, which is largely the result of international speculation. Have not the ruling circles - the banks in particular - encouraged this speculation for decades by refusing any controls over the movements of capital? That is why trade unions and a left worthy of the name, instead of calling for national unity to defend the Swiss economy, should demand that the federal

government and the SNB, who did not hesitate for a second to make tens of billions available to save UBS in 2008, put under public control and refinance companies whose existence could be threatened by the rise of the franc, in order to defend wages and the right to employment.

What answer from the left?

The *Wochenzeitung*, newspaper of the German-Swiss alternative left, recently challenged the position of Daniel Lampart, chief economist of the USS and member of the board of the SNB, who criticized the decision of the managing board of the central bank. For this weekly paper, the exchange rate ceiling against the euro was in fact nothing more than a hidden subsidy to Swiss exporters; which is not wrong, but a bit insufficient ... In fact, by removing the currency ceiling, the SNB now intends to use international speculation on the franc as a lever to further increase the competitiveness of the Swiss financial sector at the expense of workers, users of public service users and recipients of social benefits. As we can see, the debate on the defence or not of the currency ceiling ignores the substance of the matter. To design an alternative economic policy, it is in reality necessary to look beyond the exchange rate policy.

A left worthy of the name should demand that the central bank defend the interests of the big majority of the population. For example, the government and the SNB could have attempted to resist the speculative rise of the franc by accepting debt ratios and deficits comparable, in Switzerland, to those of its main trading partners. Since autumn 2011, instead of spending 300 billion francs to buy euros, the central bank could have lent a similar amount to public authorities to support a large-scale plan of support for research, education, health, pensions, social housing, defence of the environment (insulation of buildings), etc. By bringing the public debt to the level of Germany's, which is still quite "reasonable", the SNB would have helped to slow the rise of the franc

while "serving the general interests of the country" (or rather of the

"population"), as the Constitution mandates it to do.

This article was originally written for Viento Sur.

A travesty of tea and tribals

22 February 2015, by Sushovan Dhar

The venue, Banarhat Tea Garden playground, is located within 15 kilometers of the closed Red Bank, Dharanipur and Surendranagar Tea Estates that have been virtually shut-down since the last 12 years. These non-descript locations sometimes hit headlines when starvation and chronic malnutrition take the lives of the closed tea-garden workers and their family members. The otherwise picturesque Dooars, at the foothills of the Himalayan West Bengal and Bhutan has turned into a veritable valley of death with tea garden workers suffering due to low wages, poor quality rations and inadequate medical facilities. It is a shame and matter of utter disgust that the government, instead of bringing the real culprits to books, decides to organize a festival that makes fun of the dead. And not one or ten, but thousands of deaths due to malnutrition, starvation and undernourishment. Matters that could have otherwise been easily prevented.

According to a survey done on body mass index (BMI) by rights activist and doctor Binayak Sen and five other organisations, in the erstwhile closed Raipur tea garden in the same district "40 per cent of its residents have a BMI lower than 18.5, indicative of being underweight, and 140 people in 539 examined had BMI lower than 14, a sign of malnourishment." The report points towards the dire living conditions in the closed tea gardens in West Bengal and exposes the sub-human conditions that people are compelled to endure.

Turning a deaf ear to such alarming developments, the Trinamool Government in the state - (in)famous for its ardent mela culture where millions of rupees are disbursed in

extravagance - tries to showcase its "talents" leaving the tribals and the tea-workers in a quandary. Critics say that these melas or fairs are organised to conceal the failures of the government and also dish out money to local beneficiaries and contractors. Besides, these are great public propaganda exercises for a party in a desperate need to repair its tarnished image owing to unfulfilled expectations and widespread corruptions. Though, the multiple scams, including Saradha ponzi scheme, has hit the government so hard that its image seems beyond any repair. The party can only hope to stay in power with the opposition votes squarely shared between the CPI (M) and the BJP, as testified by the recent assembly and parliamentary by-polls in Krishnagunj and Bongaon respectively.

While workers reel under pathetic wages, currently Rupees 90-95/day, the ministers of the government including the one in charge of labour, resort to falsehood about improving the lot of the labourers and the implementation of minimum wages in the sector. This enclave economy has witnessed notorious collusions between the owners and the successive governments reducing the workers to penury, permanently. Even, in the face of a strong and unified resistance from workers, the government takes the mantle of dragging them into dubious wage deals that would see their hard won gains further eroded. Any Lady Macbeth to say- "Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand"?

In a landmark judgment on Kamani Metals & Alloys Ltd vs Their

Workmen, the Supreme Court of India on 24 January 1967 ruled that "a minimum wage which, in any event, must be paid, irrespective of the tent of profits, the financial condition of the establishment or the availability of workmen on lower wages. This minimum wage is independent of the kind of industry and applies to all alike big or small. It sets the lowest limit below which wages cannot be allowed to sink in all humanity." The government is resolute to connive with the tea-garden owners to violate every word and spirit of this opinion. West Bengal is the only "owner's pride" in the country after the neighbouring Assam government, also notorious for gross violations of workers' rights, issued necessary notifications towards the implementation of minimum wages, last month. Let us not forget that the health of the tea industry depends a great deal on the health of the workers as this is highly a labour intensive industry.

And the timing could not be better with the industry poised to witness tea prices climbing by 9% to an average of Rupees 200 (\$3.2) per kg in 2015 as consumption rises in a recovering economy, according to McLeod Russel India, the world's biggest tea grower. ASSOCHAM, the oldest and a leading apex-body of the trade associations of India, projected the industry to achieve a turnover of Rs. 33,000 crore (\$5.4 billion) by this year making plantation owners richer and leaving workers earn the lowest wage of all organized sectors in the country.

Surely, after forcing a black-wage agreement on the workers, the government could only resort to such travesty to woo the plantation workers and the tribals. And, no wonder there is hardly any turnout of lesser mortals

Fighting for Women's Rights in Turkey

21 February 2015, by **Mattia Gallo, Selin Cagatay**

Mattia Gallo: Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan said that women are not equal to men. His public statement is only one piece of a policy pursued by his party of conservative neo-liberalism, a policy that increases precarity and poverty for men and women, and which tries to control and subordinate the role of women. What have been the effects of this policy on Turkish society since 2002, the year that brought Erdoğan's party, AKP, to power? What are the issues that feminists have faced?

Selin Cagatay: This is not the first time that Erdoğan has stated his disagreement with gender equality. In 2010 when he was the Prime Minister he said, "I do not believe in the equality of men and women. I believe in equal opportunities. Men and women are different and complementary." More strikingly, he said this at a consultation meeting with women's NGOs, which included long-standing feminist organizations, during which he addressed women exclusively as mothers.

In the following years, AKP governments launched a rigorous campaign to monopolize the politics of gender in Turkey. This campaign rests upon two pillars: (1) women's flexible, precarious inclusion in the labor force - that is, the exploitation of women's paid labor while maintaining their subjection to male control; and (2) women's exclusive responsibility for housework and care work in the familial sphere - a full-fledged exploitation of women's unpaid labor. The consequence of this campaign for women is the perpetuation of the sexual division of labor and the overselling of fertility and motherhood. In other words, what we

call "women's entrapment between paid and unpaid labor."

The AKP's catch-phrase for this campaign is "Strengthening the Family." In practice, this means that women are to be the main (if not the only) providers of housework and care work. This hampers their access to paid employment, which pushes them into low-paid, flexible and insecure jobs. Women in return become dependent on the men in their families. Needless to say, this isn't specific to Turkey but is a global trend, especially after the 2008 economic crisis. Many governments in Europe and elsewhere take measures that will result in the further exploitation of women's labor in paid employment and guarantee the reproduction of the labor force while maintaining the patriarchal organization of gender relations.

However, this takes a peculiar form in Turkey under the AKP regime: the imposition of a Sunni-Islamic worldview. This is because religion provides a legitimate framework for the exploitation of women's bodies and their labor. Women should be pious, preferably covered, materially and emotionally dependent on men. They should behave according to their "fiyat" (purpose of creation), as it is popularly said these days. The AKP and conservative women's organizations, which operate as the party's auxiliaries among women, call this "gender equity" and they claim that they've gone beyond gender equality by replacing the abstract term "equality" with an Islamic understanding of "justice."

The result of AKP's neoliberal-conservative campaign is devastating especially in the fields of women's employment, sexual rights, and violence against women. Here I will

note some of the very recent developments in these fields.

Despite all the efforts made to use women as a cheap source of labor, women's labor force participation hovers around 30%. Why is this so? We can understand this by looking at the time-use data provided by the state itself. Women spend four times more time than men on domestic tasks, including care work. When asked, women point at household responsibilities as the main obstacle to their participation in paid employment. Moreover women's unemployment is on the rise: officially 13.3%, but actually 25.2% when you add those who are not looking for a job because they are "hopeless." Women's unemployment increases also with their level of education. That is, the unemployment of women with higher education is twice as much as the unemployment of men with higher education. Apparently, employers do not think that hiring women is as profitable as hiring men.

This situation is supported by the AKP's population politics which deprive women of their sexual rights. Following Erdoğan's claim that "abortion is murder" in 2012, the government took measures to regulate abortion and birth control. Even if the AKP did not ban abortion, the introduction of doctor's right to conscientious objection made abortion inaccessible, especially for women of the lower classes. Getting an abortion at a state hospital is virtually impossible in many cities and towns in Turkey. Similarly, previously state-provided means of birth control are now much harder for women to access. These policies and many others are in line with Erdoğan's insistence that every woman should give birth to three to five children.

Only this month, the government launched a program to “protect the family and ensure a dynamic population” where it promises a increasing cash allowance for women who give birth. When the promotion of motherhood is this aggressive without any emphasis on the father’s role in care-taking and sharing other household responsibilities, it is not realistic to expect gender equality in the field of employment.

Finally, violence against women. In 2009, feminist organizations in Turkey found out that femicide in Turkey under the seven years of AKP rule since 2002 had increased by a scandalous rate of 1400%. The fact that at least three women were murdered every single day caused a great furor among different sections of Turkish society. The AKP responded to this by passing a new law to eliminate violence against women in 2012 but this law seeks to protect women only within the family, meaning that it doesn’t address women who are not married. The law also prioritizes solutions to violence against women within the family institution instead of ensuring that women pursue their lives independently from the perpetrator.

Five years later, the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs conducted research on violence against women. And they didn’t share the results with the general public! The results, which were recently leaked to the media, are as follows: Women experience physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence at an unchanging rate of 40% in the last six years. 89% of them do not seek any official help. The most severe cases of violence are faced by women who are divorced or who have left their partners. Similarly, femicide is most prevalent among this group of women. This means that women face the most extreme cases of violence when they attempt to become independent of men. Here, the religious-conservative ideological imposition that women should behave according to their purpose of creation is the discourse that perpetuates violence against women because it encourages men to “punish” women who step outside the confines of patriarchal family.

MG: In June 2013 the protests of Gezi Park broke out in Taksim Square and mobilizations continued for a long time after. What was the role and importance of women in this cycle of protests? In this regard, what were the initiatives organized after Erdo?an’s claims that “women are not equal to men”?

SG: When we discuss women’s participation in the Gezi-inspired protests, we must distinguish between women’s and feminists’ presence in the revolt. Women, just like men, took part in the protests because the issues at stake were directly related to their lives. Again, just like men, women belonged to different political groups that participated in the protests: Kemalists, Kurds, worker’s unions, left/socialist organizations, LGBT activists, anti-capitalist Muslims, etc. Women and men together expressed their dissatisfaction with the AKP and its politics such as the commodification of urban space, the exploitation of natural resources and the destruction of forests, the conservative, anti-secular and authoritarian administration of the public sphere, the increasing exploitation of waged-labor, the replacement of universal welfare provisions with poor relief and conditional social allowance, and so on. In this sense, women’s participation was not particularly different from that of men.

On the other hand, the AKP’s sexist, conservative, and anti-secular take on gender issues like the government’s failure to eliminate violence against women, misogynist comments by high-rank party members including (or primarily by) Erdo?an and the attacks on women’s sexual rights like the attempt to ban abortion in 2012, contributed to women’s involvement in the protests. Moreover, women generally have more interest in reclaiming the public sphere because the authoritarian regulation of public space perpetuates the patriarchal control over their lives.

When we come to feminists, they also actively took part in the protests individually as well as collectively. We were a constituent of the organizing committee inside Gezi Park, but we

also organized a number of events and demonstrations as “feminists” during the protests. Our specific political contribution was to link the “public” matters that were politicized during the protests to the less visible “private” matters, in particular to women’s oppression in the familial sphere. In other words, feminists protested against the authoritarian, conservative regulation of the whole social organization, not only of the public sphere. So we provided the link between the anti-democratic administration of the public space and the increasingly conservative regulation of gender relations both in public and private.

The protests triggered a significant political mobilization in the social opposition in Turkey. Neighborhood forums, squatted houses, green initiatives, and formation of groups against the commodification of urban space are some examples. Women are of course part of these initiatives. Following the protests feminism too became one of the influential political discourses for the young population mobilized by the revolt. Therefore, many young women are now recruited into our ranks or they closely follow feminist politics. Another important outcome of the Gezi-inspired protests was the rise of social media activism. This significantly strengthened the hand of feminists in responding immediately to the misogynist attitudes or claims of the cabinet members or other high-rank state officials or Islamist intellectuals. These responses are also more visible and more popular thanks to the prevalence of online social media.

MG: When was the Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif born? What is its analysis of the situation of Turkish society? What are the campaigns and initiatives that this organization has led since it was born?

SG: As a group of feminists, we founded the SFK in Istanbul in 2008. The SFK instantly grew into a collective with some 250 members and organized in five cities: Istanbul, Ankara, Eski?ehir, Izmir and Adana, plus individual members in other cities and abroad. The SFK was born out of the need for strengthening the anti-

systemic grassroots feminism in Turkey. We thought that the feminist movement was becoming increasingly dependent on the state and capital and therefore less radical. We knew that neither the state nor capitalist institutions would genuinely support women in becoming collectively autonomous from men. Therefore, we are a completely autonomous collective; we don't receive funding from or cooperate with state or capitalist structures. This way we are able to both build our own independent agenda and mobilize women into grassroots activism at the same time.

The SFK has a materialist understanding of feminism. Women's labor lies at the center of our analysis; women's paid, unpaid, productive, reproductive, emotional labor. Through the concept of women's labor, we show how patriarchy and capitalism operate as two different but mutually coexisting systems of oppression. Our political project is to mobilize women against conservative-Islamist neoliberalism in Turkey to

overthrow the patriarchal control over their lives.

In this aim we previously ran campaigns with a focus on women's labor, especially on women's unpaid labor in the family. For example, in the campaign "We want our due back from men!" we demanded equal share of housework and care work between men, women, and the state. Similarly, in our campaign "There's life outside the family!" we drew attention to women's entrapment in oppressive familial relations.

Currently the SFK is involved in a number of joint initiatives with other feminist individuals and organizations. Among these, "Immediate Action against Femicide" urges the government to take specifically preventive measures against femicide, for example by opening shelters instead of increasing the punishment for the murderer. In other words, in order to eliminate violence against women we demand women's empowerment not as a family member but as an autonomous individual.

Similarly, the campaign, "Abortion is a Right, Decision Belongs to Women" demands free and unconditional access to abortion and that abortion be defined as part of women's right to health. Women's Initiative for Peace, on the other hand, is a platform where we contribute to women's involvement in the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict with our feminist agenda. The current war in Syria and its consequences for women refugees in Turkey is right now the most burning issue that the Initiative deals with.

Other than these, we organize public discussions and publish the quarterly journal *Feminist Politika*. At the same time, we are highly involved in street activism where we collaborate with other feminist groups and individual activists. While our activities mostly focus on local issues, we also take part in feminist conferences and gatherings abroad in order to share experiences with socialist feminists in other countries.

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Syriza's victory seen by a dockworker, union leader from the Port of Piraeus

21 February 2015, by **Giorgos Gogos, Katy Fox-Hodess**

Giorgos Gogos is a Greek dockworker and union leader from the Port of Piraeus. A member of SYRIZA, he is active at the regional and union levels of the party and is engaged in local organizing efforts in Piraeus, the large urban industrial area surrounding the port outside of Athens. Katy Fox-Hodess is a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley writing her dissertation on international solidarity among dockworkers' unions. She spoke with Gogos on January 31 following the recent election in Greece

Katy Fox-Hodess: How have people in your community reacted

to the election results?

Giorgos Gogos: Generally, it was accepted with great enthusiasm by many people, not only by those who voted for SYRIZA but other people who traditionally belonged to other parties and couldn't escape from those commitments. Everybody I think was saying, ok, let's see what this new route is like and we have to try, somehow, a new way of approaching the whole problem.

K: When you say other parties, you mean PASOK and the Communist Party?

G: PASOK and New Democracy,

mostly. From the Communist Party, anyway, I don't have many acquaintances, but I think that people who don't belong to the structure of the party, who are not members of the party, accept this election result with relief. In the beginning, we can say there was a negative reaction, they were questioning the possibility of co-governing with ANEL, the Independent Greeks, that is actually a populist right-wing party, though all of their discourse is actually quite anti-Troika, anti-memorandum. But I think after the formation of the new government, the new elected government, many people realize that there is going to have to be cooperation

within the government. The new government has been quite coherent and we have the first announcements from several ministers confirming to the people that the main guidelines of the pre-election program are going to be implemented at once.

K: What has the reaction been in the port?

G: In the port, we were really happy, especially after hearing the first announcements by the new Minister of Maritime Affairs. He reaffirmed that the privatization process of all ports, but especially the Port of Piraeus and the Port of Thessaloniki, will stop.

K: One of the first announcements SYRIZA made after the election was about stopping the privatization of the ports. Why do you think SYRIZA has made this such a priority and why is it important to fight for public ports?

G: You know we are saying in the port that everyone who was against the dockworkers in Piraeus port lost power, lost the government, they were eliminated, so don't fight against us. Ok, so this is a very macho explanation, it's not political. For SYRIZA, privatization in general is something that's not acceptable. The privatization that was going on very, very quickly was the privatization of the ports, and especially the Port of Piraeus. So I think that it was symbolic, and at the same time, an important message, that we're not going to privatize. And of course, it's very important that Piraeus port workers and dockworkers have shown their determination, their devotion to defend the public port.

First of all, it's a strategic point for a country such as Greece, not only because of the many islands that connect the people living there and traveling there, not only because it's the main gate of incoming and outgoing cargo and goods. It's also because when a state-owned company passes to private investors, the private investors care only for their profits and nothing else. So the

people's transportation needs will not be served. Apart from this, it affects the society and the economy in general. It was and it will be profitable. It didn't have losses in any year over the past fifty years. And a government like SYRIZA needs profitable public entities so as to redistribute the public wealth. Apart from this, our jobs would be lost, our labor rights and the organization of our job would be challenged and in danger, and it's affecting our families, so we are fighting also for our jobs and for our children.

K: Are you optimistic that SYRIZA will be successful in this process of confronting COSCO and the troika and stopping the process of port privatizations?

G: SYRIZA will be strong only if they will remain committed to the pre-elections program. In addition to this, they need the support of the people and society. For example, of course we are sure that they are going to have pressure from abroad, from China and from the European Union and from the troika and from member states in Europe. But all this pressure will be less effective if people stand with the decisions of the government. One of the first things that Alexis Tsipras said yesterday to [Eurogroup Chair] Dijsselbloem was that he wants to do things differently than the people who were in power before him. He said he wants to follow the commitments that he made to the people. It's important to hear that from a leader, the Prime Minister, to say that he will follow the program that he showed to the people and was voted for. This way, they cannot reverse their plans or in case they have to reverse their plans, they will have to ask for the opinion of the people and the society first.

I have trust in my comrades in SYRIZA. And I have trust not only that they will be accountable but that they will follow what they have been saying. I have trust that they have received the message from society, which says go do what you have told us you will do. Of course, we know that as a union, we have our autonomy, we are not going to follow

something that a member of SYRIZA says or a minister of SYRIZA says - we have a very healthy cooperation and an honest one.

K: Is it important for the union and for the coalition in Piraeus to continue to organize and be mobilized to provide pressure from below for SYRIZA to keep its promises?

G: Of course. Organization and mobilization of the union in general, and especially in a sector like ours, is a necessity and a precondition for anything you want to do at any time. No matter which party's in power, no matter what the decisions are. Until now, all the decisions have been negative for the unions - it's the first time in Greece we face something pro-labor, anti-privatization and so on. But we still want to be mobilized. We don't want people to remain on their couches, but instead we want to be on alert in order to promote our demands so that they will not disappoint us. And we want to promote our demands and the decisions of the government that the European Union or other countries do not accept and are pressuring the Greek government to back down on. And already we have started to have this discussion among ourselves. Everybody was happy all this week, it was the first time we were laughing after the announcement of the new government, but at the same time, or the next day, we were starting to talk about it, to say, now we have a government that says no to privatization, but in case they are pressured by Europe to sacrifice the ports, what are we going to do? We're going to stand outside of the door of the Maritime Affairs Ministry and our port, and we will continue our fight.

K: The same day that SYRIZA announced it would stop the port privatization process, they also announced that they would rehire the cleaners from the Ministry of Finance and thousands of people who were illegally fired from the public sector. What is the significance of prioritizing these decisions?

G: It's very symbolic, first of all, because this group of women were very militant, very active, and very much present in every struggle taking place in Athens. So it's very symbolic and a very good example, not in all senses because they made certain mistakes in my opinion, and we have some others who can say a lot of things, but they still remain like heroes. But I don't like to use the word hero because you put a hero over there and you forget him and you are doing bullshit on the other side. So they're people like us, they were women like us and they were very devoted to their struggle. So it's very important for SYRIZA to support them and to solve their problem. It encourages other unions to be this devoted.

K: What is the significance of the election for workers and unions in Greece in general?

G: It's the highest moment of democracy. This is a moment in which all of us are called to choose who is going to represent us and support and defend our rights and our positions. We are not afraid of elections. On the contrary, I think Greek people should be asked more frequently. For example, it is constitutionally permissible to have referendums, so I think the new government will use this process and will mobilize people in this way to be participatory and not an audience. This is important. It needs time. It's not a matter that will change in one or two or five years. But if a left government can remain powerful for more than five years, for two government cycles, and build strong foundations, it will change the our mentality as citizens. We believe in this because as a trade union, we use elections frequently, we have collective decision making processes.

K: Do you believe SYRIZA will prioritize reversing the anti-labor legislation of the last government, which targeted collective bargaining and unions?

G: It's one of the first things they say they are going to cure. They are going to reverse all of these negative laws which prevent collective bargaining

and return all the laws that were protective to the less powerful part of the market, which is labor and not the employers. It's a commitment and I think it's one of the first laws they are going to reverse.

K: What is your opinion on the alliance between SYRIZA and ANEL?

G: In the beginning, I was quite skeptical. But the majority of 149 MPs gives them the opportunity to have a role in this government. Greek society in general is not so progressive. A big percentage of Greek society is quite conservative, not only in its way of thinking, in its way of acting, but in its way of approaching several issues, for example, sexual orientation or human rights concerning immigrants. These are issues that many Greek people are not in favor of. They are quite conservative. The vast majority of Greek people are not so religious, but quite attached to the tradition connected to the Orthodox church. The oath that the new Prime Minister, Tsipras, gave was political, with respect to the leader of the Greek church, saying that I'm going to give a political oath but also I want your good wishes for this government to go on. It sends a message. So you need a conservative party that can support you in this struggle, in the common fight against the memorandum policies, and after that, I think the Greek people will realize that recognizing, for example, the marriage between LGBT people, it's not crucial, you're not going to be affected, you're not going to be infected, it's a human right. So you are more powerful having a conservative party in this and having already some time, a year, six months in power, and having shown that you believe in what you are saying and you fight for it and you want to implement it. It's important to have a conservative audience in such a government so as to transmit some ideas. It's more clever, let's say, to have them inside, and honest, in the sense that you can say to them, for example, ok guys, we have a problem with some thousands of kids that are born here in Greece, their parents

were citizens of other countries and they have no citizenship, but they are Greeks, they are brought up here, they have been taught in Greek schools, they are our children's friends, so we should give them citizenship, they are Greek people.

K: So you are saying that having ANEL in the coalition forces SYRIZA to try to speak to and convince people on the right?

G: Yes, Yes. And I think it's the best vehicle to minimize conservatism in Greece. Maybe what I'm saying is too romantic and has no political explanation, but it's my personal impression. I've seen this in my union. Some conservative people have seen members of our union, left guys, who are committed and hard-working, and through their example, they are persuaded that no matter if you left wing or right wing, when somebody is fighting for something that is right, and if they trust you more and they are convinced but you voted for SYRIZA, it's ok. If you want to make bread, you put in flour and water and you mix it together and after that you have bread. This process I think will take place in the government and will be expanded to society.

K: Is there not a risk that SYRIZA will move to the right?

G: No, not from ANEL. I don't think there is this danger from ANEL being inside the government. If we will have this move, it will be from other agents outside of the government, more powerful players in this game, the state or big capitalists - the whole system, let's say. But not from ANEL.

K: What are the biggest challenges or pressures SYRIZA will face to push its agenda?

G: First of all, if we leave the case of the port and privatizations and all of that, this anti-privatization policy will be the vehicle for the troika to press us. For example, if you don't follow our program, we'll stop your liquidity. The first thing they have to do is address the debt crisis at the European level. It's not easy. There are several articles this week, for

example, about how Prime Ministers Mariano Rajoy in Spain and Pedro Passos Coelho in Portugal, reject this proposal. They say it will be damaging for all of us and the markets will punish us, just like what Antonio Sampaio, the former Prime Minister, would say, for example. But I think that if this cause is taken up by the people and the European social democratic parties that still have some significant part of left discourse in them, I think that more alliances and more allies will be found. This is the first thing. Because the debt is not only strangling us, it's also pressuring more healthy economies. Germany itself has such problems. It's not obvious now, but sooner or later it will come. And on the other hand, for internal affairs, I think they should start giving signs that the citizens are the priority, not the companies. They should start, for example, as I said, by amending labor laws, and also making changes in the health and education system, and making a serious effort to tax big wealth. These will be signs to society and to the poorest part of the society that something has changed, that they're not the same as the others, that the rich are not untouchable and the rest of us will not be fucked over once again.

K: Do you believe that the coalition with ANEL will last?

G: I don't know. It's a big question mark. I don't think that this form of government will last much time. I don't know if it's going to be one year or two years but I don't think it will last for four years. They are going to face serious challenges in the near future. I put a deadline, let's say, in the summer, when we're going to face the first serious problem in paying back some of the debt. If we don't have any alternative resources for paying this money, I think we will have new elections. So SYRIZA has until that time to show to the people what the direction is, that it's different than the previous government, so they will reaffirm, maybe with better results, the new government. Actually, I wouldn't like to see this coalition last for four years. I would like to see the left party get more powerful through this

coalition in order to have a light at the end of the tunnel soon and to go to elections again with a greater percentage for SYRIZA, so it has an absolute majority.

K: To support SYRIZA, in general, what should workers and unions in Greece be doing?

G: They should be more active and respond to the calls for dialogue. There is a commitment from SYRIZA's side that no decision will be taken without a dialogue between the government and the affected or interested parties. So first of all we have to be working harder to have proposals, so as to simply say no or yes with obedience, but to continue to be critical. On the other hand, we have to start processes, procedures, and initiatives in order to realize we are not the only ones with a problem, but next to us there are also people with more problems or less problems. This way we can have horizontal and vertical relationships with other adjacent institutions.

It's not difficult for this to happen, especially in Piraeus, because we have the labor center. Unfortunately, the power rests with the the Communist Party link in trade unionism, and they're not so cooperative. They not only have certain structures and discourses, but they follow certain directives from the party. And their intention is to get more power for the party instead of developing a more coherent program and becoming closer to private workers. I think we have a lot of work ahead of us if we want to be constructive and if we want to expand the idea of solidarity and co-action. I think the days of each sector fighting on their own are over. It's not effective anymore. And in case SYRIZA does not do well and loses power, a more conservative government will certainly come to power. So we need to make the most of this time, not only to change things for the better, but in case we have negative results, to be more prepared to face the conservative activism that will come for sure. But this is the pessimistic view. We have a more optimistic view, to be constructive

ive, draw up proposals, and make our self-criticism - why we didn't succeed as trade unions before, what things have to be changed within the structures and the processes to be more democratic and less clientelistic. We have a lot to do.

K: How is the relationship between SYRIZA and the labor unions? Are there strong ties?

G: No, they don't have strong connections because actually within the trade union structures, SYRIZA's percentages are the same as they were five years ago. So people from SYRIZA in trade unions are in the minority. Although society has changed, due to clientelism, personal connections, and all these rotten systems, democratic ways of breathing are not allowed. So SYRIZA in power is in a better position to put these processes in the front and center. But I don't know how big the resistance will be, especially from the Communist side. Because, unfortunately, the Communist Party is part of this clientelism and has especially non-democratic ways of holding power within the unions. I've heard terrible stories, and I know they're not just stories, about how unions that belong to the Communist party use very undemocratic means to keep their power.

K: In other words, the principal problem is the structure of the unions - they are clientelistic and not very democratic - which makes it difficult for SYRIZA to gain a foothold in the unions?

G: They were very close to the parties that were in power. SYRIZA must not fall into the trap of using their power in government to sow the same seeds in this field. It must leave the trade unions alone to change themselves.

K: One criticism of SYRIZA is that the party is dominated by university intellectuals, not people from the union movement - do you share this view?

G: It is more or less true. But as I told you, the problem is that people in

the unions who are members of SYRIZA are few in number. And to be honest, personally speaking, I don't promote myself in SYRIZA as a trade unionist and in my trade union as a member of SYRIZA. They are two different roles. I try to distinguish and behave according to where I am. Of course, between these two roles, the priority for me is to be a dockworker and to protect as much as I can the rights of my colleagues and my job. But apart from this, I need some political tools to make this happen. I think there will be fewer unionists over time. But also I have to tell you that trade unionism in Greece is quite devalued.

K: There is a negative opinion of trade unions?

G: Yes, because of the very big connection between the parties of New Democracy and PASOK with the trade unions. I think I told you before that many presidents of the Confederation of Greek Workers, after the end of their term, became ministers, without explaining or having any process open to the people or open to the unions. It was just a very personal decision, passing from one role to the other. So all these behaviors created problems and people were leaving the unions. What we're trying to do in our union is to fight this. Of course we have few things in common with such behaviors. On the contrary, we have very open approaches, we try to mobilize people, we try to involve new members and young members in decision making in the union, so while we might not be one of the best, I think we have a very good approach to this. And we think that unionism is a tool to have common demands and to fight for our common demands. It should not be seen as only a step for one person to become more powerful or more dominant. Whoever holds these positions has to serve for the good of everybody, not to serve their personal interests.

K: The Piraeus B electoral district near the port had among the strongest support for SYRIZA in the elections in 2012 and in 2015. Why has there been such strong support there?

G: Generally, in the poorest areas, SYRIZA got the biggest percentages. The vote was quite concentrated. In Piraeus, and in the wider area of Piraeus, I think the seriousness of the approach of SYRIZA, the sincere intervention, you know, all the activities of the last three years, have awarded SYRIZA with this percentage of the vote.

K: You have been very active in organizing with the party in Piraeus. What kinds of activities has SYRIZA been involved in there?

G: Solidarity for All in Piraeus, an organization supported mainly by SYRIZA, serves daily meals. There are also the "solidarity lessons", free classes for students who cannot afford to have private lessons for the university exams, as well as social pharmacies and social doctors, checking people for free and prescribing and so on. These are immediate actions for the society done without checking people's status, unlike Golden Dawn. Every vulnerable person is accepted. It's a healthy intervention in society. Of course we are trying to tell people that they should mobilize and collectively demand their rights. But it's not to make them be a member of SYRIZA or to work for SYRIZA and so on.

There is also a coordinating body of anti-fascists in Piraeus and we are in it. We don't have our own campaigns. We try to support the common struggles, the anti-fascist struggles. On the contrary, the Communist Party is unfortunately out of this, with their own intervention, which is very low, I have to tell you. They don't make frequent protests, and so on, although they were a target and they are still a target of fascists. But they are very afraid to get involved in a common struggle. On the other hand, we have very good relations with people from ANTARSYA, especially in anti-fascist struggles, despite our differences. I don't think there is an anti-fascist movement or manifestation, in Piraeus at least, that we do not participate in.

K: support for Golden Dawn is

less than it was one, two, or three years ago. Why do you think this is?

G: In my opinion, they should be even less powerful, they should lose more than 5% of the percentage. Unfortunately, they kept 6.5% or something like this. It's a big percentage if you consider that their leadership is in prison, that they don't have the financial resources they used to have, and, most importantly, that it is now publicly well-known that they are engaged in criminal activities. So it's an unfortunate result and it's quite painful to have 6,000 or so of your neighbors vote for Golden Dawn. I expect from SYRIZA first of all to put them on trial, to give them a fair trial, and at the same time, from the perspective of being in government, to promote anti-fascism and anti-racism so as to start changing the mentality of those people who are now voting for Golden Dawn, to change their orientation and to be clear with society about their criminal face.

K: As a union leader and a SYRIZA member, when you speak to members of your own union or to workers in Piraeus in general who aren't members or supporters of SYRIZA, what kinds of arguments do people make and how do you respond and try to organize them?

G: First of all, they are afraid that they are going to act like the previous governments. They say now that they are not going to privatize the port and finally they will do it. So these are the main arguments I hear. What I say honestly is that I don't believe they will do it, but in case they are pressured or they change their mind, I'm sure that they are going to fight from a better position. We are going to have for sure a more democratic government. I'm certain we are going to take part in an open dialogue, and anyway, not only our ability to fight but our responsibility to fight is here. And we are going to be against anyone, even if it's SYRIZA in power, who undermines our rights and our jobs. It's clear.

K: Are there other strategic sectors that you would like to see pass

to public ownership?

G: Energy companies, for sure, I don't have to mention the health system and education system, universities, trains and roads, should be taken back from subcontractors that have taken a very big amount of money. For example, I traveled to my village which is 350 km from Athens recently during the Christmas holidays and we paid 45 euros for the tolls, for the roads that were paid to be constructed by the state. I want to see my dad but I don't want to pay 45 euros to go and see him. So for all these sectors, I think they should remain public.

K: What is your opinion of the arguments made by SYRIZA figures like Costas Lapavistas in favor of Greece leaving the Eurozone?

G: Personally, I think the euro as a currency is a means, it's not the objective. It's the means to have an economy. What is an economy? An economy is ok if it serves people and provides a certain level of security to the people - jobs, health systems, education. So in those terms, the euro is a tool. Apart from this, it is a political issue. I would prefer to see what chances we have inside the Eurozone. And after that, for sure inside the European Union, which is something different. And after that if they insist, if they say, you have to keep getting fucked over, you have to be sacrificed so as to remain in the Eurozone, no. I think that if that moment comes, we should go to a referendum and decide altogether. And from Lapavistas' side, I was following him during 2011 and 2012 - for two years, I was following his speeches. I was quite open to hearing such opinions but I was not persuaded that they have a clear answer especially for the first period of a transfer from the euro to a local currency. They didn't convince me that they have something concrete to propose to the people for those first critical six months of transition. And you know, our society is not trained or educated to suffer under such terms. For example, if you leave the euro, the iPhone will be three or four times more expensive. I don't care. I don't give a damn. But

many people give a damn about some items that they don't even have the power to buy in euros. So I'm ready to wait for gasoline and to do my part and not to demand more but I know many guys around me that would be happy to simply take their share and their family's share for the month. So I think we're not trained well enough to confront such a danger.

K: There have been some criticisms that SYRIZA has moved toward peripheral leadership and is becoming too focused on individual politicians - do you share this view?

G: It's becoming too presidential, yes. That's true. I'm one of these guys that are criticizing Tsipras although I recognize that he is very charismatic, very clever, very efficient. He can represent our core ideas and all this that we call SYRIZA. Unfortunately, the last six months, we have seen that the party procedures were not respected and some decisions were taken with a small group around the president. This is a problem. This is a problem which we have addressed within the organs of the party. It's something that we cannot prevent now, now that he is Prime Minister. This kind of thing will happen more and more, I think. But I hope that the collective reactions, the collective interventions will ameliorate this. And of course I'm not saying that he's like Georgios Papanikolaou or Samaras. He's a left guy. And he's not going to act in such a way. But ok, within the left spectrum, he has made some mistakes - not respecting the organs of the party - and he was trying especially during the pre-election period to put things as far back as possible so as to have less collective procedures. I'm also critical of this. But I don't know if it's personal decisions or people surrounding him. For example, there are one or two guys that are not so clever, in my opinion, that don't have such a collective way of acting, though I don't want to minimize his responsibility. I prefer to give responsibility to a team, a party, a union. That's why I'm accusing the team of leadership. It's not just one man.

K: Do you participate in a political current within SYRIZA?

G: I was participating in the meetings of AKO, the Renewing Communist Ecological Left, a Eurocommunist party and one of the founding members of SYRIZA. Inside SYRIZA, AKO, with two smaller groups, created ANASA, which in Greek means breathe. ANASA became an official political current. It doesn't have a structure, there is an open dialogue between ANASA and some guys from the majority of the party, meaning close to Tsipras and close to the president's group. They're critical and they created what is called the Group of Fifty-Three, fifty-three members of the central committee. So this Group of Fifty-Three, it's getting bigger and bigger, it's not fifty-three anymore, it's more. We don't have a very strict structure. Actually it's a group for dialogue that is trying to promote collective activity within the party, trying to prevent factionalism, trying to prevent the leadership from making decisions without being approved by the collective, and trying to prevent the presidential leadership group from making mistakes and taking decisions out of the hands of the party.

K: What can worker movements in general learn from this experience?

G: This topic we could talk about for some hours. Look, the motto that SYRIZA used during the pre-election period was that hope is coming. So now we feel that hope has come and we think it's a great opportunity for the working class to start breathing. In my personal opinion, it's a period of responsibility for all of us to go beyond ourselves, not to have the first demand be for our union, for ourselves, but to try to develop more collective demands, more fundamental demands, and to start the hard work of positive criticism, of serious impact proposals. Because I think now we are fighting from a better position, but we are still fighting. It doesn't mean that just because we have a very charismatic Prime Minister with

good ministers that this is the end of the story, no. I've known these guys for many years. They are guys like ourselves. So I can imagine that if I were in that position how important it could be for me to have the support of the people. I would feel more secure having people back me. Not to follow them and to say yes to everything they say, no, but to support the right decisions, to keep our presence and to keep our signature being active in every decision they take. It's really serious and I feel more responsibility because as General Secretary of the union, it's a lot of work for me to mobilize people, having fulfilled their main demand, meaning that the port is not going to be sold but I want the state to own it. It's difficult. But it's the only way we're going to succeed, knowing that the program is not something revolutionary. It's a clear social democratic program. But in order to achieve a socialist society, we need some time so as to pass through a real social democratic path with socialism as the end goal.

K: What is the significance of the election for workers outside of Greece?

G: I have to tell you that I have received from our friends who are dockworkers in Europe many, many messages, congratulations, very optimistic messages. They are waiting, at least the people I am in contact with, and they are very close to my mentality, they were very happy. And they really want to see this government succeed, because they feel that this will trigger changes in this direction in their countries. I do believe that the government's change in Greece will have a snowball effect.

K: What can people outside of Greece do to support the political process in Greece?

G: First of all, they should not listen to the mainstream mass media and should try to find alternative information. It's really important. I'm following what the mass media in

Germany has been saying these past two or three days and it's really too biased. They are against the new government and they don't tell the truth. The second thing is that they should show their solidarity actively. For example, I know that today (January 31) PODEMOS are having a big manifestation in Madrid, so as to criticize Rajoy for his statements at the European meeting about European debt. These kinds of actions are really encouraging the Greek people and encouraging Greece's new elected government to go on. To Europeans, I have to say that we have to remain together and to remain together as nations, not as companies or as multinationalals. SYRIZA is another Greek experiment. Greece was an experiment in austerity for the past five years and now I think it will be an experiment in prosperity.

31 January 2015

[Viewpoint](#)

Swiss leaks / HSBC : Drug and Bank Lords

20 February 2015, by **Éric Toussaint**

It has been revealed that HSBC was accused of failing to respect regulations, to prevent money laundering, on nearly \$700 billion of transfers and over \$9.4 billion in US currency purchases from HSBC Mexico. The bank also violated sanctions against Iran, Sudan and Burma, amongst others. Although HSBC is openly contemptuous towards the law, it has hardly been subjected to any legal consequences. In December 2012, HSBC was condemned to a fine of \$1.9 billion - about one week of revenue - as the full and final penalty for its money laundering activities. Although aiding and abetting terrorist organisations, and drug trafficking, are punishable by five years in prison not one director or employee has been criminally prosecuted. Bank directors have a free

hand to take part in drug trafficking, sanction violations, or any other crime.

The *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) has inquired as to what was said behind the doors of the Justice department about this case. According to certain information, several prosecutors wanted HSBC to plead guilty and recognise that it had violated the law, which obliges banks to inform the authorities of any transaction of over \$10,000 dollars that might be suspicious. This plea would have led to HSBC losing its United States banking licence and an end to its activities in that country. After several months of negotiation, it was eventually decided not to press criminal charges in order to avoid the Bank's closure. It was even decided to

avoid too much tarnishing of the Bank's image. [16] This small fine of \$1.9 billion was completed by a period of probation: should the authorities discover, between 2013 and 2018, that HSBC has not put an end to these practices (there has been no condemnation), the justice department may reopen the case. This result may be summed up as: "Naughty child! penance of one week's pay and don't do it again for five years." this is clearly an example of a bank that is "Too Big to Jail".

During a Senatorial Commission concerning HSBC in July 2013, Elizabeth Warren (D. Massachusetts) interrogated David Cohen, undersecretary at the Treasury responsible for actions against terrorism and financial espionage, appearing for the

US Treasury. She made the following points: the United States government takes money laundering very seriously. It is possible to close a bank that engages in this activity. Those condemned can be definitively prohibited from conducting banking and financial activities and may be condemned to prison sentences. Now, in December 2012 HSBC admitted to laundering \$881 million for Mexican and Columbian drug cartels, and the Bank also admitted to many sanctions violations over a long period. HSBC has paid a fine, but no individuals were sanctioned and the closing of the bank in the US has not been mentioned. She asked, *‘What does it take? How many billions of dollars do you have to launder for drug lords, and how many economic sanctions do you have to violate before someone will consider shutting down a financial institution?’* The treasury representative dodged the issue saying the question was too complex to give an answer. [17] The Senator concluded that a cocaine dealer would go to prison and for a very long time if he repeats his fault whilst bankers who launder hundreds of millions of narcodollars can sleep easily in their own beds at night with no fear of being condemned. [18]

Stephen Green, CEO of HSBC (2003-2010), becomes British Minister for Commerce

Stephen Green is a vivid illustration of the symbiotic relationship between finance and government. In this case, it goes ever further, because he does not content himself with serving the interests of big capital as a banker and a minister. His *‘ministries’* go as far as being an ordained priest of the Church of England. He has written two books on the subject of business and ethics, notably **Serving God, Serving Mammon?** [19] The title refers to the biblical quotation, *‘No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24).’* Mammon is symbolic of wealth, greed, and profit. This name comes up in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Phoenician. Mammon is sometimes compared to Satan. As for Stephen Green, he has

received university honours and is obviously untouchable.

He started his career at the British Ministry of Overseas Development, before going to the private international consultancy company, McKinsey. In 1982, he was hired by HSBC the biggest British bank where he was rapidly promoted to positions of high responsibility. He was named Executive Director in 2003, and became HSBC chairman in 2006, where he remained until 2010.

The accusations by US authorities of laundering \$881 million of drug money, and other illicit transactions relate to the 2003-2010 period. According to the 334-page Senate report published in 2012, Stephen Green had been informed by an employee, in 2005, that HSBC had installed money-laundering operations in Mexico and doubtful transactions had taken place.

Still in 2005, the financial services company Bloomberg, based in New York, accused HSBC of laundering drug money. Stephen Green replied that the accusations were, *‘singular and wholly irresponsible,’* putting the reputation of a great and trustworthy international bank into doubt. In 2008, US federal authorities informed Stephen Green that Mexican authorities had discovered the existence of a money laundering operation involving HSBC in Mexico, and an HSBC branch in the Cayman islands. The agency remarked that such activity could imply penal responsibility for HSBC. [20] There followed a series of rather soft warnings compared to the gravity of the accusations. HSBC promised to change its behaviour, but continued its criminal practices.

Finally, HSBC was issued a Cease and Desist Order in October 2010 to put an end to these nefarious activities. [21] At the end of 2012, following the publication of the Senatorial Commission’s report and months of discussion between different US security agencies, HSBC was fined \$1.9 billion dollars.

Stephen Green cannot claim he did not know what his bank was up to not only in Mexico and in offshore tax havens, but also in the Middle East and in the US. He was CEO of his

group, and had also been a director of HSBC Bank Bermuda Ltd. [22], HSBC Mexico, HSBC Middle East. He had also been president of HSBC Private Banking Holdings (Suisse) SA, and of HSBC North America Holdings Inc..

When the US decision to impose a heavy fine on HSBC for drug money laundering was made public in 2012, Stephen Green was no longer at HSBC. He was now minister in the British Cabinet under James Cameron...

With hindsight, Stephen Green’s timing was spot-on, a work of art. In February 2010, he published a book entitled: *Good value: Reflections on Money, Morality and an Uncertain World.* The foreword asks the following question: *‘Can one be both an ethical person and an effective business person? Stephen Green, an ordained priest and the chairman of HSBC, thinks so [23].’* Of course, the *‘ethical person’* and the *‘effective business person’* are identifiable in the author, priest, and HSBC chairman Stephen Green. The propaganda is well coordinated, at the same time he is awarded the honorary degree Doctor Honoris Causa by London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

In October 2010, for the second time, the US justice department orders HSBC to stop its criminal activities. Before this information is made public, Stephen Green jumps the boat. The following month, at the request of David Cameron, he received honours and was appointed Baron Green of Hurstpierpoint, which is in West Sussex. Unbelievable, for a shady businessman, who laundered millions of dollars of drug money, to become on 22 November 2010, a Life peer, a member of the House of Lords. Stranger than criminal fiction!

He resigned from his position at HSBC in December 2010 to become Minister of State for Trade and Investment in February 2011. [24] In this way, he continued to serve the interests of the British corporations, with whom he has very close relations, because he has been Vice- President of the Confederation of British Industry since May 2010. Stephen Green also used his know-how to promote London as a

candidate for the 2012 Olympic Games candidate, which were held in July, exactly when the US Senate published its report on the HSBC affair. Stephen Green refused to reply to questions from members of the House of Lords on this scandal. He was protected by the president of the House of Lords Conservative Party group under pretext that a Minister is not answerable to Parliament for matters that do not concern his Ministry portfolio. [25]

In 2013, David Cameron commended Lord Green for his superb job in favour of British exports, commercial treaties and in particular for his work on the EU - US transatlantic treaty. [26] He has also achieved much in developing the sale of British armaments throughout the world. He finished his term in December 2013, and now devotes his precious time to speaking at conferences (probably in exchange for important fees) and to receive the honours that so many academic institutions heap upon him. His career is certainly not over. His hypocrisy has no limits. In March 2009, at the same time that HSBC was totally involved in the famous money

laundering affair, he had the cheek to declare at a press conference, concerning the responsibility for the crisis which started in 2007-2008: *“Underlying all these events is a question about the culture and ethics of the industry. It is as if, too often, people had given up asking whether something was the right thing to do, and focused only on whether it was legal and complied with the rules.”* and, *“there have been too many who have profoundly damaged the industry’s reputation.”* [27] That is how Stephen Green, rascal and rogue, above the law speaks to the lackeys who all rush to repeat his good words all over the mainstream press. In February 2015, *‘The World Today’*, the review of the honourable British ‘Royal Institute of International affairs’, published a long interview of Stephen Green in order to show off his great erudition in Worldly affairs; a propaganda exercise to the advantage of a high-rise Bankster. The title mentions much *‘A former chairman of HSBC, lifelong Germanophile and committed Christian, Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint talks about the future of the eurozone, empty cathedrals and what makes Chinese leaders anxious’*.

In the interview Stephen Green said, ‘It’s important to approach business life with a sense of values and responsibility: you can’t conclude that banking is off limits. It would imply that banking is intrinsically an evil domain of activity and no self-respecting person should be in it. That’s nonsense’. No questions were asked concerning the tax evasions organised by HSBC or on the laundering of drug money; an omission?

Conclusion

Green and all his HSBC cronies who have organised money laundering should answer for their crimes before the courts and be severely condemned to periods of loss of liberty and of community service. HSBC should be shut down and its directors sacked. The bank should be split into smaller units under public control with a strictly defined public service objective

Translation by Mike Krolkowski

CADTM

Social and democratic rights radically challenged!

19 February 2015, by *Éric Toussaint*

The mainstream media often mention the dangers of the Eurozone falling apart, the failure of austerity policies to fan the embers of the economy, tensions between Berlin and Paris or Rome, or even London and the Eurozone, disagreements between ECB directors, the enormous difficulty in agreeing on the EU budget or the wincing of certain European governments concerning IMF remarks about austerity levels. These problems are real but they should not overshadow the essential issues.

The leaders of the strongest European

countries and of big business alike are delighted to have created a common economic, commercial, and political zone in which European transnational corporations and the major Eurozone economies benefit from the collapse of the Eurozone’s Southern economies. The stronger economies gain a competitive advantage over their North American and Chinese competitors. Their objective at this point is not to revive growth to reduce differences between the stronger and weaker economies of the EU.

Furthermore the European elites see

the economic collapse in the South as an opportunity to privatise public companies on a large scale and acquire common goods at give-away prices, helped by the Troika (ECB IMF and European Commission) with the active complicity of the peripheral governments. Big Capital in the Southern European countries is in favour of this prospect, hoping to get a piece of the cake it has been ogling for a long time. The grabbing of public sector companies in Greece and Portugal foreshadows what will happen in Spain and Italy, where public companies are relatively much

bigger in respect to the size of their economies. The leaders of the strongest European economies are hoping to pass another wave of important privatisations in their own countries.

The collusion between governments and big business has gone public. At the head of several governments, in important ministerial posts and at the presidency of the ECB, we find men and women who are part and parcel of the world of high finance, [28] in particular former directors of Goldman Sachs. [76]. Meanwhile, Putin played on "gas wars" (using the weapon of the price but also of the quantities delivered), in particular to the Ukraine of the "Orange Revolution" after 2005 - which was not without having an impact on the EU, which was extremely dependent on Ukrainian pipelines to receive Russian gas.

Since then there has been (everywhere) a frenzied search for new sources of supply and alternative "strategic" corridors: opposed to a proposed "Nabucco" oil pipeline supported by the European Commission and the United States so as to bypass Russia, Moscow has negotiated other projects, avoiding Ukraine, with several EU members - including Germany, France and Italy. Nabucco had to be abandoned as too costly in 2013; but the increased tensions with Russia placed several EU member countries or candidates in major economic and geopolitical dilemmas around the South Stream project, between advantages granted by Russia and EU constraints - until Russia decided in late 2014 to abandon the pipeline.

Multipolar world

But we are in a world of uncertain alliances between powers which are partly rivals but which also share class interests and indeed methods and discourses that are convergent - the "war against terrorism" provides a demonstration of this; but Russia also

plays at being a mediator in Syria, while its oligarchs are popular in the City of London and Gazprom is expanding its networks in Europe. What Putin's Russia criticizes about the EU is that it is excluded from it. It is also its "decadence" - against which is mobilized the "conservative revolution" based on homophobic and sexist religious orthodoxy. But it is the EU model that the Putinist project of Eurasian Union wants to copy; a Union whose aim is to create a relationship of forces for a renegotiation of all European relations. It is partly inspired by ideologues of a "Eurasian civilization" that would correspond to the grandeur and diversity of the "Russian World", from Czarism to the Soviet Union - which has known variants, with or without Putin - against the United States [77]. Red-white or national-socialist fronts are formed on this basis, attracting far-right (and unfortunately sometimes far-left) currents throughout Europe.

The "advantages" of Russia to play in "the big league" are its military power - (it owns 24 per cent of the arms market, against 30 per cent for the United States in 2011, but also the abundance of raw materials. But it weighs less than Brazil or India in world GDP (2.5 per cent). An uneasy compromise was concluded, according to Jacques Sapir, in the mid-2000s, between liberal and Russian protectionist currents. The points of friction touch on the use of oil revenues to diversify the economy, the recourse to international financing and the delimitation of what is under the direct and indirect control of the state. The international and then European banking crisis of 2009 produced a shift towards more trade internal to the BRICS and towards autonomous financing. But it is the escalation that has been underway in Ukraine since 2014 that is pushing towards major adjustments.

A Joint China (40 per cent)-Russia (60 per cent) Investment Fund was created in 2012, but is becoming more important with the sanctions against

Moscow. It has invested \$4 billion, principally in oil and gas pipeline infrastructure, rail and air transport. But it is planned that exports of hydrocarbons to China via Rosneft (public) will amount to 365 million tons of oil between now and 2038. For the moment the quantities are derisory: 2 million tons in 2014, compared with... 208 million tons that were delivered to European countries outside the EU in 2013.

In other words, the effect of international sanctions is to push for the Russian economy to have greater autonomy (through import substitution and recomposition of its trade exchanges); but in the short term, the economy has become fragile. Capital flight is leading to the fall of the ruble, which increases the prices of imported products; reserves are massively mobilized to bail out banks affected by the sanctions and to fund new projects. But at the same time, as Jacques Sapir points out, the central bank has chosen to raise interest rates to limit the fall of the ruble, at the expense of what would be a policy of massive domestic credit to the economy.

Finally, it is not clear that the headlong rush to "hybrid" war in Ukraine favours Putin's objectives. NATO is "legitimized" in Ukraine; and tensions are appearing with Russia's partners (for the Eurasian project), who are jealous of their own independence. Finally, although the main objective of Putin in the short term has been achieved - to consolidate a power that had been challenged by the movements of the years 2011-2012, which could have drawn fresh inspiration from Maidan - the first protests of mothers of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine and anti-war mobilizations are opening substantial gaps in the patriotic consensus.

The peaceful and egalitarian recomposition of the European continent, including Ukraine and Russia, will be the work of neither Putin nor the EU.

What's Left in Africa?

5 February 2015, by **Firoze Manji**

Left and communist parties of various sizes and influence have arisen in a number of countries across the continent over many decades, despite the terror of colonial repression that they faced. In many cases, the political strategy of these parties was to merge with the nationalist parties in the struggle for independence. This was in line with the prevailing dogma at the time: the 'stagist' view of revolution according to which communists were required not only to support the emergence of a national bourgeoisie as part of the 'national democratic revolution', but to concede leadership to the nationalist movements - much as we have seen with the South African Communist Party yielding to the leadership of the ANC since 1994.

On coming to power, most of the nationalist governments, often supported by the left, believed that all that was required to satisfy the demands of the masses was to take control of the state. But what they ignored was that the state was itself a colonial state, and set up to serve, protect and advance the interests of imperial power and its entourage of corporations and banks. That state had a monopoly over the use of violence. It had police forces, armies and secret police and it used force and, where necessary, violence, to protect the interests of the way in which capitalism operated in the peripheries.

Having occupied the state, independence governments essentially sought to make modest reforms consisting primarily by deracialising the state and modernising it so that the economy could be more fully integrated with the new emerging international order that the US, Europe and Japan set about creating after the Second World War. The structures of state control, the police, army, and special forces - even the structures and powers of native authority established by colonial

powers - all these were left fundamentally intact, albeit dressed up in the colours of the national flag. The structures of the capitalist state were left intact, even where regimes proclaimed an adherence to 'Marxism-Leninism', as in Mengistu's Ethiopia.

Few understood the dangers of occupying, rather than creating alternatives to the capitalist state. Amongst those must be counted Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) and Tomas Sankara (Burkina Faso). They had in common their commitment to building alternatives to the colonial state. And tellingly, all three were assassinated by their own comrades, in collaboration with empire.

Cabral was emphatic: "It is our opinion that it is necessary to totally destroy, to break, to reduce to ash all aspects of the colonial state in our country in order to make everything possible for our people."

While the repressive arms of the state may have been dressed in new uniforms, their role - that of protecting the interests of capitalism in the (former) colonies - remained unchanged. And as the emerging middle class and party officials who now occupied the neo-colonial state realised the potential for private accumulation and looting that access to the state provided, so their interest in transforming the state waned. 'Africanisation' - or in South Africa's case 'Black Economic Empowerment' - was the battle-cry of the emerging national bourgeoisie that would legitimise their access to sources of private accumulation. The growing presence of transnational corporations and international financial institutions, and the growing interest in 'investing' - principally in the extractive industries - provided too many lucrative opportunities for

them to even consider making changes to economic power. The state became a honey-pot, and therefore frequently a terrain of conflict between different factions of the emerging class. In some cases, leading members of the left joined the ranks of the national bourgeoisie, just as we have seen in the case of Cyril Ramaphosa and others in South Africa.

As Fanon put it: The national bourgeoisie discovers its historical mission as intermediary. ... its vocation is not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism, forced to camouflage itself behind the mask of neocolonialism. The national bourgeoisie, with no misgivings and with great pride, revels in the role of agent in its dealings with the Western bourgeoisie. This lucrative role, this function as small-time racketeer, this narrow-mindedness and lack of ambition are symptomatic of the incapacity of the national bourgeoisie to fulfil its historical role as a bourgeoisie.

In fulfilling its function as an agent of the Western bourgeoisie and 'as a small-time racketeer', this class turns upon the left that aided its path to power, and slaughters it, imprisons it, exiles it or marginalises it. Slaughter was the case with one of the strongest communist parties in Sudan when, in 1971, Gaafar al-Nimiery launched a campaign that resulted in almost the total elimination of the party. Even where the organised left was not strong, the post-independence period witnessed assassinations of radicals: for example in Kenya with the assassination of Tom Mboya, Pio Gama Pinto and JM Kariuki, or in South Africa with the assassination of Chris Hani and, more recently, of members of NUMSA and Abahlali base Mjondolo. 'African Socialism' was fated as the

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answer to the continent's underdevelopment in the early post-independence years, but in every case, this was combined with the requirement of that there be only one legitimate party. Whatever the actual political colour of the regimes, it was not uncommon for nationalists to proclaim an allegiance to socialism, albeit to an 'African' version.

Kwame Nkrumah was perhaps the most radical of the nationalists, but even in Ghana, no attempt was made to dismantle the colonial state. As a result, radicalisation spread amongst the population. In 1961, railway workers organised a national strike, but the state became increasingly authoritarian and independent political organisation was repressed - until eventually a one-party state was declared. Nkrumah's political writings became much more radical after the coup d'état that overthrew him in 1966.

Similarly, Julius Nyerere established his own particular brand of socialism - Ujamaa - in the aftermath of the revolution in Zanzibar, in which he orchestrated the repression of Abdulrahman Babu's Umma Party. Nyerere's Arusha Declaration declared a one-party state, preventing the independent organisation of left, working class organisations. A once ardent trade unionist, Ahmed Sékou Touré led Guinea to independence in 1958, and in 1960, declared his party, Parti démocratique de Guinée, the only legitimate party. The combination of repressive one-

party states that proclaim themselves 'socialist', the establishment of Stalinism in the Soviet Union with its own form of repression and one-partyism, and its final demise in the collapse of the Berlin Wall - all these have contributed to the discrediting of the idea of 'socialism' as a progressive force. In many countries, the word 'socialism' is a dirty word that has been lost in every-day vocabulary.

Another factor that has inhibited the development of the left in Africa needs to be considered. The last thirty years of neoliberal policies have resulted not just in material dispossession, but also in the dispossession of memory. Many people born or raised in the aftermath of the implementation of structural adjustment programmes have lost connection with their own histories in an environment of CNN and MacDonalds culture.

As Milan Kundera put it: The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history, Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster. ... The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. There remains today the challenge of building strong left, working class movements. Whatever the constraints that we may have inherited from our history, the reality

is that after independence our national bourgeoisies have failed to deliver on their promises.

Thirty years (or some twenty years in the case of South Africa) of neoliberal policies willingly imposed by this class have resulted in conditions for the majority that are in many ways worse than they were at independence. Today discontent is growing, especially among the youth. But there is also a more widespread disenchantment with postcolonial governments that derives from their loss of credibility and legitimacy. Serious questions are increasingly being raised concerning the ability of this class to lead the way to emancipation.

The objective conditions offer, at least potentially, good conditions for building a left movement. But that cannot be done on the basis of the forty-year-old analysis of the nature of capitalism and imperialism to which much of the left has become accustomed. There is work to be done in deepening our understanding of the changes that have occurred in both the nature of today's financialised capital and its operation in the 'peripheries'. Such an analysis is necessary if we are to appreciate the fact that the workplace is not the only site where accumulation by dispossession occurs - it also occurs through the extraction of income and wealth through rents, the privatisation of health and social welfare, education, land, water, power, etc. All of these are subject to speculation.

Revolution, Reaction, ?and Intervention in Syria

4 February 2015, by Joseph Daher

New Politics. Your writings give voice to those persons and groups who are often ignored in the international media's portrayal of the crisis in Syria. I would like to ask you some questions regarding

the United States' recent entry into the battlefield and how you believe this will affect the various actors in the region.

The crisis in Syria is often painted as a

conflict involving the Assad regime and the Islamic State (ISIS), with barely any mention of other players within the country. How do you understand the current state of Syria, taking into account all of the groups

ving for power?

Joseph Daher. The dominant narrative, especially since 2012, has been to portray the Syrian revolutionary process as not a part of the other revolutionary processes in the region, for democracy, social justice, and equality. Instead the ongoing events in Syria have been seen as either a sectarian conflict between religious minorities against a religious majority, or through a geopolitical perspective where different imperialist and sub-imperialist states of the region oppose each other. This is especially the case with the so called "axis of resistance" argument, based on Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, with the support of Russia, opposing Western imperialism led by the United States and allied with the reactionary monarchies of the region: Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This ignores the dynamics from below of the Syrian revolutionary process.

Both of these analyses are problematic because they ignore the deep and objective conditions of the Syrian revolutionary process, which are similar for all of the countries that went through "and are still going through" revolutionary processes. In short, the driving forces have been the desire for democracy, the socio-economic crisis, and a will for emancipation and liberation towards more equality.

Firstly, remember that Syria was also an authoritarian regime, ruled for the past 40 years by one family, and it is also a bourgeois regime that went through a process of neoliberalization and privatization, accelerated considerably with Bashar al-Assad's arrival to power. Sixty percent of the population was living under or just above the poverty line in 2011. Syria was subjected to the same form of crony capitalism that is prevalent in the region. For example, in Egypt it was the Mubarak family that benefitted mostly from the privatization and neoliberalization; in Tunis it was the Trabelsi family, of the wife of the dictator Ben Ali; and in Syria it is Makhoul, the cousin of Assad, who owns 60 percent of the country's wealth. In the end what we have are neoliberal and authoritarian systems, and Syria is no different in this regard.

Secondly, by saying it is all simply a conflict between ISIS and Assad, one ignores the popular movement that has been ongoing for the past three years despite the fact that the movement was undermined first by the regime and then by Islamic reactionary forces. However, this popular movement is not only still alive but it is still playing an important role. Members of this movement were the original actors of the revolution and are still upholding the objectives of the revolution.

Thirdly, the Assad/Islamic State dichotomy ignores the fact that the Assad regime helped the development of ISIS and all the Islamic reactionary forces, by releasing from the prisons of the regime the different individuals who would become the heads of these reactionary forces. In various amnesty decisions during the start of the revolutionary process, leaders of various Islamic reactionary forces were freed, while democratic activists were imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed. We should realize that the Assad regime targeted and still targets mostly the democratic and progressive activists as well as the Free Syrian Army, while it allowed ISIS to grow.

The best example is the city of Raqqa, which was under the domination of ISIS since October 2013, and was only targeted for the first time by the regime at the end of August 2014. This is when ISIS gained a lot of territory in Iraq and when the U.S.-led coalition for bombing Iraq and Syria was organizing. And one must also not forget that the first to oppose ISIS and other Islamic reactionary forces was the popular movement. Since the beginning of 2013 in various areas there have been popular mobilizations and demonstrations to condemn the authoritarian practices of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front.

A popular uprising occurred in the beginning of 2014 in some neighborhoods of Aleppo and in northern areas of Syria against ISIS. ISIS was expelled militarily from several areas due to the pressure of the masses. Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front also participated in these military fights against ISIS because of the opposition of the

masses and the increasing defiance and violence of ISIS against them. We can see that the popular masses in Syria oppose those who don't uphold the objectives of the revolution and practice authoritarian policies.

Of course this does not mean in any way that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front, or other Salafist forces, should be considered allies of the revolution for democracy, social justice, and equality; they are part of the counter-revolution. We have seen just recently that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State cooperated in expelling the Syrian Revolutionaries Front from Rif Idlib and that Ahrar Sham (a Salafist group) has just attacked Free Syrian Army forces in a neighborhood of Aleppo called Bustan Qasr.

Finally, seeing the conflict as solely between Assad and ISIS actually serves no one but the regime and ISIS, and both alternatives are reactionary. In some ways it also serves Western imperialism, which wants to portray the conflict as choosing between the lesser of two evils. The Assad regime welcomed the U.S.-led coalition's bombardment, and supported "all international counterterrorism efforts." Assad wants to appear to the various international imperialist actors in the West as the person that can help them in their fight against "terrorism." This last perspective has unfortunately pushed many "from conservative right-wingers to ill-informed anti-imperialists" to take the view that Assad is a lesser evil than the Jihadists. In fact we should oppose both, because they nurture each other and are each seeking to establish an authoritarian system.

So definitely this view of seeing only a conflict between ISIS and Assad is negating the popular revolutionary process in Syria, and the strength of the popular movement. Even though it has been undermined, it is still present, still fighting, and still upholding the objectives of the revolution.

NP. What do you believe are the objectives of the U.S.-led airstrikes and arms supplies in Syria and Iraq?

JD. First, in Iraq, they serve to protect American allies. The U.S. military intervention, despite its "humanitarian" propaganda, is nevertheless part of established political objectives that are: to protect American diplomatic personnel stationed in Erbil (which is also home of a CIA base); to protect the large multinational companies in the hydrocarbon/oil sector such as Mobil, Chevron, Exxon, and Total who are exploiting the oil production in the region and have already invested more than \$10 billion; and, perhaps most importantly, to keep the alliance with the Iraqi regime, inherited from the American invasion. The United States did not intervene when Mosul fell and more than 200,000 refugees were on the road to Iraqi Kurdistan, but only got involved militarily when ISIS was threatening to conquer the Kurdish areas of the north and the capital Baghdad in the south.

That is why the United States only wanted cosmetic and superficial changes in the Iraqi regime, replacing only the prime minister, Maliki, who was also let down by his Iranian ally because of his catastrophic mismanagement of the country. The new prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi, is far from representing any radical change. He is a close partner of Maliki and a member of the same party, Dawa. He was Minister of Communication in the interim government set up after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. This new Prime Minister, al-Abadi, has received international support including from Iran. Ex-prime minister Maliki has nevertheless tried to remain in power, but finally gave up. Following this announcement, American officials said that they could accelerate the economic and military aid to Iraq if the new government of al-Abadi were more inclusive, particularly towards the Sunni population of Iraq. But this forgets that it is the current political system of the Iraqi regime and the same political forces that have led Iraq into this situation today as I have explained in different articles on my website.

It is worth mentioning American assistance to the Iraqi army for those who doubt that this regime is an ally of the United States: the Pentagon has

provided Iraq with \$650 million worth of ammunition and small arms this year alone. Before 2011, the United States had spent \$24 billion on arming and training the Iraqi army. Finally, on October 22, the United States declared that it was negotiating to sell \$600 million worth of armor-piercing tank rounds to Iraq.

The airstrikes in Syria are definitely not in favor of the Syrian revolution. Washington from the beginning claimed it would be targeting ISIS, but it has targeted other reactionary forces as well, such as Jabhat al-Nusra or forces linked to it. While we as members of the revolutionary-left current in Syria have opposed these reactionary forces, we also oppose this intervention in Syria because the objectives of the U.S.-led coalition are not to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or to protect them from ISIS or the regime. The objective is to reimpose their hegemony over the region and guarantee a form of stability, especially to the reactionary regimes of the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, by putting an end to the revolutionary processes.

These strikes are also in the framework of reaching a "Yemeni" solution, as was the goal since the beginning. In other words, reaching an agreement between the Assad regime (or a section of it) and the opposition linked to Western and Gulf regimes. The approval by the U.S. Congress of \$500 million to support President Obama's plan to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, whom Washington describes as "moderate" in their fight against ISIS and Syrian regime forces, goes in the same direction, as we can see in the text of the resolution:

"The Secretary of Defense is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustainment, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

1. Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL [another term for

ISIS]), and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.

2. Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.

3. Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria."

The desire of the United States to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests is nevertheless thwarted by the reality on the ground. This is because of the decision of a large majority of opposition groups to cooperate with Washington only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision making, and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Colonel Riad al-Asaad, the leader of the Free Syrian Army, for example said he would not join the alliance against ISIS without a commitment to oust the Syrian regime. He added, "If they want to see the Free Syrian Army on their side, they should give assurances on toppling the Assad regime and on a plan including revolutionary principles." Other armed groups present in the Supreme Military Council of Syria, close to Washington, also expressed their resentment of the United States and other Western forces for their lack of support. They said that coalition airstrikes against ISIS targets were not enough; the strikes must also hit Assad's forces. One of the commanders said that "we need to deal with this problem at its root cause: Assad, the gangs that support him, and Daech [an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State]. Those are the three problems every Syrian deals with." Many armed groups were also critical of the way the strikes were being carried out and many inside the country on the side of the revolution reject these bombings.

The jihadi and Islamic reactionary forces are used by the Western imperialist and regional forces as the entry point for this new military intervention. At the same time, the expansion of the jihadi groups, which has ignored state borders and created instability, has reached the point

where it is threatening Western and regional imperialist interests. We should remember that ISIS, which was established in 2006, was of no interest to these powers when they were confined to specific geographic locations in Iraq and later Syria. They were even financially supported by some Gulf private networks in the beginning. Although ISIS and other sister organizations are a factor of instability for the global imperialist system, we should be clear they are in no ways actors for the emancipation and liberation of the people of the region; they are very much the opposite. At the same time, the bombings from the U.S.-led coalition have killed civilians and destroyed much-needed civilian infrastructure.

These are the reasons we should oppose these bombings. Airstrikes by U.S.-led forces have killed more than 32 civilians during the first month of bombing in Syria, according to official data. At the same time the Assad regime has continued its war against the population and combatants of the Free Syrian Army in the "liberated" areas. Thus, Assad's siege of Aleppo is almost complete. He has made significant progress in the countryside of Damascus (Al Ghouta) and has bombed on a daily basis the Al Wa'ar neighborhood in Homs for the last two weeks. This has elicited the complete silence of the media.

In addition, to believe that ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other similar organizations can be defeated with the same tools that created them is completely insane. These reactionary forces are indeed the consequences of the criminal authoritarian regimes (for example Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) and foreign interventions (mainly Western countries led by the United States and regional states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran). This new military intervention has indeed no objective of overthrowing the Assad regime. As a banner held by a Syrian protester in Aleppo last week said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, Albert Einstein," and below, "Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014." The only political groups that will benefit from these bombings are the two sides of the counter-

revolution: the Assad regime on one side, and on the other the reactionary Islamic and jihadi political forces.

The Assad regime will most probably benefit in the short term militarily, with the weakening of strong military actors. Assad's forces have actually continued their attacks on various areas of the country, but in addition the regime sees a chance to regain "legitimacy" with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism.

The bombing will likely militarily weaken in the short term ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other reactionary forces, but will most likely prove counterproductive for the Syrian revolutionaries by increasing the popular support for the jihadi fighters, driving even more recruits to their ranks. These forces are already painting themselves as the only serious anti-imperialist movement, rather than the reactionary and sectarian outfit they are. Several reports have already noted that these bombings have boosted the appeal of these organizations, with new recruits arriving every day. There is also competition between the organizations; for example, Jabhat al-Nusra must further radicalize its discourse to prevent the departure of its members, especially foreigners, to ISIS. Following the bombing of their positions in Idlib, some members have claimed their willingness and readiness to fight alongside ISIS.

Further, when we look at the example of KobanÃª, this intervention can really be questioned by studying its consequences on the ground; in particular it has been unable to stop the offensive of ISIS. Let's remember that when the U.S.-led coalition intervened in Syria in mid-September, ISIS was 60 kilometres away from KobanÃª. Today ISIS "even though the U.S. started bombarding" is occupying half of the city. This tells us that this new intervention is not at all helping the revolution, and is more propaganda than anything. Lastly, we can see who supports this U.S.-led coalition: Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the centers of counter-revolution in the region.

This intervention is in the interests of

Western imperialism and also those of the different sub- and international-imperialist forces. You can see that Russia is not really opposing this kind of bombardment, although there's criticism of the way it is led. The same with Iran; it criticizes the way it is led but does not directly oppose these bombings. All of these actors want some form of stability, which was challenged by the revolutionary processes that began in 2010.

When the United States says it is targeting ISIS, we have to remember that ISIS grew out of al-Qaeda, which was present since 2005 in Iraq. When ISIS expanded, especially by intervening in the Syrian revolutionary process, it was not a problem for Western imperialism and other sub-imperialist forces. But when the expansion of ISIS became too powerful for them to ignore, they chose to intervene at this moment. So it is the level of expansion of ISIS that was a problem for the United States, not the fact that ISIS is a reactionary force. When ISIS was not directly challenging Western political interests, and the forces of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the latter nations even supported it financially before 2011, and even after.

NP. Journalist Jeremy Scahill has recently said in an interview that the idea that ISIS is made up of strictly ultra-orthodox Islamists is false. He claims that figures such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, a prominent Ba'athist, are also a part of it. Do you agree?

JD. One must understand that the fall of Mosul was due to two factors. First of all it was due to the corruption and the complete unpopularity of the Iraqi state, because of its sectarianism and authoritarianism, which is why the army and police forces left so rapidly. Second, it was a coalition that took over Mosul, led first of all by ISIS, but composed also of Sunni tribes and former Ba'athists. However, directly after the takeover and occupation of Mosul, ISIS became the dominant force and eliminated the other forces, including tribes and the Ba'athists, and al-Douri as well. So it's not right to say that al-Douri is part of ISIS; he's not.

At the same time, you have former Ba'athist military commanders that became jihadists and Salafists after the American invasion, and only after joined forces with al-Qaeda and later ISIS. So, yes, the military leadership of ISIS is composed mainly of former Iraqi military commanders from the Iraqi army.

NP. What is the state of the Free Syrian Army militarily? After losing territory to Assad's forces, and the rapid growth of ISIS, do they still have a chance?

JD. First we need to understand that the Free Syrian Army is not a single and united institution, but rather a network of independent military groups fighting under its umbrella. The various forces of the Free Syrian Army have been increasingly and considerably weakened over the past two years, because unlike its opponents it has not been supported significantly by any international forces either by direct military intervention or by supplies of advanced weaponry. It has lost a lot of ground to the Assad regime, which concentrated its offensive against them, and also to the growth of Islamic reactionary forces, not only ISIS but Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic front as well, which attacked and killed commanders of the Free Syrian Army.

Nevertheless, before the U.S.-led coalition intervened, there was a new form, a new growth of some factions of the Free Syrian Army, of people coming back to the idea and appeal of a Free Syrian Army defending the objectives of the revolution. These people were disappointed with the Islamic reactionary forces. The reason people had joined those forces was not based on ideology most of the time, but due to the fact that the jihadi groups were well funded and received arms from the reactionary monarchies of the region, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and with Turkey closing its eyes to the passage of jihadi forces into northern Syria. But people are coming back. More and more, we have seen in the past weeks demonstrations with slogans saying, "We need to go back to the spirit and objectives of the revolution," and various forces of the Free Syrian Army were building on

this kind of popular mobilization. On a military basis the democratic components of the Free Syrian Army represent the will of the people, the popular movement. You still have a lot of slogans and songs for the Free Syrian Army, so it's still a power, but it lacks any kind of unity. There are still a lot of problems. There are still regional differences in the Free Syrian Army. By unity I mean, not a unity in objectives, but rather in military strategy to defeat the regime and the Islamic reactionary forces. They have been fighting on both fronts: against the regime for the past three years, and against Islamic reactionary forces increasingly for more than one year. But nevertheless, they still have a chance because for many people on the ground, for the popular classes, the Free Syrian Army really represents the armed hand of the revolution.

The democratic components of the Free Syrian Army still protect the objectives of the revolution. This is why we can increasingly see people going back to the Free Syrian Army with a discourse that is more democratic, some even acknowledging that they were wrong to collaborate with the Islamic reactionary forces. However in some regions you still have collaboration between Islamic reactionary forces and the Free Syrian Army, depending on the situation. But this is tactical cooperation; they do not share the same political objectives. This is important to clarify.

NP. Does the group still have political legitimacy? Are there any prospects for governing the country?

JD. Definitely, among the popular masses in support of the revolutionary process in Syria.

NP. What is the role of the revolutionary left in the Middle East and North Africa today in combating both the reactionary religious orthodoxy of jihadists and authoritarian dictatorships?

JD. The duty of the revolutionary left is to understand first of all that the solution is regional and cannot be based on only one country. We have to clearly oppose any form of counter-

revolution, whether it is branded as Assad or el-Sisi. Or in Tunis as modernism, unity of the nation. All this kind of propaganda, "fighting against terrorism," we have to oppose very strongly. But we have to oppose as well the Islamic reactionary forces whose rhetoric speaks of the unity of the Umma, authenticity, and moralism, when in fact they share the counter-revolutionary goal of implementing neoliberalism, authoritarianism, patriarchy, sectarianism, and forms of nationalist-chauvinism. This is why we oppose both of them, and both of them are linked to different imperialist and sub-imperialist forces.

We need to build an alternative that is from below, a radical alternative that is democratic, in favor of social justice, and opposed to sectarianism, patriarchy, and nationalism. This means first that we need to build mass revolutionary socialist organizations, with clear principles, building collectives. And also at the same time we need to build a large democratic front that opposes counter-revolutionary forces, which is not only based on socialist revolutionaries but all the forces that share our objectives of democracy, social justice, and equality. This is the duty of the left. We must oppose using sectarianism to divide the people, especially now when we see the different authoritarian regimes or Islamic reactionary forces. We must understand that sectarianism is not a heritage from a medieval past but rather a modern phenomenon, which is used by dominant forces to divide the people.

NP. How do you envision an end to the conflict?

JD. I would prefer the term "solution to the revolutionary process," which is not going to come tomorrow. We need to think in terms of a long-term revolutionary process, because right now the situation in Syria is catastrophic, where you have half of the population displaced, 80 percent of the people now living close to the poverty line, total destruction of urban infrastructure, and two counter-revolutionary forces that are still strong: the Assad regime and the jihadi groups. A solution is only

possible with crushing both of these forces and building an alternative that is democratic, in favor of social justice, against sectarianism and chauvinism, and for equality. This means building revolutionary organizations and re-empowering the popular movement that is still battling, with both material and intangible weapons.

We should support the sending of arms without any political conditions to the democratic forces of the Free Syrian Army, and the Kurdish popular forces as well, to defeat both sides of the counter-revolution. I would like to urge those who don't think arms should be provided to read Trotsky's text *Learn to Think*. Arms without any kind of political condition! If the West were really in favor of the revolutionary process in the region, it would provide arms. Its failure to do so shows the contradictions of Western imperialism. It does not want to strengthen a large popular movement that is democratic and in favor of social justice and against sectarianism. This is the way to build a new Syria.

But also without forgetting that the solution is not only in Syria, the solution is regional. If you don't overthrow the centers of the counter-revolution, which are Saudi Arabia and Qatar, a decent future for the region will be very difficult. Likewise, the Syrian revolutionary process will also need to challenge the Israeli state and help the Palestinian resistance. Israel is not only a threat to the Palestinians, but as we've seen throughout the decades, it is also a threat to the region as a whole. On many occasions since its establishment, Israel has intervened in the region to serve imperialist political interests, not only in Palestine. Lastly, any kind of people who are serious about helping Kurdish self-determination should help the Syrian revolutionary process, because they are directly linked.

NP. Do you believe that the growth of ISIS represents a failure of the left?

JD. I think that the growth of ISIS is not directly linked to the defeat of the left, because the defeat of the left is

much older. It goes back to the 1970s, with the crushing of the left by authoritarian regimes. We should also remind ourselves of the position of the Stalinist left that allied itself with authoritarian regimes, which was destructive for the left. For example in Egypt, where the Communist Party supported Mubarak until the last day, even before the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and supported el-Sisi.

This is terrible because then people ask, "Is this the left?" Or in Syria where we see a section of the left supporting the regime, and participating in the government. Or in Iraq, a section of the left was with Saddam. So it is the crushing of the left in the 1960s and 1970s in addition to the opportunism of sections of the Stalinist left allied with authoritarian regimes that caused the defeat of the left.

At the same time, following the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, oil prices increased considerably, which allowed the Gulf monarchies to increase support to the Islamic reactionary forces in various countries, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1970s, for example in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was funded by the Gulf monarchies while being used by Sadat to crush the left. The Muslim Brotherhood was also successful because it presented itself to the people as an alternative. Nationalist forces were defeated in 1967, and became mostly corrupted and authoritarian. They also went back on their social policies, starting the "infatih" policies, increasing neoliberal policies, and creating a highly unequal society, while the left was crushed and repressed.

On top of that, there was the defeat of the Palestinian resistance in Jordan and Lebanon, in the former during Black September in the 1970s and in the latter during the Lebanese civil war at the hands of both the Syrian regime and Israel. This also crushed sections of the left that were allied with the Palestinian resistance. Finally, there have been the attempts by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to co-opt the Palestinian movement. So the Palestinian resistance has been attacked on all fronts.

This is why we say the liberation of Palestine requires the overthrow of all the regimes in the region. Arafat, on the other hand, played a bad role, saying that Palestinians shouldn't intervene in Arab states. This was very appealing to Fatah, which was playing to the different reactionary regimes, and was funded by them. Unfortunately, most of the Palestinian organizations follow this policy today. This is true of Hamas, which for example opposed the Bahraini revolution on sectarian and political grounds, and of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which has not taken any radical position in favor of the Syrian revolutionary process.

ISIS is a direct consequence of the American invasion and destruction of the Iraqi state and society. Contrary to what has been suggested by some media and so-called "analysts," the current events in Iraq are not the result of an ancestral hatred between Sunnis and Shiites that goes back hundreds of years, but truly are the result of contemporary policies.

In addition to the military invasion that came after more than a decade of inhumane sanctions, killing a million Iraqis and causing the forced displacement of four million people, the U.S. occupation policies are at the origin of the current debacle. These include fierce repression of any political opposition to the U.S. occupation, implementation of neoliberal policies and repression of the independent trade union movement, destruction of state institutions (military, public administration, university system, and so on), and the establishment of a political system based on political sectarianism as in Lebanon. The last-mentioned element was one of the main reasons for the terrible sectarian war between Shia extremist groups and Sunnis between 2005 and 2008, resulting in a monthly average of 3,000 dead.

As I said before, some former officers of the Iraqi military joined ISIS after the American invasion. ISIS also finds its roots in the sectarianism of the Iraqi state led by Hizb al-Dawa, Maliki's political party. Dawa was an ally of the Iranian regime, but also collaborated with the United States,

and it became an ally of sorts, collaborating politically and, as we saw previously, militarily. This does not mean that the previous regime before 2003 was ever good; it must be remembered that the country was under the bloody dictatorship of Saddam Hussein's clan which caused the death, exile, and imprisonment of huge numbers of people, not to mention the gassing of Kurds in Halabja in 1988. This regime was built on a totalitarian repressive apparatus that accepted no political opposition or independent trade unions, and on a clientelist tribal and sectarian basis.

We should also not forget that the rise of ISIS is linked to the repression of the popular protests that shook Iraq in early 2011 in the wake of other popular uprisings in the region. They started on February 25, 2011 with a "Day of Wrath," which then launched a weekly cycle of protests on Fridays in most major cities. Demands were diverse, ranging from the fight against unemployment, which is still very high, to condemnation of the lack or absence of services such as electricity, the release of political prisoners, and opposition to the whole sectarian political system established by the U.S. occupation. The movement was made up of members of civil society, women's groups, trade unionists, and so on.

Popular gatherings sometimes exceeded tens of thousands, while for example in the city of Mosul, protesters called for a general strike pushing the local governor, Atheel al-Nujaifi to support the popular protests and support the violation of the curfew imposed by the government. Popular demonstrations represented a serious challenge to Maliki's government, with many local politicians resigning, including two in the city of Basra. Above all, the public squares where protests took place became politicized poetry sites and areas of cultural performances drawing on Iraq's rich cultural heritage.

The government was quick to react

with systematic repression, using tear gas and live ammunition and the establishment of numerous checkpoints"forcing people to walk for hours in the scorching heat to reach public squares that were usually easily accessible. Security forces also forbade all pens, markers, poster board, and bottles of water to people going to public squares to protest. Political consolidation within the ruling elite of Iraq nevertheless allowed Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to co-opt local dissident politicians, as in Basra, while continuing the repression of the popular movement.

This Iraqi sectarian regime oppressed Sunnis and fired many of them from government positions, including the high command of the army. Maliki refused to integrate the "Sunni awakening" councils, which had fought al-Qaeda, into the army. He maintained the anti-Ba'athist law, established after the U.S. invasion against former leaders close to Saddam Hussein but which was mainly used by the Iraqi prime minister to suppress all Sunni political forces, while accusing leading Sunni politicians of supporting terrorism. This is a typical tool of repressive regimes in the region to suppress any opposition, as is seen in Egypt and Syria today.

In 2013, a popular movement in the Sunni-majority areas led a mass campaign of non-violent resistance against Maliki's government, and particularly its sectarian and authoritarian policies. Popular mass demonstrations and sit-ins were held in this period demanding the release of political prisoners, especially thousands of female prisoners, more jobs and better public services, and the replacement of the Iraqi constitution. The protesters especially opposed the "anti-terrorist laws" used by the Iraqi government to suppress opposition members with accusations of links with al-Qaeda or the Ba'ath Party. At that time, leaders of the Iraqi Shiite group of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and of Moqtada al-

Sadr's movement, who had their own grievances against the Maliki regime, expressed their solidarity with the protests organized almost entirely by Iraqi Sunnis, and threatened to organize their own demonstrations. Unfortunately, no trans-confessional solidarity materialized, nor inter-ethnic, despite Kurdish criticism of and opposition to the Maliki government.

The Maliki regime bloodily suppressed the popular protests, as it did the movement of February 25, 2011, when Iraq had earlier witnessed countrywide protests. The government also used tactics taken directly from the U.S. occupation: districts wholly or partially destroyed, mass arrests, and torture. Iraq has also been the battleground for the different sub-imperialist states in the region: Iran supporting the Iraqi sectarian regime under Maliki and other reactionary Shia militias and groups, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar supporting Islamic reactionary Sunni forces, including ISIS.

Finally, what allowed ISIS to grow considerably was the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process, and the intervention of ISIS in this process, where it gained military experience. It also was able, through the occupation of different oil facilities in Iraq and Syria, to build an independent military economy. (ISIS is no longer dependent on foreign funding, which has been mostly stopped by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.) So all these elements enabled ISIS to grow considerably.

The solution is of course to oppose the jihadi reactionary forces of ISIS, but also to oppose the Maliki government with its sectarian and authoritarian policies and reactionary forces that support it. These two actors feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated in order to have any hope of building a progressive popular movement opposing sectarianism, enabling Iraq to end a nightmare that has lasted too long.

[New Politics](#)

The lessons that can be drawn from the failure of the Greek 2012 restructuring

3 February 2015, by **Éric Toussaint**

In 2012, the Troika did a restructuring of the Greek debt: what went wrong?

The context was as follows: from early 2010 Greece was subjected to speculative attacks by the financial markets that demanded excessively high interest rates for roll-over loans. Greece was close to defaulting because it could not refinance its debt at reasonable rates. The Troika interfered with a structural adjustment Memorandum'. It would grant new loans for Greece to repay its creditors, i.e. essentially European private banks. [78] Those new loans were accompanied by austerity measures that had a brutal, even disastrous, impact on the people's living conditions and on economic activity.

In 2012 the Troika restructured the Greek debt owed to private creditors only, namely the private banks, of EU member states, that had already largely withdrawn though they still held some Greek debts, and other private creditors such as Greek worker's pension funds. This restructuring involved cutting Greek debts to private creditors by 50 to 60%. The Troika, which has been lending money to Greece since 2010, restructured the Greek debt but refused to be involved in any reduction of the debt. It means that the debt owed by Greece to the Troika has not been reduced.

The operation was presented as a success by mainstream media, Western governments, the Greek government as well as the IMF and the European Commission. They attempted to fool international public opinion and the Greek population into believing that private creditors had gone to considerable lengths to ease Greece's dramatic situation. Actually

the operation was not at all beneficial for the country in general, and even less for its population. After a temporary slackening in 2012 and early 2013, the Greek debt has been steadily rising again and is now beyond the highest point attained in 2010-2011. The conditions enforced by the Troika have resulted in a dramatic fall in the country's economic activity: the GDP went down by over 25% between 2010 and early 2014. The living conditions of the population have dramatically deteriorated: violation of economic and social rights and of collective rights, regression of the retirement system, sharp reduction of public health and public education services, massive layoffs, drop in purchasing power... Moreover, one of the conditions for any debt relief was a change in the applicable law and the relevant jurisdiction in case of dispute with creditors. All in all this debt restructuring goes against the interest of the Greek population and of Greece as a country.

How does this restructuring of the Greek debt compare with the Brady Plan that was implemented in countries of the South as a consequence of the 1982 debt crisis?

The Brady Plan [79] was implemented in some twenty indebted countries towards the end of the 1980s. It was a way of restructuring debts through an exchange with US-guaranteed securities on condition that creditor banks reduce the amount of what is owed to them and that they use the money in the economy. In some cases the debt was reduced by 30%, and the Brady bonds guaranteed a fixed interest rate of about 6%, which is most favourable for bankers. The problem was thus solved for the banks and merely postponed for indebted

countries.

We find the same components in the debt restructuring imposed on Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus as in the Brady Plan.

1Â°: In the Brady Plan, just as in the Memoranda imposed on the countries on the 'periphery' of the EU, governments of the major powers and international institutions step in instead of private banks as main creditors. All those plans thus aim to make it possible for private banks to withdraw as main creditors of the countries concerned without significant loss since they are replaced by governments and multilateral institutions such as the IMF. This was what happened with the Brady Plan. In Europe, the European Commission, the European Stability Mechanism [ESM], the ECB and the IMF have gradually replaced private banks and private financial institutions as creditors.

2Â°: All those operations are obviously accompanied by conditionalities that enforce the implementation of austerity measures and neoliberal policies.

3Â°: The other common point lies in the ultimate failure of such restructuring for indebted countries. Even neoliberal economists such as Kenneth Rogoff and Carmen Reinhart [80] acknowledge that the Brady plan was not beneficial for the countries concerned: debt reduction was much more limited than had been announced and in the long term the amount of debt actually increased and the amounts paid are very high. We can now say the same about Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Ireland.

If restructuring the debt is not a solution, what should be done to help those countries solve the debt

issue?

Those countries ought to unilaterally: 1) set up an integral debt audit - with citizens' active participation; 2) suspend debt repayment; 3) refuse to pay the illegal or illegitimate part of it; and 4) demand a reduction of the remainder. The reduction of what is left after cancellation of the illegitimate and/or illegal part can be seen as a form of restructuring but it cannot be isolated as a sufficient response.

What happens if a government starts negotiating with creditors without suspending repayment?

If there is no suspension of repayment or public auditing, creditors are in a dominant position. We mustn't underestimate their manipulative skills that can lead governments to

unacceptable compromises. Suspending debt repayment as a unilateral sovereign decision creates a new power relationship with creditors. Besides, with a suspension, creditors have to crawl out of the woodwork. Indeed if you deal with securities holders without suspension of payments they remain anonymous since securities are not nominal. Only if they topple this power relationship can governments create the necessary conditions for them to enforce measures that legitimize their action in domestic and international law. In the cases of Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus the troika is the major creditor and would be obliged to go to the negotiation table.

In this case could governments initiate negotiations to show public opinion that creditors have an unacceptable position and that they have no choice but to turn to

unilateral actions?

Yes, but such an approach has its pitfalls. Creditors may create confusion in the people's minds claiming that the governments are unyielding and delay negotiations. Whereas the countries need urgent solutions and cannot afford to use their tax revenues to repay their debts.

The adequate moment to suspend debt repayment must be defined according to each country's specific conditions: the people's degree of consciousness, urgency, creditors' blackmail, the general economic situation of the country... In some circumstances auditing can occur before; in others, the two must occur simultaneously.

[CADTM-<http://cadtm.org/The-lessons-that-can-be-drawn-from>]

What caused the killings?

3 February 2015, by Ahmed Shawki, Gilbert Achcar

What has been the reaction to the attack on Charlie Hebdo by French society in general, and the French state and ruling class in particular?

The reaction has been what anybody would expect. The initial reaction was one of massive shock—which is not that different from the initial reaction to 9/11 in the United States, though it's obviously a big exaggeration to place both attacks on an equal footing as many did, particularly in France.

And, of course, the shock was immediately exploited by the French government in the same way that 9/11 was exploited by the Bush administration—in order to silence critics and get wide support in the name of "national unity." Suddenly, François Hollande's popularity went up sharply, from a very low point. The same happened with George W. Bush, whose popularity was very low before 9/11 and got boosted beyond anything

he could have dreamed of.

These were quite similar reactions from appalled and frightened societies—and, of course, the crimes were appalling indeed. In both cases, the ruling class took advantage of the shock in order to whip up nationalist sentiment and support for the state: The police forces have been hailed as great heroes in France for mobilizing several tens of thousands in hunting down three lunatic assassins. To be sure, the New York firefighters were much more deserving of the praise for their bravery.

There is nothing much original about all this. Instead, what is rather original is the way the discussion evolved later on.

As you know, the Charlie Hebdo attack and the anti-Semitic attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris were perpetrated by two young men of Algerian background and one from

Malian background, the three of them French-born. Over the last few days, there has been a significant shift in the discussion about the attacks: it has become more mitigated, with increasing acknowledgement of the fact that there is something wrong in French society—in the way it treats people of immigrant origin.

This shift went to the point French Prime Minister Manuel Valls stating publicly two weeks after the attack that there is a "territorial, social, ethnic apartheid" in France with regard to people of immigrant origin. That's an extremely strong characterization indeed—and as you might expect, it was massively criticized, even from within the cabinet over which Valls presides.

But it did represent a vindication of some sort for those who said from the start that those terrible attacks should lead people to think in the first place about the conditions that bring young

people to such a level of resentment that they become willing to engage in suicidal attacks in order to kill. Not that any reason whatsoever could constitute an excuse for the murders that were perpetrated, but because it is indispensable to investigate the origin of such hatred and resentment instead of indulging in the inept explanation that "they hate us for our freedoms," as George W. Bush put it after 9/11.

This gets us to the core issue, which is what the French prime minister was referring to. The core issue is the condition of populations of immigrant origin inside France. One obvious and very telling indication of this is the fact that a majority of inmates in French prisons are people of Muslim background, although they constitute less than 10 percent of the population. And there is the related fact that the French society and state have never really settled accounts with their colonial legacy.

On this last issue, it's striking that self-examination in the U.S. society about the Vietnam War has been much more radical and widespread—reflecting the huge mobilization that built up within the U.S. itself against that war—than whatever there has been in France about the war in Algeria, although the latter was no less brutal, if not more so, and came after well over one century of barbaric colonial occupation of that country.

France is a country where, believe it or not, the parliament voted in 2005—that is, only 10 years ago, not half a century ago!—for a law about the colonial legacy that saluted the men and women, especially the military, who took part in the colonial enterprise. And it required, among other things, that schools should teach "the positive role of the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa." That particular part of the law was repealed by presidential decree a year later after a huge outcry from migrant organizations, the left, historians and schoolteachers. But the very fact that such a law could be adopted by a parliamentary majority is just outrageous.

Can you tell us more about the reaction to the prime minister's statement about France's "apartheid"? Because that's a striking statement.

It is—very striking. Mind you, Valls is definitely not a radical or even a progressive. He's from the right wing of the Socialist Party. He was minister of the interior before becoming prime minister, and was criticized on the left for entering into a competition with the far right—with Marine Le Pen—of trying to outdo each other on the issue of immigration. And now, suddenly, here he is with this strong statement.

Unsurprisingly, he was widely criticized, not only from the right-wing opposition, but also from within his own party, and even from some people on the left, all of them saying that he went over the top and should not have used the A-word.

His most sober critics pointed to the fact that there is no legal apartheid in France, unlike what you had until a few decades ago in South Africa or in the U.S. South half a century ago. But no one could seriously deny the reality of a "territorial, social and ethnic" segregation in France that is similar to what still prevails in the United States.

The condition of the populations of migrant origin in France is indeed closer to that of the Black people in the U.S. than to apartheid in the strict sense. These populations are concentrated in separate areas, on the periphery of cities, and live in extremely frustrating conditions. On top of that comes racism that is pervasive in various forms in French society, including discrimination in employment, in housing and so on.

On this last point, France is even

worse than the United States—it won't be any time soon that we shall see a person of African background elected president of France, other than in the wild fantasy of an infamous French Islamophobic novelist. It is actually—and unfortunately—much more likely that a far-right candidate would be elected to the French presidency. After all, in 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen managed to get to the second round of the presidential election, beating the Socialist Party candidate in the first round.

This brings up a related question about the French far right, which is quite powerful electorally, with Le Pen's daughter Marine leading a "reformed" National Front. My understanding is that the National Front, which historically draws its inspiration from the far right—up to and including the fascist right—is now inviting representation among its leadership of gays, of other minorities, of Jews. But it is singling out the immigrant population, and in particular Muslims, as the "new enemy." Is that roughly the trajectory?

Generally speaking, the far right in Europe nowadays, except for a lunatic fringe, does not focus on anti-Semitism or even anti-gay bigotry. Actually, one of the major figures of the far right in Holland was an openly gay man, who used to justify his Islamophobia by referring to the alleged homophobia of migrants of Muslim background.

So this is no longer the platform of the European far right nowadays. The preferred target of their hate speech is Islam. Muslims are their scapegoats, much more so than Jews or any of the other victims of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s—save the Roma, who are still the object of much racist hatred. Nowadays, it is Islam that is by far the main target of far-right hatred.

This Islamophobia is actually presented most often with the pretense that it isn't about racism—that it's a rejection of the religion alone, and not of Muslims themselves, so long as they aren't practicing Muslims.

In other words, there are "bad Muslims" and "good Muslims," the latter being those who "drink alcohol and eat pork," i.e. those who are irreligious and adapt fully to Western Christian culture. The most welcome Muslims—here in the ethnic sense, of course—are the small minority who join the Islamophobic choir, seeking reward for their collaboration, like the colonial natives who worked for their colonial masters.

It is this anti-Islam approach that is at work in the demonstrations that have been organized in Germany by a movement that claims to be fighting against "the Islamization of the West." This kind of ideology is common to the far right all over Europe—though maybe less so for the UK Independence Party in Britain, which targets all immigrants, including those from European Union countries.

It's been suggested that the French left is quite poor on the question of institutional racism within French society. Do you think that's true?

Definitely, the French left—and I mean what is usually called the "radical left," to the left of the Socialist Party, which I would not really call "left"—has a poor record on relating to people of immigrant origin. This is a major failure—though, of course, you can find similar situations in most imperialist countries.

The absence of a strong connection with these populations, and particularly with their youth, means that there is little challenge when the resentment that builds up for legitimate reasons among them goes in the wrong direction, leading in extreme cases to the murderous fanaticism that we have seen at play.

The historical record of the French Communist Party on anti-colonialism, especially in the case of Algeria, is far from clean overall. Within France, the fight against ethnic discrimination and the colonial legacy has not been central enough in the actions of the left, and this has led many young people who have been attracted to the left at some point to reject it and develop quite bitter feelings toward it.

This is usually connected to a tradition within the French left that one may call "radical secularism," or "secular fundamentalism."

You mean "laïcité"?

"Laïcité" means secularism. There is something beyond that, though—let's call it an "anti-clerical" tradition, which has been very strong on the left historically in France. It can take the form of secularist arrogance toward religion and the believers overall.

As long as the targeted religion is the dominant one, this isn't a major problem, although even then it can be politically counterproductive. As the young Marx aptly put it, the same religion that is the dominant classes' ideological tool can also be the "sigh of the oppressed."

But this is much truer when the religion in question is the particular faith of an oppressed and exploited part of society, the religion of the downtrodden, such as—in the West—Judaism yesterday and Islam today. You cannot have the same attitude to Judaism in 1930s' Europe as in today's Israel, for instance—or the same attitude to Islam in Europe today as in Muslim-majority countries. Likewise, you cannot have the same attitude to Christianity in, say, today's Egypt where Christians are an oppressed minority as in Christian-majority countries.

This is the problem with Charlie Hebdo. Some of the people involved in Charlie Hebdo were very much on the left. Stéphane Charbonnier, known as Charb, the editor of the magazine, who was the principal target of the assassins, was, by any standard, someone on the left. He had close ties with the Communist Party and the general milieu of the left. His funerals were held to the tune of the "Internationale," and his eulogy by Luz, a surviving member of the Charlie Hebdo editorial staff, included a bitter criticism of the French right and far right, and of the Pope as well as of Benjamin Netanyahu.

In this respect, the comparison that some have made of Charlie Hebdo to a Nazi publication publishing anti-Semitic cartoons in Nazi Germany is

completely absurd. Charlie Hebdo is definitely not a far-right publication—and present-day France definitely not a Nazi-like state.

Rather, Charlie Hebdo is a blatant illustration of the left-wing arrogant secularism that I mentioned, which is an attitude widely held on the left in good conscience—that is, in the firm belief that secularism and anti-clericalism are basic tenets of the left-wing tradition. They are seen as part of a left-wing identity, along with feminism and other emancipatory causes.

I know that one of the major debates on the French left in the last decade or so was about the question of the veil and the rights of Muslim women to wear the hijab in public. Can you discuss what the issues were in that debate?

This is another illustration of the same problem. It arose in 1989 over the issue of young girls coming to school wearing the headscarf, and being expelled for insisting on doing so, with the support of their families. This led to a 2004 law banning "ostentatious" religious symbols from being worn in public schools.

Part of the left—in fact, I would say the vast majority of the French left, including the Communist Party—supported this ban, in the name of "helping" young girls to fight an oppressive imposition of the headscarf on them by their families, and in the conviction that since the headscarf is a symbol of women's oppression, banning it is a way of challenging this oppression, as well as of upholding the secular character of public schools.

The core problem with this arrogant secularism—this very Orientalist arrogance, one could say—is the belief that liberation can be "imposed" on the oppressed. The rationale is that in forcing you to remove your headscarf, I am "liberating" you, whether you approve of it or not. Needless to say, this happens to be an exact reproduction of the colonial mindset.

I think that for some people, this criticism of the French left for its arrogant secularism gets mixed up

with a hesitation to make a left-wing analysis of political Islamism, particularly the reactionary variety behind the attack on Charlie Hebdo or the September 11 attacks in the U.S. You touched on that issue with your book *The Clash of Barbarisms*, didn't you?

I wrote that book after 9/11 indeed. When you're faced with an attack like 9/11, of course, the term "barbaric" will inevitably be used to describe it.

Now how should anti-imperialists react? There are two possible ways. One is to say, "No, it's not barbaric." That's ridiculous, because it obviously is. Why should one regard as barbaric the Islamophobic rampage perpetrated by Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right fanatic, in 2012, but not the massacres of 9/11, or the Paris killings, for that matter? This would be an extreme case of "Orientalism in reverse," substituting the contempt of Islam with a very naive and uncritical stance toward everything that is done in Islam's name.

What is politically wrong and dangerous is not the use of terms like "barbaric," "appalling" and the like, but that of the misplaced political category of "fascism." Many on the French left—the Communist Party, but also members of the far left, and most recently, the post-Maoist philosopher Alain Badiou—have labeled the Paris attacks as "fascistic" and described those perpetrating them as "fascists."

This is completely pointless in socio-political terms since fascism is an ultra-nationalistic mass movement whose main vocation is to salvage capitalism by crushing whatever threatens it, starting with the workers' movement, and to promote aggressive imperialism. Applying this category to terrorist currents inspired by religious fundamentalism in countries that are dominated by imperialism is nonsense.

Such a use of the label "fascism" blurs everything that makes it a distinctive sociopolitical category. If one wishes to dilute a socio-political category this way, then phenomena such as Stalinism or, even more so, the Baathist dictatorships in pre-2003 Iraq or present-day Syria bear much more

resemblance to historical fascism than al-Qaeda or the purported "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria."

The misuse of the label was started by the neocons in the Bush administration and others who called al-Qaeda "Islamofascism," and it is quite unfortunate that people on the left fall into this trap. The obvious political goal of this misuse of the label—since "fascism" is seen as the ultimate evil, and Nazism itself being an avatar of fascism—is to justify every action against it, including imperialist wars.

I remember well a discussion in which I was invited to take part in Paris in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, which was organized by the Communist Party. One of the speakers, a prominent member of that party, explained that al-Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism constitute the new fascism, against which it is legitimate to support war by Western states, in the same way as it was legitimate for the USSR to ally with the U.S. and the UK against fascist powers in the Second World War. You can find a direct echo of the same rationale in the neocon description of the "war on terror" as being a "Third World War" against "Islamofascism."

To come back to the "barbaric" label, the other way of reacting to it, of course, is to say: Yes, these massacres are barbaric indeed, but they are in the first place a reaction to capitalist-imperialist barbarism, which is much worse. That's the reaction many on the left had after 9/11. Noam Chomsky was probably the most prominent of those who explained that, as appalling as the 9/11 attacks were, they were dwarfed by the massacres committed by U.S. imperialism.

In my book on "the clash of barbarisms," I emphasized that the barbarism of the strong is the major culprit, and that it is the primary cause that leads to the emergence of a counter-barbarism on the opposite side. This "clash of barbarisms" is the true face of what has been, and still is, misleadingly described as a "clash of civilizations." As Rosa Luxemburg put it a century ago, the dynamics of the crisis of capitalism and imperialism leaves no option in the long run but

"socialism or barbarism."

The attacks of September 11, 2001, those of Madrid 2004, London 2005 and Paris recently, were all claimed by al-Qaeda—an extremely reactionary organization. Along with likeminded organizations, they are the sworn enemies of anyone on the left in the countries where they are based. For example, a prominent member of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria boasts of having organized the assassination of two key leaders of the Tunisian left in 2013.

The young men who carried out the killings in Paris were wrapped up in terroristic organizations that stand on the extreme far right in Muslim-majority countries. Al-Qaeda is an outgrowth of Wahhabism, the most reactionary interpretation of Islam and the official ideology of the Saudi kingdom—and as everybody knows, the Saudi kingdom is the best friend of the United States in the Middle East, outside of Israel.

People on the left should not appear to be excusing or supporting in any way organizations like these. We must denounce them for what they are—but we must also stress, at the same time, that the main responsibility in their emergence lies with those who started the "clash of barbarisms" in the first place, and whose barbarism is murderous on an incomparably larger scale: the imperialist powers, and above all, the United States.

There's actually a direct and obvious connection between the two. The United States, along with the Saudi kingdom, has been fostering for decades these militant Islamic fundamentalist currents in the fight against the left in Muslim-majority countries. These currents were, for a long time, associated with the United States—a historical collaboration that culminated in the 1980s war in Afghanistan, when they were backed by Washington, the Saudis and the Pakistani dictatorship, against the Soviet occupation.

What happened eventually is that, like in the Frankenstein story, some sections of these forces turned against the Saudi monarchy and against the United States. This is the story of al-

Qaeda: its founders were allied with the United States and the Saudi kingdom during the fight against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, but they turned against both of them because of the direct deployment of U.S. troops in the Saudi kingdom in preparation for the first U.S. war against Iraq in 1991.

Thus, the Bush Sr. administration provoked al-Qaeda's about-face against the U.S. with the first war on Iraq, and Bush Jr. carried it on with the invasion of Iraq. The latter was

carried out on the pretext of huge lies, one of which was that it was needed in order to destroy al-Qaeda—although there was no connection whatsoever between al-Qaeda and Iraq. The result of the U.S. occupation of that country was actually a huge boost to al-Qaeda, allowing it to acquire a crucial territorial base in the Middle East, after having previously been restricted to Afghanistan.

What is today called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is but a further development of what used to be al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq—an

organization that didn't exist before the 2003 invasion, but came into being thanks to the occupation. It was defeated and marginalized from 2007 onward, but it then managed to re-emerge in Syria, taking advantage of the conditions created by the civil war in that country and the utmost brutality of the Syrian regime. And here it is, now striking again in the heart of the West. As ever: "They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

[Socialist Worker](#)

Rebuilding the Left - "building movements, bringing them together"

2 February 2015, by **David Finkel**, **Greg Chern**, **Susan Schmitt**

Income and wealth inequality, widening since the 1970s, have reached levels not seen since the Great Depression. Real wages remain stagnant or declining while massive debts are crushing "underwater" homeowners and college students. Job creation since the 2008 crisis has been disproportionately concentrated in low wage positions with unpredictable schedules that cause stress and anxiety, especially for workers attempting to care for their families. On top of the unstable employment situation, around 20 percent of us are providing unpaid care to an aging adult, and many of us are struggling with physical or mental health issues without adequate health insurance.

As we face daunting economic and personal challenges, we also find our support network shrinking and our communities fractured. Mass incarceration and deportation have destabilized many poor and working-class communities. The approximately 2.4 million people currently behind bars represents a massive disruption of families and communities, especially African-American

communities which are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration. Similarly, the more than two million deportations carried out under the Obama administration has devastated immigrant communities. Tens of thousands of children of those deported now face an uncertain future and the possibility of long-term separation from their parent(s). At the same time, the churn of neoliberal "development" in the form of privatization and gentrification deprives communities of public neighborhood schools and safe affordable housing.

Bourgeois politics have taken increasingly ugly forms, fuelled by a toxic ideological brew of greed, racism, bad religion—and mountains of unregulated political cash—manifested in state voter-suppression laws and the drives to close abortion clinics; the spread of "right to work" laws to northern states (Michigan and Indiana); and the rest of the poison spread by the Koch brothers and the American Legislative Exchange Council. The municipal bankruptcy of the city of Detroit with

all its vicious consequences may be the largest so far, but certainly not the last.

All this takes place against the backdrop of a growing cascade of environmental disasters, local, national, and global. The logic and necessity of capital accumulation, and what's considered "growth" under the regime of capitalist production, mean that this system cannot and will not halt the destruction of the environment. If this system itself isn't challenged and overthrown in time, the environmental crisis (actually, multiple crises) will accelerate until it becomes an actual obstacle to "growth"—at which point the measures likely to be imposed on the population, the means of enforcing them, and the prospects for human civilization are not pleasant to contemplate.

The left has the analytical tools to understand the deep roots of the capitalist crisis, and on the whole uses them reasonably well. In principle, furthermore, the conditions of social decline should provide openings for

the left and for the growth of socialist politics—indeed, in the wake of the 2008-09 financial meltdown, “socialism” famously received favorable polling results among young people. It’s fair to say that millions of people in the United States perceive that there’s a general crisis—more than just separate and discrete issues—and feel it sharply impacting their own lives, their families, and their futures.

The Occupy movement, mass protests and actions against the Keystone XL pipeline and fracking, the outpouring of hundreds of thousands for the September 21 Peoples Climate March, the October 10-13 weekend mobilization in St. Louis demanding justice for Michael Brown, and numerous local struggles large and small, show that people are not silent or passive in the face of the system’s serial atrocities. And the deep hostility in the U.S. population toward another military adventure, thankfully, limits the options of the current president and the next one to put “boots on the ground” back into Iraq or elsewhere.

This potential must be viewed, however, against the stark reality that the left itself has nothing like the capacity to beat back the continual assault on working people, on African Americans, on immigrant communities, on public education, and on essential social services. Our existing organizations, taken individually or even all combined, have nothing like the social or political weight or leadership capacity to act as an authentic “vanguard”—not to be confused with the posturing of ideological currents aspiring to play that role. And this problem, of course, is self-reinforcing as the vast layers of working-class and oppressed peoples are less likely to be attracted to a left that can’t win big gains for their communities and themselves.

How can the left rebuild itself to become the force it needs to be? In Solidarity, we are engaged in two mutually supportive tasks: building movements and bringing them together, along with uniting the remnants of the left.

Solidarity from our inception has emphasized the importance of left

unity in action wherever that’s feasible, and of socialist regroupment when agreement on basic principles make it possible, without demanding unanimity of opinion or artificially enforced “discipline” on every political question. We have attempted to act accordingly both in left unity initiatives and inside our own organization. But breaking down sectarian intra-left barriers, however important and necessary, is in no way sufficient for reconstructing a socialist left that matters.

That’s why we need to build social movements, taking them seriously and on their own terms. As mass movements progress, the leadership and consciousness that develop can form a firm foundation for a relevant left.

It may sound old-fashioned, but we believe that the labor movement especially remains key. If the general state of unions in the United States is shockingly weak by historic standards, that only reinforces a hard fact: the weakness of working class politics and organization imposes a low ceiling on the possibilities of significant reforms, to say nothing of fundamental change.

That does not mean now, nor has it ever meant at any time, that struggles like Black liberation, the women’s movement, indigenous people’s struggles, or any other democratic fight, should “wait for the working class” or hold back on their demands for fear of disrupting a mythical “class unity.” Quite the contrary, those struggles are inevitable, progressive, and democratic in their own right, and may also have a catalytic impact on sectors of the working class. And no one ever won their rights by waiting for someone else to do it for them.

There’s one example at least of a movement that’s made significant gains in a politically reactionary period: the LGBTQ struggle, particularly in the arena of equality within mainstream institutions, notably the right to marry; to some degree in housing and job discrimination; and in winning the evolution of a much less hostile culture toward queer people and issues, although much more remains to be fought for and won.

Nonetheless, reviving the nearly moribund labor movement is essential to any overall strategy for serious reform let alone socialist left reconstruction. Our views on “A renewed strategic perspective on socialist work in the labor movement” are outlined in a document posted [here](#).

Without going into details here, it’s important to say that the union movement must be rebuilt, but cannot be expected (nor would we want it) to look like the organized labor movement and apparatus of the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s. The enormous changes in the structure of the U.S. working class and of work itself, and the demands imposed by the social crisis itself, demand that a reconstructed labor movement be radically more democratic, inclusive, and armed with a far more inclusive social justice agenda than that of decades past. That agenda will need to cover the gamut from universal single-payer health care, to defending immigrant rights, to a conversion to renewable energy and environmentally sustainable economy—taking on the system that forces millions of workers to choose between having a job or a habitable planet.

The socialist left needs to project that kind of labor movement vision, and engage in the hard work of helping make it happen. A picture of what kind of movement is possible—and how those movements relate to left refoundation—can be seen in the Chicago Teachers Union strike two years ago, spearheaded by an energetic rank-and-file union leadership in which socialist activists play a meaningful role.

To achieve the strike’s limited victory, CTU built a powerful alliance with parents and especially with Black and Latino communities far in advance of what most union leaderships have even contemplated. This entailed not just a positive program for quality education, but more—it demanded and achieved a level of sustained teacher membership involvement on a scale that most traditional union leaderships have considered to be impossible, unnecessary, inconvenient, and indeed threatening.

Even in the case of this magnificent struggle, “all proportions guarded” is a necessary caution. This was a defensive strike, which succeeded only partially in the struggle to stop the plague of school closings and “turnarounds” in the destructive drive of “Mayor One Percent” Rahm Emanuel and President Obama’s education czar Arne Duncan. CTU’s Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE) had raised the union above that ceiling imposed by the general weakness of working-class organization in the United States, only to encounter another ceiling: the undemocratic Chicago political system. Among other things, this meant that CTU found itself isolated from other public sector unions or the rest of the Chicago labor leadership that’s tied itself to the Emanuel machine. Nevertheless, the alliances built in Black and Latino communities and the local left catalyzed by the strike continued to gather momentum, sweeping CTU President Karen Lewis into position as a strong challenger to Rahm. A left was building around her campaign, which hoped to turn that ceiling into the floor for further political organization.

But as the situation unfolded, it presented new barriers and challenges resulting from fragmentation within the labor movement, social movements, and the left generally. How does a union, isolated and defensive in the wake of the mayor’s post-strike counter-offensive, prepare itself to expand offensively into political activity? How does it maintain the democracy, inclusivity, and social justice agenda CORE built within the union as it enters the undemocratic, exclusive arena of bourgeois politics? How does it avoid splitting the left side of the ticket, coordinating with other

movements entering that same bottleneck at the ballot box? Movements we work with can often end up in competition with each other for resources, media attention, or capacity, especially in times like the current crisis where working class people are asked to “make more with less.” And any victories riding on the efforts of one organization or social movement working in isolation cannot last in the long run. This indicates the necessity of a left refoundation perspective that seeks to break down barriers “both material and ideological” between movements and socialist organizations. The continued future success of any one movement requires it.

Even as Karen Lewis has withdrawn from the race due to a serious illness, the questions brought up by her campaign and the continued pull into local political action by CTU’s post-strike setbacks commit us to this perspective. We can safely estimate that, in times of state-administered austerity, future successes from rank-and-file-led unions will come up against the same ceiling of political action against that state.

There are other examples that give us glimpses of possibilities still to be realized: the potential for alliances between Occupy forces and West Coast longshore workers, the unions that came out in support of the Peoples Climate March (a revival, perhaps, of the “Teamsters and Turtles Together” of Seattle in 1999?), the continual growth in turnout for the biennial conference and “Troublemakers Schools” held by Labor Notes for activist layers in labor and allied movements, and the two straight months of mobilization-turned-organization in Ferguson, Missouri, that have pulled in unions and garnered recognition of a new

generation of black activists in public attention.

Solidarity looks for ways to engage with comrades, whether from other socialist organizations or independents, in projects to help move such possibilities forward. For example, our Ecosocialism Working Group participates in the exciting, relatively new System Change Not Climate Change (SCNCC) initiative that’s building a left presence in the environmental movement.

We’re exploring how the left that’s engaged in independent political action can build on the successes of Kshama Sawant/Socialist Alternative campaign in Seattle, the Howie Hawkins campaign for New York governor and other Green Party campaigns around the country, and the powerful example in Jackson, Mississippi, that was so tragically cut short by the untimely death of Chokwe Lumumba. We’re certainly hopeful that a national progressive campaign might emerge in 2016 posing an alternative to the dreadful reactionary candidates sure to be the Republican and Democratic nominees, but it’s far too early to assess those prospects.

Our own efforts and those of others, to be sure, are barely a start of what will be required to take on the ruling class offensive in both its neoliberal and far-right forms. The crisis is way bigger than we are, and in one way or another it is leading toward some form of social explosion. Whether that may ultimately take the positive form of mass strikes and new movements, or any number of destructive and reactionary forms resulting from hopelessness, cannot be predicted, but may in some measure depend on what we do now.

[New Politics](#)

Violence against women in West Bengal and Police-party Axis and the police-party axis

2 February 2015, by **Radical Socialist**

The incidence is a straightforward case of politically motivated violence targetting women. A man named Sheikh Mithun, of the Parui region, is reported to have switched from the TMC to the BJP. As part of the threat to wipe out the BJP from the Parui area, he was injured due to bomb throwing on the part of alleged TMC goondas. Treated in a hospital in Bardhaman, he was released on the 17th of January, 2015. Thereafter, police, accompanied by TMC people, turned up at the paternal home of Mithun's aunt, which is in the Budbud area of Bardhaman. She was asked about his whereabouts, and dragged to a forest area, tied to a tree, beaten, with a blade used on her body, stripped and otherwise tortured.

The TMC has jumped to the defence of the police, claiming that nothing wrong was done. The police has accepted that some wrong was done, but the role of senior police officer, SDPO Amlan Kusum Ghosh, has been ignored. In a typical move, the internal police report has been trying to pick holes or inconsistencies in the torture

victim's claims, questioning whether a blade was indeed used and so on. The Calcutta High court had asked the police to provide protection to the woman, yet in subsequent developments the father and brothers of the woman were attacked by TMC leaders with journalists being chased away. The survivor claimed that they are under constant threat to withdraw the case and even the threat of rape dangles on her which the police think will compel Sheikh Mithun to surrender.

Without diluting in any way our condemnation of the police and the ruling party, and while fully supporting the woman concerned, we would however also point out that the media hype today is because this is a conflict between two rightwing bourgeois parties. When it is a case of women being accused of belonging to left forces, or of being relatives of male left wing activists, in particular the radical left, the media often plays a far less vocal role. We therefore urge all women's rights activists to

relate the Budbud case to all cases of police and party led violence on women, instead of treating it in isolation.

Radical Socialist:

â€¢ condemns the police violence

â€¢ condemns the use of woman's body as a pressure tactic to arrest the target of the police

â€¢ demands an end to police protection of political parties whenever they are in power

â€¢ demands a speedy independent enquiry and punishment of the guilty

â€¢ demands an interim suspension of the OC and the SDPO during the inquiry

â€¢ demands that the government should take the responsibility of the safety of the woman and her family and should also bear the responsibility for the medical expenses

Radical Socialist 28 January 2015

After the Peshawar massacre of 141 children, Imran Khan's retreat

1 February 2015, by Farooq Tariq

And this was not accidental or a change of tactics. The protest by a handful of the Peshawar victims' parents has made a huge impact on the PTI's changing position. The KP ministers' initial policy of rebuttal in an offensive manner backfired. All this is a natural outcome of Imra Khan's political blunder of launching an untimely agitation to overthrow the PML-N government.

Imran's changed calmer tone was a reflection of the present political

scenario. Most of his strategies for dealing with growing extremism have been rejected by the circumstances he has had to face in recent weeks. Arguments like 'this is not our war, it is America's war', 'why should we fight another country's war?', 'we must differentiate between the good and the bad Taliban', 'tribal people are different' - are not repeated any more.

The speeches at the dharna convention were an explicit

manifestation of the PTI leadership at a loose end. They had to listen to the people's verdict - 'do a good job in KP and then come back to us'. The PTI felt the pain of the parents in protest. Imran Khan's 'no protocol letter and back to KP' was an exercise to control the damage.

The Peshawar incident changed the consciousness of many Pakistanis in a decisive manner. Even the military establishment had to change its decade-long security paradigm

strategies. The PTI is no exception. It had to abandon its dharna politics and political tone.

The rising extremism resulting in terrorist activities cannot be challenged by softening your views towards them or offering concessions. You offer them an inch, they will take a mile. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto tried this and not only failed but lost his life as well. In 1977, to cool down a right-wing challenge on the issue of rigging elections, Bhutto offered Fridays off instead of Sundays, a ban on alcohol etc. That accelerated the agitation rather than taming it. The ultimate result was a military coup led by Ziaul Haq on July 5, 1977.

Imran Khan's strategy towards the Taliban was more like Bhutto's 1977 tactics. It failed then, and it failed now. The extremists took full advantage of Imran Khan's softer tone and went on the offensive; the net result was the most barbaric incident in the history of Pakistan. The killing of 141 children by militants shattered many myths.

After every terrorist activity the most popular argument by religious groups has been that it is the work of RAW and Mossad. They would easily blame foreign hands. Another argument to favour this was that those who were killed had not been circumcised. All these false arguments have not been used this time.

Chaudhry Nisar's first press conference after the Peshawar incident emphasised that those involved in the Peshawar barbaric murders were Pakistanis. His own PML-N had to change its position on the 'good and bad' Taliban by accepting that they are all the same.

Seldom have we seen in such a short space of time the failure of strategies as those of the PTI towards the Taliban. A rising political tide without an ideology cannot last long. The charisma of personality to popularise politics without a proper ideology is a short-term phenomenon.

Imran Khan's present popularity is because of the recent unpopularity of Mian Nawaz Sharif's neo-liberal

policies, particularly in the energy sector. Imran's retreat was the only reasonable option left. Much is lost but not all. The PTI can regain some lost constituency if it is able to do what it says about KP.

However, all efforts to bring 'change and revolution' mainly through the media failed miserably. Dharna politics were not a genuine mass mobilisation but an organised effort through the growing popularity of Imran Khan to change the name of the game. It could not go very far.

Right-wing politics has its own limitations. It has to be within the circle of a certain ideology. Organising a mass public meeting is different in character than calling a general strike - the most effective tool of political damage to opponents. The lonely call of a 'Pakistan band' was not successful. A revolution in a counter-revolutionary period was just not possible.

Thursday, January 22, 2015

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