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30 April 2015, by **robm**

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Conference calls for halt to privatisation

29 April 2015, by **Awami Workers' Party**

Addressing the participants, APTUF general secretary Rubina Jameel said, "We are gathered here to protest against the privatization project which the government is bent on going ahead with." She said over a decade ago the APTUF had denounced the government's practice of taking loans from the IMF and other international organizations. She said they had predicted back then that the government would sell off state-owned firms to pay off the debts. She said even parties that promised "roti kapra makaan" had kept on taking loans. "Then came the right-wing parties which sought to divide the country along sectarian lines...They created social fissures and deepened the class divide."

Jamil highlighted the need to unite and fight against the oppressive powers which sought to quash workers' struggles. "To those who say Pakistan's trade union movement is dying, we will show them that they are

wrong. We need to be committed across the board - the National Board Employees Workers Confederation, the Railway Workshop Union, the All Pakistan Wapda Hydroelectric Workers Union - my comrades, we will get together and raise one voice against privatization." She said if there was anyone who could save Pakistan it's the workers of this country. "So we say no to imperialism, no to IMF and World Bank, and no to Privatization!"

AWP general secretary Farooq Tariq said the conference was organized to get together all public sector unions on a platform to strengthen their struggle against privatization. "Privatization only solves problems of the capitalists, not the workers'." He said Pakistan's government could learn from the example of Sri Lanka where the proposed privatization of public utilities (electricity) was resisted by workers who suspended electric supply to the entire country

for three days.

He said the AWP will support public sector workers in their struggle against privatization. He said the media tends to cover only political parties led by capitalists or Islamists. "It has turned a blind eye towards the problems of the workers."

APWHWU general secretary Khursheed Ahmed demanded reforms in the public sector enterprises instead of privatization. He said workers have always been committed to their jobs. The dismal state of some PSEs is owed primarily to the distinction between workers and the bureaucracy. He said workers need to be made part of the decision making structures in these enterprises that will solve their problems. He said on April 15 there would be a country-wide protest demonstration against privatization of PSEs.

AWP president Abid Hasan Minto said

the Privatization Commission was formed but there wasn't any consultation with workers who ran the PSEs that are being privatized by the government. "We shouldn't just limit the struggle against privatization to emotional sloganeering. Privatization represents an ideology under which the government has to be withdrawn and service delivery has to be handed

over to the private sector."

He said the AWP stood against this ideology and would make the government live up to its responsibility towards the people rather than surrendering them to the private sector and international financial institutions. He said the struggle against privatization was not a struggle against a particular political

party. "It's a struggle against the ruling elite of the country which is represented in all mainstream parties and is supported by the civil and military bureaucracy."

He said the working people needed to become a political force if they wanted to succeed in their struggle against privatization.

Contours of the class struggle in China

28 April 2015, by **Ellen David Friedman**

How did you get involved in labor organizing in China?

The immediate cause for my beginning to travel to China, starting around 2002 or 2003, was that my son was studying there. I quickly met people in the labor movement on the mainland and Hong Kong. I began to work with labor scholars, labor lawyers, journalists and people working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—and then, increasingly, students. Beginning in the academic year 2005-06, I was able to arrange through colleagues a visiting scholar position at Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) in Guangzhou.

I have continued to go back every year since then for one term, or about four months. This was the first year that I did not go back. Through teaching labor studies at SYSU, I was able to become acquainted with various parts of the labor movement. I've done a lot of work over the years with some reformers in the trade unions and the labor NGO activists in south China particularly, but also in Beijing.

In one of the most important projects, I've worked with a senior professor in the Political Science Department of Sun Yat-sen University to start an International Labor Research Center in collaboration with University of California Berkeley's Labor Center.

This program is the only one of its kind in China, and it has been

incredibly productive and successful over the last few years. It organized a lot of research, academic publication, workshops, seminars, conferences, exchanges between unionists, scholars, students and grassroots activists in China and their counterparts, primarily in the U.S. and Germany, but also from many other countries, including a very promising starting relationship with progressive unionists and scholars in Japan. The government, however, shut it down last November.

One of the things you organized was a tour of the Hong Kong dockworkers. What was the significance of their struggle?

They had an amazingly important strike two years ago. It was important for several reasons. Even though Hong Kong is being reabsorbed by the Chinese central government, at present, there is still a great amount of pluralism and autonomy, and in the labor sector, it means there are three or four major labor federations.

The largest, far and away, is the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU), which is identified with, or is supervised by, the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), a pro-Beijing, pro-employer union. The next largest is considered to be the pro-independence, pro-democracy union federation called the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU).

On the docks, there is what we would think of as sort of open shop, with some workers in the HKCTU, but others in HKFTU. The dockers in HKCTU waged a heroic strike. They all work for independent contractors, but the real target was Li Ka-shing, who is one of the richest men in the world and an oligarch of great capacity. He owns something like 70 percent of the port berths in Hong Kong and many other ports throughout Asia.

The dockers' strike was also an important political struggle. It drew tremendous support from society, and particularly from students. I became acquainted with some of the leaders of that strike, and I was able to bring them to speak at the 2014 Labor Notes conference in Chicago, and then go on a speaking tour of the West Coast ports sponsored in part by the ILWU, and by other unions and left and progressive organizations.

What's the picture of the broader class struggle in China?

First of all, we have to understand that workers in mainland China do not have their own independent unions; the ACFTU is the single recognized union since the 1949 revolution. The government has prevented independent unions from developing through repression and retaliation, especially since the crushing of the uprising in Tiananmen Square in 1989. The government wanted to stop

the development of autonomous workers' federations, which had come into being as part of the democracy movement.

Since then, there have been few attempts at forming independent unions. The closest expression is that in some strikes, workers are including a demand for direct election of their own ACFTU officers at the enterprise level—that is, at the lowest level. This represents an internal challenge to bureaucrats within the government-controlled ACFTU, which performs no functions that we would recognize as part of the class struggle. So the demand for elections is significant assertion of workers trying to make the union fight for them.

This particular demand took an enormous, exponential leap after the auto strike wave of 2010.

These strikes showed how workers understood their chokehold over production. It began with a strike in an auto transmission plant—a wholly owned subsidiary of Honda—in a district called Nanhai. The 2,000 strikers were mostly technical school student interns, with an average age of about 20 to 21. They were familiar with use of the Internet, and did research on Honda and discovered it was a really profitable company. They found that workers doing their jobs in Japan were making 50 times as much as they did.

They also understood how lean production or just-in-time production gave them tremendous power to shut down the auto industry. They realized that if they stopped production in any of the parts plants, they would be able to paralyze the assembly plants. So when they struck in the parts plants, it took just three or four days to shut down four assembly plants and hundreds of parts plants. Honda lost millions and millions of dollars in revenue.

This sparked a wave of strikes in auto parts factories. Nobody knows the real number, but hundreds probably. A kind of infectious demand in those strikes was for direct election. I will say also that one of the most encouraging, important things we've seen is that where workers were able

to elect their own leadership, those new leaders have taken seriously, to the degree they can, the task of representing their members.

In those plants with elected leaders, there is something that begins to resemble real collective bargaining going on. This is a contrast to business as usual. In the vast majority of what passes for negotiations in China, the official head of the trade union will get together with the guy from HR and will sign a paper that affirms existing minimums wages and other legal requirements. So workers forcing the beginnings of collective bargaining is a very notable advance.

Strikes in China have been endemic since the mid-1990s and the initial wave of privatization of the state-owned enterprises. The struggles go up and down with various economic micro-factors, but they have been growing pretty steadily for about the last 20 years among migrant workers with varying demands.

What are the new patterns of class fight back today?

The latest phase is characterized by demands over unpaid wage and social insurance arrears at plants that are shutting down. There are a lot of shutdowns, especially in the Pearl River Delta in the southeast part of China. Some of it is because of economic slowdown since the 2008 crisis. Some of it is government policy to reduce the subsidies that had been established to attract all of this labor-intensive low-end production. They now want to drive that inland. So they're removing subsidies such as tax abatements, water subsidies, energy/utility subsidies, infrastructure, logistics support and so on.

Many small enterprises work at such a narrow profit margin that they really can't sustain themselves. When they shut down and leave, they don't pay proper severance or wages in arrears. Often, workers also learn that their social insurances have not been paid for five or 10 or 15 or 20 years. As a result, workers face sudden unemployment without the wages they're owed and without social insurance to tide them over until they

find another job.

These conditions have driven the wave of strikes in the southeast. But it really should be noted that there are strikes everywhere, including inland, in every sector. Teachers, taxi drivers, bus drivers, airline pilots, Walmart workers and bank tellers have struck. There have even been strikes in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). So we're witnessing a broad movement of workers.

How much of the struggle has been in reaction to outsourcing to the rest of Southeast Asia and plant relocation? Has that been a factor at all?

A lot has been made of this in the Western mainstream press. My observation is that that's not the biggest factor. Of course, bosses are using the threat as a whip hand to attempt to keep wages low in China. Some capital is relocating, obviously. But my view of it has always been it will never amount to a tremendously serious threat in China, because China offers a situation for capital that is simply not available elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

This is the case for several reasons. First of all, China has quite a competent authoritarian regime and a highly developed infrastructure. Second, it possesses this vast, almost inexhaustible labor pool, which is better educated and healthier than in the rest of the region. And it's also the region's largest economy.

Amid this strike wave you've described, are workers starting to raise broader questions about social change?

Not much, and I have a few thoughts about that. One is that unlike Western European, North American or Latin American countries, which have all had histories to one degree or another of some democratic process and institutions, this is not really true of Asia, except for the countries that have been occupied, like Korea and Japan. So there's no history to draw on. The impulses in the direction of democracy, I would say, are weak and scattered.

The second is that China has a paternalistic state tradition that devotes a significant portion of surplus to maintenance of social stability and livelihood. This has been the case through various regimes and economic structures for over 2,000 years. So whether under the various emperors, the Maoist period or this bizarre state capitalist mixed economy, the state provides some tiny little cash subsidy or subsidized housing of some form.

It also ensures that there's always work for people. And peasants still nominally have access to their own land. On top of that, it's important to remember that workers and peasants in China are, in the main, poor. That means people's first concerns are around survival.

These factors combine to dampen the generalization at this point from local struggles to broader social transformation. So you definitely don't see that much in the way of political demands in workers' struggles. When they do show up, it's in social media. People have a great interest in trying to find out what's going on and sharing what's going on. That is a very dynamic part of Chinese society right now. But it's a very basic level of political generalization.

The government is aware of this ferment in social media. It hopes to keep it harmless by ensuring growth and the promise of future improvements in people's standards of living. They're very concerned that economic slowdown could trigger broader complaints about Chinese society and its state. So far they have been successful in muting such a development.

One of the most important struggles that developed recently was the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. What are the roots and the dynamics of this struggle?

The Umbrella Movement has its roots in developments over the last four or five years. Many people date it with the start of the Scholarism Movement, in which high school students started to resist the mainland government's attempt to impose a "national curriculum" in Hong Kong. There have also been many other skirmishes in

this battle against absorption.

People have resisted the imposition of the Cantonese language, and of course, they have engaged in ongoing struggles to defend suffrage ever since the handover from the British. So students have grown up among all sorts of political agitation and have had the opportunity to learn about struggles, strategy and tactics.

The second important factor is that the Hong Kong universities, much like in Quebec, have had a long history of being very political. It's a complicated history. Many students were very pro-Communist after 1949. After the revolution, Hong Kong authorities conducted an anti-Communist purge. There was a lot of confusion and disorientation on the left throughout the 1960s and '70s as people tried to figure out what was going on in China during the Cultural Revolution. Then, as the democracy movement started in the 1980s, many Hong Kong student unions supported it. But after Tiananmen, that was really crushed. Since then, the universities became relatively depoliticized.

So the Umbrella Movement is an encouraging and important development. They don't have a lot of activists from the previous generation to help guide them. A good number of those had become lost, confused and disillusioned. But there is a stratum of young academics that have come together in this group called Left 21. They were the main channels of student activism to support the Hong Kong dockworkers.

The issues that fueled the new Umbrella Movement are like Occupy movements elsewhere. Students and young people in general are quite indignant that their elders have not managed society well enough to give them access to both education and a livelihood, and the possibility of housing and being able to support a family. The cost of living is absurd in Hong Kong. They see the tremendous growth of inequality. It's hard to miss in Hong Kong—you are in one of the centers of world capital, and yet people can't afford to buy their own apartments and leave their parents' homes.

The second thing is this issue of suffrage. The third is just that people are very, very worried about being absorbed into the mainland. There is a positive aspect to this concern, but it also has a negative aspect. Some parts of the movement reflect a new form of anti-mainland racism that has developed recently. There were posters appearing in Hong Kong for months portraying mainlanders as locusts coming to Hong Kong and buying consumer goods, because it is cheaper for wealthy mainlanders to buy consumer goods in Hong Kong. Such racism will open the movement to destructive divisions.

So there is a strong occupation impulse, but the political infrastructure to it is far from stable. In the democracy movement, there all sorts of forces who have varied interests, including big Hong Kong capitalists, who are trying to use the movement as leverage for what they know will eventually be negotiations with big mainland capitalists.

After the occupation was demobilized, the chief executive in Hong Kong and members of their legislative council, took unusual steps to publicly criticize some of the student leaders and call on university administrators to discipline them, to expel them and so on. That was met with a lot of disapproval from society. People think they're going too far.

The leftists in Hong Kong took this movement very seriously. They engaged with a mature, self-conscious and comradely way of supporting, but not trying to preempt the students—to help with the students' thinking, as well as their strategy and tactics. I really admire their work. Many of them seem to me somewhat dismayed now. They're concerned that the legacy of this will be a fairly narrow set of electoral demands, without being able to make the connections to the economic inequities.

What's the significance of the arrest of the feminists in China? Does this represent the beginning of a new movement?

I wouldn't say that there's a feminist movement in the mainland, though there are networks of people trying to

raise issues of gender inequality. The detaining of these five feminists is hard to understand—why has the government been willing to risk this global censure?

If anything, there probably is now more of a feminist movement potential as a result of these arrests. There are many young women that are thinking about and grappling with issues, and the government's actions have probably helped to focus and deepen their consciousness.

Are there ways that people on the left in the U.S. can help build solidarity with the workers' movement and the other social movements in China?

Yes, but it's very difficult. For example, if there is a significant strike, or something like the case of the detention of the feminists, it's important to mobilize within our own

unions, our own political organizations, our own universities and student groups, and so on to make statements. That should absolutely be done. But the impact is generally muted—the Chinese government doesn't actually seem to care that much.

With labor struggles, the instrumental form of solidarity that we normally think of is quite challenging in the Chinese context. In other countries, it's easier to organize real support. For example, a year and a half ago, there was a strike at a Rio Tinto aluminum smelting facility in northern Quebec. So, people from Vermont went up there, we brought people down here, there were speaking engagements, you had unions donating money—things like that. That cannot be done in China—it just can't. There are important strikes, but no partner on the other side to connect

with.

There are opportunities that we should take advantage of. Chinese-American progressives, leftists and scholars have an important role to be play in building intellectual and organizational connections. There are openings for exchanges and visits.

We hope that, minimally, it accomplishes a broadening of the sense of the inter-penetration of the countries and their economies, creation of relationships, sharing of strategies and tactics that hopefully, when the time comes, can open up spaces and connections for more important forms of solidarity.

Transcription by Rebecca Anshell-Song

April 22, 2015

[Socialist Worker](#)

Middle East Imperial Meltdown

27 April 2015, by [Against the Current](#)

The rise of the grotesquely named "Islamic State" is the direct consequence of the Bush-era neoconservative delusion that U.S. power would "transform the Middle East." In Syria, the destruction of society by both the formerly U.S.-allied Assad regime and ISIS, the genocidal massacres of minority religious and ethnic communities, the mass dislocation of refugees with nowhere to go or anywhere to return, and the loss of priceless cultural legacies, are largely irreparable.

"Islamic State" fighters

The imperialist scramble for political control and oil isn't new, of course. Indeed, for at least the past century it's been at the root of crises and tragedies in the Middle East, whether by direct invasion or by the

installation and maintenance of dictatorships, manipulation of sectarian divisions, and sponsorship of settler-colonialism, especially in Palestine. [1] The Israeli state's drive to crush all Palestinian national aspirations, no matter how accommodating and moderate the Palestinian leadership becomes, will only accelerate—with undiminished financing by the United States—in the wake of the March 17 Israeli election, despite the blatant efforts by the Netanyahu regime to sabotage U.S. and European negotiations with Iran.

The tragic crushing of the revolutionary upheaval and brief democratic opening in Egypt is a huge setback for the people of that country and the entire region, and for the international left. The reconstruction of the presidentialist dictatorship under al-Sisi has produced a reality more brutal than the old Mubarak regime, precisely because the scale of

the mass movement required more murderous repression. It's clear that the Egyptian military and "deep state" never intended to allow a democratic outcome, but despite hollow U.S. rhetoric about democracy and human rights, this counterrevolution was certainly preferable for Washington to the victorious spread of the Arab Spring.

The al-Sisi regime expects to be rewarded with a flood of international investment—and it may well prove right if history is any guide. Capital poured into apartheid South Africa in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre (1960), into Chile after the 1973 coup, into South Korea after the Gwangju democratic uprising was crushed (1980), into China after the butchery at Tiananmen (1989), and plenty of other examples: why not into Egypt now?

Further, in labeling Hamas "terrorist,"

the restored Egyptian dictatorship is proving itself a loyal assistant in the Israeli-U.S. campaign to strangle Gaza. And with military aid from the United States fully restored, the Egyptian regime along with Saudi Arabia has launched a massive U.S.-supported military intervention into Yemen, including air strikes with no pretense of concern over enormous civilian casualties, quite possibly to be followed by a ground invasion. This campaign seems more than likely to lead to Yemen's disintegration, as well as a quicksand for the invaders. It's telling indeed that Pakistan, a longtime Saudi military ally, declined to participate.

Yemen, only months ago, was announced by president Obama as a "model of success" achieved with the help of U.S. drone strikes in the name of counter-terrorism. We now see how well that has worked out. Sowing Catastrophe

The United States emerged from the 1991 Gulf War, followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with a triumphal sense of overwhelming power and global mission. This was illusory, as the image of the "global hyperpower" could only be temporary. Most important, the defeats of Arab nationalism and the left would not lead to the neoliberal "democratic transformation" of Washington's fantasies but to the growth of Islamist forces, reactionary and often murderous, with which imperialism has also been prepared to ally when it served some short-term purpose.

While the image of permanent U.S. supremacy inevitably had a shelf life, its decline was rapidly accelerated by ruinous policy choices, motivated in part by the ideologically-driven myth of "the new American century." The most egregious of these, the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, was a criminal enterprise, fraudulently motivated, arrogantly conceived, and stupidly implemented, with the most appalling consequences: for Iraq, where the direct death toll is estimated somewhere between 150,000 and half a million; for its neighbors; and for thousands of U.S. troops, some of whom returned home physically broken or as walking human time bombs.

Predictably, the regional beneficiary of the removal of one official U.S. enemy, Saddam Hussein, was another, the regime in Iran, whose influence has expanded ever since. The U.S. debacle in Iraq also generated domestic antiwar sentiment and popular anger, which (along with the 2007-08 financial meltdown, of course) greatly contributed to the election of president Barack Obama. Once in office, the Obama presidency faced the stark choice between sharply breaking from the George W. Bush war doctrine, or inheriting it. As on other issues (immigration, economic stimulus, health care, etc.) Obama attempted to "split the difference" with results that have predictably become quagmires.

In attempting to extricate from Iraq, the U.S. relied upon the sectarian regime of Nouri al-Maliki until and even well after it had become obviously unsustainable, and has now returned U.S. troops in the guise of advisors. The promise to close Guantanamo prison camp stalled out—due in part to the president's unwillingness to confront the Republican right wing—resulting in a series of well-publicized outrages, a permanent well-deserved blot on the United States' international standing, and priceless recruitment propaganda for al-Qaeda and its ISIS offspring. Indeed, the rise of ISIS in all its naked and hideous barbarity is the ultimate expression of the "Clash of Barbarisms" that Marxist analyst Gilbert Achcar identified in his book following the 9-11 attacks. In the process, the Obama administration has essentially solidified as established practice what began as extralegal improvisations by the Bush-Cheney gang.

In Libya, U.S./NATO bombing became the air force of the anti-Qaddafi insurgency. The consequence was the toppling and assassination of Qaddafi, without the construction of a coherent political front or agreement among competing insurgent forces. The resulting fragmentation of power, internal hemorrhaging, and flow of weapons to ISIS and to regional Islamist armed groups in neighboring African states (including Mali and Nigeria) marks a tragic outcome of what began as such a promising

popular Libyan uprising in the context of the Arab Spring. Washington, Tel Aviv, and Tehran

Netanyahu and Obama

The United States, Israel, and Iran are a special tangle. On one hand, in its actions toward Palestine and the Israeli state, the United States has performed the remarkable, perhaps unprecedented, trick of actively sabotaging its own stated policy. While calling repeatedly for a "two-state solution," Washington has obstructed every initiative of the conservative and accommodationist Palestinian national leadership to move toward international recognition of statehood in some form. (Whether that goal itself is feasible, especially now that Israeli prime minister Netanyahu has dropped the pretense of supporting it, is a separate question.)

The Obama administration's record in the face of Israeli settlement expansion, violent aggression, and military intransigence has been a never-ending political and moral collapse. For this it's been rewarded with the open contempt of the Netanyahu government, and the amazing spectacle of 450+ members of the United States Congress jumping up and down in rapturous applause of a foreign leader openly ridiculing U.S. policy and the president.

The international left must defend and actively participate in the most powerful grassroots expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right of self-determination: the growing BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) movement demanding the end of the Israeli occupation, dismantling of the structures of discrimination inside Israel, and establishing the Palestinian Right of Return. If anything, Netanyahu's reelection has brought a new groundswell of support for BDS on U.S. campuses. At a time when official political structures are utterly indifferent to Palestine, BDS is the best available tool for changing public understanding of the issue.

On the other hand, the linchpin of the Obama administration's attempt to salvage its Middle East strategy today must be a successful negotiation with Iran over nuclear development. It must attempt to accomplish this in the face of the Israeli and Republican drive, supported by many Democrats, for tighter sanctions—and the ultimate insanity of another preemptive war. Iran, for its part, also needs an agreement to save its oil-dependent and sanctions-crippled economy from collapse. The act of the Republican Congressional leadership inviting Netanyahu to sabotage the negotiations was stunning, even by the present standards of U.S. politics of the long knives. The longstanding pretext in the United States that "politics stop at the water's edge" has always been a lie, of course, but rarely has it been so transparently disregarded.

The preliminary "framework agreement" of the P5+1 (permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) with Iran required the Obama administration to work in partnership not only with European allies but also with Russia, even as tensions over Ukraine reach an explosive point. In order to complete this politically tangled and technically complex deal, Washington must treat Iran both as an official adversary and

as a necessary partner in Iraq and in any hope of a solution in the Syrian catastrophe. The Home Front

Not since the "Iran hostage crisis" of 1979-80 has a Middle East crisis been so entangled in U.S. domestic partisan politics. Now as then, the impact of these crises on U.S. political culture has been generally degrading. On the positive side, there is no war psychosis. Falling prices of oil and gasoline, to which Americans are acutely attuned with our lengthy commutes and automobile addictions, have taken the edge off the concept that we have to control "our" Middle East oil.

The U.S. public is properly cynical over the results of the Iraq war, and certainly hostile to new adventures, the ravings of revived necons and Hillary Clinton's warlike rumblings notwithstanding. But the hideous acts of ISIS, spectacles of journalist beheadings, the Charlie Hebdo massacre, and rumors of terrorist plotting have certainly enhanced the ambient level of Islamophobia—although clearly not nearly to the levels visible in some European countries. What does uniquely exist in the United States is a high level of Christian

fundamentalism, which views events in the Middle East through the lens of Biblical end-time prophecy and exerts a powerful distorting influence on political debate, especially in the Republican party.

In short, the fading Obama presidency has been drawn—and has dragged the country—into quagmires from which it had promised to escape. The Obama legacy will include the militarization of the U.S. border and urban police forces (greatly assisted by Israeli expertise in these methods), institutionalized legitimacy of drone warfare and assassinations, massive security oversight of the population, and permanent states of war, much of them half-hidden, from Pakistan to North Africa. The presidency that was supposed to clean up the mess that George W. Bush made has mostly served to confirm what the left has known but is sometimes tempted to forget: there is hardly any situation so appalling, so destructive, so catastrophic in human and political terms that "our own" imperialist government can't find a way to make it worse.

April 23, 2015

This editorial will appear in the May-June 2015 issue of Against the Current.

The abuses of the World Social Forum: Towards the end of the process?

27 April 2015, by Mimoun Rahman

The political and ideological context was marked by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War which led to the hegemony of the United States and liberal ideology, but also by the emergence of social movements fighting against the ultra-liberal policies dictated by the international economic institutions (IMF, WB, WTO) as part of the Washington Consensus.

The enemies of the WSF were therefore well identified: the World Economic Forum in Davos, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the multinationals, the United States as an empire...

The Charter of Principles of Porto Alegre defines the WSF as "An open space for reflection, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of

proposals, exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action among social movements and civil society organisations that are opposed to neoliberalism and to the domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism..."

The World Social Forum is therefore not simply an event for the debate of ideas and proposing alternatives to neoliberalism. It is also an ongoing

process that involves the construction of common actions on a global scale. In other words, the WSF will have to be a catalyst for social struggles, and to make struggles more visible, with the overall objective of reinforcing the common battle against neoliberalism and, in general, against capitalist globalisation, to help reverse the balance of power in the world.

Meanwhile, the WSF is aware of more and more serious abuses that have "reduced (it) to insignificance" [2], making it into a simple international fair for associations and development NGOs. Excessive commercialisation in the heart of the Forum area, outsourcing certain aspects of the organization to private companies, high fees, the presence of official delegations and Islamist fundamentalists, funding of the Forum by undemocratic governments and other uncertain funding sources, activities recorded in complete contradiction with the principles of the WSF Charter...

Add to that the internal crisis of the International Council (IC) of the WSF whose commissions are no longer operational, as well as the liaison group that played the role of coordination between the commissions and prepared Council meetings. Decisions are most often prepared in advance by a minority that controls the IC, mostly members of large NGOs whose presence and influence are increasingly important in front of the low representation of social movements and movements for change in the IC.

The hope of Tunis 2013 evaporated after "Tunis 2015"!

The WSF in Tunis 2013 gave a new impetus to the process, or at least a little hope! The revolutionary process and the popular uprisings in Tunisia and elsewhere in the Arab world have achieved a Forum more or less successful in comparison with the previous editions, including those held on African soil (Nairobi in 2007 and Dakar in 2011). This is also the positive conclusion drawn by the IC

that pushed its members to take the decision to organise a second consecutive forum in Tunisia in 2015. Compared to 2013, a change was expected, both in terms of mobilisation and organisation in regard to the involvement of social movements for change, and articulation between movements for common concrete actions. Unfortunately the result was disappointing, despite very good debates in some workshops and some interesting conclusions from certain convergence assemblies which proposed joint action dates. [3]

The excesses of the WSF 2015

The 13th edition of the WSF faced the challenge of ensuring significant participation, as much as that of 2013 to bring together the struggles of social movements, especially in the region that is experiencing protests boiling over: protests against the shale gas development in Algeria, the movement of striking teachers in Algeria and Tunisia, unemployed graduates fighting for their right to work... and the popular uprisings in Africa (Burkina Faso, Togo, Congo...), in Europe (particularly in Greece and Spain) and Latin America. The third challenge was to facilitate the construction of common agendas against the international financial institutions and the debt system, against the exploitation of natural resources by multinationals, against neo-liberal free trade treaties, against the regression of the most basic human rights, against violence against women, for climate justice and food sovereignty, social justice and peace ... The fourth challenge was for the organisational and security sectors, that is to say assure a required quality of organisation and interpretation and avoid violence and disturbances that political clashes can cause as happened in previous years.

As the WSF approached fears were growing, and some of them were confirmed. First on the issue of mobilisation, despite the inclusion of a large number of organisations (over 4,000) and no less than 1200 recorded activities, participation was lower than

in 2013. The estimates of the organising committee are of the order of 45,000 participants, but this is a quite surprising figure which is certainly "inflated"! It was not based on the number of badges distributed or on confirmed registrations.

Another aspect that should be highlighted; i.e. the near inability of some movements really struggling to participate in this Forum. Certainly, there have been debates on Greece, on Spain, the current protests in Africa (Burkina Faso, Togo, Congo...) but these movements, and in a general manner the so-called "new movements" were not present.

On 27 and 28 March around thirty convergence assemblies were scheduled. However self-managed workshops were organised in parallel. This is what accounted for the low participation in the meetings. This methodology did not facilitate the convergences.

It is also important to note that some content of some activities were in contradiction with the WSF Charter of Principles: organisations defending the agendas of the World Bank, activities that defend the partnership agreements between the EU and the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, others who talk about entrepreneurship in solidarity-based economy, etc. The Forum program was also sponsored by Tunisian enterprises (TUNISIA TELECOM TUNISAIR, TRANSTU ...). Add to that the strong presence of religious Islamists distributing free religious propaganda books! As well as Islamist parties like the Moroccan party "Al Adl wal Ihsane" (Justice and Spirituality), which even held its stand at the Law School!

The presence of a strong delegation of Algerian pro-regime (about 1200 participants supported by the government) and a Moroccan official delegation panicked the Forum and disrupted the conduct of certain activities. The organising committee had to do a press conference on March 27th in the morning to denounce the violence caused by the Algerian delegation (without citing the official Moroccan delegation!) but that conference was disrupted by the same

delegation.

Another very big problem: interpretation. The Tunisian organisation committee preferred to form a group of local volunteers, including language students and translation teachers, without using the experience and expertise of the Babels network recognised for its experience, competence and political involvement with the WSF process, which has so far provided interpretation for the various editions of the WSF. The Local Committee, having found that Babels interpreters are "expensive and demanding!", contented themselves with volunteers with very little experience and whose number was very inadequate. This has led the Babels network to make the decision to boycott WSF Tunisia 2015. [4] Also working conditions for performers were very difficult (no adapted material, no per diem, no food ...) which led them to strike in the afternoon of March 27 while some convergence assemblies took place.

WSF Tunis 2015: an Anti Terrorism Forum!

After the attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis on March 18th that killed 22 people, the WSF organizing committee met in emergency and made a statement in which it announced the continuation of the Forum and its decision to change the route of the Forum's opening march which would now leave instead from Bab Saadoun towards the Bardo museum under the slogan "The peoples of the world against terrorism"! The statement also spoke of the creation of a committee within the International Council for the drafting of the "anti-globalization international charter of Bardo for the fight against terrorism."

Therefore, the WSF advertised itself as an anti-terrorism event and the Tunisian media event spoke only of anti-globalists coming to Tunisia to "denounce terrorism"! Fortunately, several members of the IC of the WSF and other international activists responded quickly and expressed their concerns. A meeting of international social movements with the organizing committee, held on 22nd March, helped clarify and agree on the slogan of the opening march: "The peoples of the world united for freedom, equality, social justice and peace, in solidarity with the Tunisian people and all victims of terrorism and all forms of oppression". Social movements have refused that the WSF could be considered an event against terrorism, and stated that there are several forms of terrorism and that terrorism is fed by international imperialism.

Despite these clarifications the opening march was globally a protest against terrorism, and as such was reported by the press and the Tunisian media announcing that the organisations of international civil society demonstrated in Tunis against terrorism!

The issue of terrorism, which was invited to the debate (including the IC meeting of the WSF) shows that within the WSF itself there are those who put themselves in the wake of imperialism and those who fight it.

The future of the WSF?

It is clear that the World Social Forum is currently in crisis, as well as its International Council. It was recovered by the supporters of a "liberalism with a human face!", those who see the Forum as a simple event. The struggle against the capitalist system is not on the agenda and is not a common agenda of the various

components of the dynamics of the WSF. The future of the process is therefore uncertain!

In other words, the WSF is inward-looking and not intended to counteract the World Economic Forum in Davos or any other neoliberal body. It has no more objectives in terms of enemies to fight. And worse, it sits in the empire's lap (cf. fight against terrorism). In fact, it is without a political compass.

In addition, the WSF has never managed to actually be a forum for movements to express themselves. Only structured organisations are able to finance the travels of a few militants. There has been very little attention paid to the grassroots.

The Assembly of Social Movements (ASM), which was the last minute of the WSF in the early years, and calls at each edition for action days and mobilisations worldwide, has been rendered meaningless by the strategy and methodology established by the IC. It is now marginalised and placed at the same level as other convergence assemblies! The idea was to break the momentum of the AMS which positions itself concretely in the field of alternatives to capitalist globalisation. And social movements themselves have contributed to this by their withdrawal and disinterest, including some major international movements that had initiated this dynamic.

Social movements, especially those that make up the ASM, and the various movements fighting for global social justice, are called to more coordination and cooperation for the common struggle, even beyond the WSF, to strengthen the fight against capitalist globalization for a more just and equitable world.

*Translated by Jennie Bright for
Tlaxcala.
Original article in French CADTM.*

A provocation that should alert us!

26 April 2015, by Andreas Sartzekis

We have mentioned it on several occasions: in the north of Greece, not far from Thessaloniki, gold mines are being exploited, producing high levels of pollution. The giant of the region, the Canadian company Eldorado Gold, has been aiming for several years to expand its activities around the town of Skouries, which triggered a massive mobilization of the local population, with rallies and violent clashes with the police of the Samaras government. Very early on, several things became very clear: the former government of the Troika was taking its orders from the employers and it used methods of barbaric violence against the local people who had mobilized, with police descending on their homes to terrorize them. Moreover, this company took little notice of legality, and pushed forward with the destruction of forests in order to open its new site, despite the absence of any authorization to do so. Finally, it succeeded in manipulating the company's workers, turning them against the mobilized people and forcing them to depend only on the company... and on the members of the Nazi group Chryssi Avgi (Golden Dawn) who came to give them their support "against the terrorists"!

A reactionary descent on Athens

We could have hoped that with the arrival of the Syriza government this question, among the most popular with left activists, was going to have a radical solution: a ban on opening a new mine. However, here as in other areas, the Tsipras government discusses but does not act, while the revanchist Right and the Nazis have seen very well the possibility of exploiting the disoriented miners! Result: a real pitched battle there a few weeks ago between local residents and miners... who received the backing of the MAT (riot police) who violently charged the local people.

And above all, the organization on Thursday, April 16 of a descent on Athens by 4,000 miners with their families, entirely organized and supervised by the management of the company! No need to dwell on the free transport, with 85 buses, and the brand new yellow jackets and helmets worn by the miners and their families. The most important thing is the way the whole thing was stage-managed: a big crowd of television journalists was there from the morning onwards, to greet these brave workers on every channel... this time without a word about the city centre being blocked. Not forgetting the overblown commentaries on this demonstration, whereas on the evening of the same day, the counter-demonstration of 2,000 people in support of the people of Skouries barely got a mention... except to show, surprise, surprise, some hooded individuals throwing Molotov cocktails.

There was one sight that sent a shiver down our spines: repeatedly, we saw groups of miners banging on iron grills with their helmets, in a clear comparison with empty saucepans of middle-class housewives in Latin America demonstrating against left governments. And there was a bonus, providing this clearly stage-managed demonstration with an echo of the French "Demo for Everyone" against same-sex marriage: we saw a former minister of Samaras, a mangy ex-fascist clown, leading the demonstration with a workers' helmet on his head. The image was constantly relayed on all the TV channels.

In short, the message was clear: the real Greece, healthy and anti-union, is back, confronting the government that is protecting the eco-terrorists, who according to some banners are not "real inhabitants" of the region of Skouries.

Winning at

Skouries is an issue of national dimensions

The event was certainly ridiculous and in bad taste; it remains worrying by its successful stage-managing and its eminently political dimension. And it therefore demands a strong and massive response from both the population (many committees exist in the country) and the government. However, on that side, despite protests from many officials about the use of the police against the people of Skouries, Tsipras went at the beginning of this week to congratulate the minister responsible for the police and to reinforce the propaganda operation "Now the police are at the service of the people"... When we know the influence of the Nazis in this repressive force, we can only have doubts about the success of the objective of democratizing the police!

As far as the workers in the mine are concerned, it is clear that the goal is of course to break the relationship of submission that the bosses have established over them. But but this can only be done on a clear basis: there can be no question of giving Eldorado Gold the possibility of expanding. And on this basis, we must obtain the guarantee of employment or retraining on the site. According to the latest news, it seems that several miners have the feeling of having been manipulated by an employer who did not even seek legal authorization. This is perhaps the beginning of a contradiction that can help turn the tide.

Winning at Skouries would obviously have a national impact; it would be a stinging defeat for the bosses and for the Troika, which still considers that Greece is for sale!

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Austerity, the destruction of the health system and the urgency of a debt moratorium

26 April 2015, by **Charles-André Udry, Louise Irvine**

The decision of the Tsipras government to abolish the €5 charge for medical visits is largely illusory, because the sums represented by the one euro to be paid by patients when buying medicine are much greater. In the interventions of caregivers, one fact stood out: the vast majority of managers in the health system and the hospitals have not been changed. The bureaucratic and clientelist apparatus of New Democracy and PASOK remains in place. Ministers can always make statements - they do so every day and in every way - but changing a structure depends on having a real plan and on social mobilization. No new model of effective control of hospitals has been established. The government, of course, does not support any mobilization. The acceptance of the so-called European constraints forms the corset that holds together the different elements of this government, who each play their cards, sometimes in conformity with their convictions. This helps to create illusions among observers about the possible effects of so-called internal contradictions. We witnessed the same illusions at the time of the first government, called "in dispute", of Lula in 2003, although the government structure of the PT was more solid.

The leadership of Syriza in its formal majority can make a declaration, but it does not take any initiative that would make the link between the crucial issues of the health system and the payment of the debt. However, the social emergency is starting to be used - admittedly for the moment in a propagandist way - by the Right, indicating that the government is not only failing to keep its promises, but it is allowing the situation to deteriorate.

In contrast, all the experience of open

meetings of the local structures of Syriza show the interest and the readiness of the population to reopen a primary care centre, to prevent a hospital closure, to increase the number of doctors, to create the conditions for a return of doctors who experience their expatriation as a deportation. One after the other, people recount how in such and such a department the number of doctors has gone down from twelve to four and the number of nurses from ten to two. Moreover, a survey is going to be published concerning the situation of the major hospitals in the Athens area and of primary care facilities. A neurosurgeon who has worked in the two main hospitals described the sharp increase in nosocomial infections (infections contracted in a health establishment) and indicated the effects over the long-term (two, three generations) of this situation. What he said was reinforced by the intervention of a pediatrician.

The debates on the illegitimate debt and its origins are admittedly very important. But the question is posed within another human temporal framework: today, tens of thousands of men and women, Greeks and migrants, are starving, are sick, and are not cared for. The answer cannot be that the government spends €300 million for so-called humanitarian measures (reconnection of electricity, distribution of food stamps), in the style of World Bank safety nets, at the same time as it votes to spend €500 million to renovate the anti-submarine air force, a proposal pushed forward by its Minister of Defence.

Admittedly, this minister, Panos Kammenos, of the Independent Greeks, did not confine himself to only this task, a priority for him. He was present on April 4, when the

establishment of an audit committee on the debt was presented. An initiative that deserves all our interest. Moreover, the President of the Republic, Prokopis Pavlopoulos, stressed its importance. He expects the results in several months. Prokopis Pavlopoulos, given his record in New Democracy and in various governments, in particular from 2004 to 2009, is aware of the explosion of debt in the 2000s, as illustrated by the recent article by Michel Husson [5]. Something that, out of pure opportunism, representatives of the Democratic Left (DIMAR) took the opportunity of recalling, highlighting the career of the President during the period of indebtedness under Karamanlis [6].

As Antonis Davanellos pointed out in a recent article for the really radical left, faced with the disastrous record of the government, initiatives to change as far as possible the relationship of forces within Syriza - and also in the trade union movement, in its militant sectors - are paramount. [7] This is in view of deadlines that are coming up in the short term (June 2015). This battle to change more clearly the relationship of forces, primarily in Syriza, must be combined with massively putting forward concrete demands whose implementation is only possible to the extent that a moratorium on the payment of interest on the debt is decided on immediately. The forces of the Left (from Syriza to Antarsya, including those members of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) who appreciate the acuteness of the social crisis), who want the immediate implementation of the programme of Thessaloniki agenda, presented on behalf of Syriza by Tsipras on September 14, 2014 [8] expressed this in multiple forms during the meeting on April 4, when the radiograph of the

health system was in fact that of Greek society.

The following article by Dr. Louise Irvine, whose data are from the end of 2014, already gave the alarm signal in January 2015. She was not the first. The *Lancet* had already made a real audit of the health system in February 2014. It reflected the needs of the population and therefore the universal rights that flow from that.

What 'austerity' has done to Greek healthcare - "What I witnessed appalled me - and brought tears to my eyes"

The shocking 'austerity'-imposed destruction of Greece's once proud healthcare system is a key reason Greeks have turned to Syriza, finds London GP Louise Irvine in an eye witness account.

In October I visited Greece to see the impact of austerity on the Greek people, in particular on health and healthcare.

I joined healthcare workers and the Greece Solidarity Campaign to visit hospitals, clinics and food markets. I spoke to healthcare staff, volunteers, politicians and local government officials.

What I witnessed appalled me - and brought tears to my eyes.

In Greece's biggest hospital, the Evangelismos Hospital in Athens, conditions were worse than those I have seen in developing countries.

The moment the hospital doors open on 'emergency' days, people flood in. The collapse in official primary and community health care services means everyone who needs healthcare comes

to A+E - whether for a major accident, medication for a long term condition or to get their child immunized. Staff told me that serious trauma cases often have to wait hours for X-rays and treatment due to understaffing and that, if too many cases come in at the same time, people die before they can be treated.

The 'austerity' conditions imposed on Greece by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF) as the price of its debt bailout have closed many hospitals (including three psychiatric hospitals) and primary care clinics. Those that remained face drastic staff cuts. Thousands of health workers have been sacked.

30% of the Greek population is living in poverty, with no access to affordable healthcare. Healthcare is funded through insurance paid by employers and when people lost their jobs they lost their health insurance. The Government claimed to have reinstated health care for the neediest but doctors and nurses told me it was a sham. The promised tribunals to assess and means test the claims of those who can't afford health care have yet to be established.

At Evangelismos I saw 50 psychiatric patients crammed into a 25 bed ward, sharing two toilets and just one psychiatric nurse. Psychiatric patients of all ages and both sexes lay apathetically on trolleys on both sides of the long corridor. I turned a corner and saw another corridor similarly lined. These narrow uncomfortable beds, crammed together, were all the personal space patients had. Nurses and doctors told me it was impossible to do any therapeutic work.

Despite the overcrowded conditions, the ward was eerily quiet. I got the impression most patients were sedated, or perhaps had just given up in despair.

'Austerity' and cuts have led to a sharp rise in depression. Suicide is up 45%. The patients in Evangelismos were the lucky ones - many others who need beds have been abandoned on the streets, with no community based support.

As we were leaving a doctor appealed to me to tell people in the UK what I had seen and heard. He said they wanted "solidarity, not charity".

People are organizing to resist and defend their communities against the worst impacts of austerity. One expression of this is the mushrooming of community based "solidarity" structures to help people who lack food or healthcare.

Social solidarity health clinics have been set up all around Greece staffed by volunteers who try to provide basic care for those with no access to healthcare. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists volunteer in these clinics, but not nearly enough to meet the needs.

I visited the Social Solidarity Clinic in Peristeri, a district of Athens with a population of about 400,000 people. The volunteer staff, doctors and nurses who worked there told me that most local state run health clinics had been shut. The government had closed all the polyclinics then reopened some recently but with only 30% of the doctors that they need. Whereas previously there had been 150 doctors providing services to the district, there were now only 50. A polyclinic for a population of 400,000 people had no gynaecologists, no dermatologists, and only two cardiologists.

"We want our doctors back" - said one of the volunteers I spoke to. Thousands of doctors have left the country. Those that remain - including senior hospital doctors - earn about €12,000 a year.

The Peristeri social solidarity clinic had been running for 1.5 years and had 60 volunteers including about 25 doctors who offered their services free. There was a simple consulting room and a small pharmacy with donated medicines.

Clinic volunteers said that people with long term conditions like diabetes or with cancer had particular problems getting the treatment they needed. Uninsured cancer patients can't afford chemotherapy. The solidarity organisations appeal to people on chemotherapy to donate one day's worth of medication for patients who

can't afford to the drugs themselves.

The Greek government passed a law in January allowing so that if people get into debt their property can be confiscated. Some people decline further treatment rather than accrue debt from healthcare costs that might lead to their family losing their home.

Greek mothers are now charged €600 to have a baby and €1200 for a Caesarian or complications. It's twice that for foreign nationals living in Greece. The mother has to pay the fee on leaving the hospital. When the charges were first introduced, if the mother couldn't pay, the hospital kept the baby until the payment was made. International condemnation led to that practice being discontinued and now the money is reclaimed through extra tax - but if the family can't afford that then their home or property can be confiscated. And if she still can't pay she can be imprisoned. An increasing number of newborn babies are abandoned in the hospital. One obstetrician I spoke to called it the "criminalization of childbirth."

Contraception is unaffordable for many - health insurance does not even cover it. There are many more abortions - 300,000 a year - and for the first time the death rate in Greece is outstripping the birth rate. People can't afford to have babies. It's hard enough to feed and care for existing

children.

A recent report compiled by Unicef and Athens University estimated that 34% of Greek children were at risk of poverty. An article in the *Lancet* (Greece's Health Crisis: from Austerity to Denialism 22 Feb 2014 [9]) reported that the stillbirth rate had risen by 21% and the infant mortality rate by 40% between 2008 and 2011. Many families are living off the meager pensions of a grandparent - typically about 500 Euros a month. The collapse in primary care systems means that thousands of children are not being immunized. It costs about 80 Euros for a course of childhood immunizations and many families cannot afford that.

Collapse of the public healthcare systems has led to a doubling of TB rates, the reemergence of malaria after 40 years and a 700% increase in HIV infections.

Food poverty is also worsening people's health. 1.7 million Greek people, nearly one in five of the population, do not have enough to eat, according to the OECD. We visited a food market in Athens organized by the social solidarity movement, which organizes the distribution of food direct from farmers to the population. The social solidarity food markets cut out the middleman so the food is

cheaper than in the supermarkets while the farmers get a good price. In return the farmers donate a percentage of their product, which is distributed free to local families in need.

Across the market a banner was strung saying "Putting hope into practice". This, for me, epitomized the spirit I encountered everywhere I went - hope for change combined with a very practical approach to creating support structures. People I spoke to were clear these were not intended to be a substitute for state provision - they can't be - but a means of sustaining life and resilience to prevent people sinking into destitution and despair. They said that what was needed was action at government level.

The success of the Syriza party is no surprise. We met Alexis Tsipras, Syriza's leader, who said that rebuilding the healthcare system would be a priority for his government if elected.

The Greece Solidarity Campaign has launched an appeal for medical aid for Greece, prioritizing the purchase of immunisations for children. [10]

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Should Greece Pay Back Its Debt?

25 April 2015, by **Özlem Onaran**

On 4 April the President of the Hellenic Parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou, set up the Debt Truth Committee - a special committee of the Parliament to investigate the truth about the increase in Greece's public debt. Eric Toussaint of the [Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt](#) is the team's scientific coordinator. The [Debt Truth Committee](#) currently includes 35 international and Greek experts in law, economics, accounting, banking

from Europe as well as Zambia, Ecuador, and Brazil.

There are well-established concepts in international law that question the legality, legitimacy, sustainability or odiousness of a loan agreement if and when it deters a state from meeting its obligations to its citizens to ensure adequate access to health and education, a life with dignity, and the right to organise. There is a long history of states making use of these

legal concepts to enter into dispute with their creditors over their sovereign debt starting with Cuba in 1898, the US in Iraq in 2003 and Ecuador in 2007.

These legal concepts are the guiding references for the Debt Truth Committee: Is any part of Greek public debt before or after the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the Troika illegitimate? Was it contracted by a government without considering

whether the public or general interest would be safeguarded? Was any part of it contracted in violation of the current legal or constitutional system? Has any part of the debt been granted on conditions that violate the social, economic, cultural, civic, and political rights of the people concerned? Were the loans intended not to save Greece but French and German banks?

The creditor institutions as well as the debtor governments have an obligation to audit these aspects before any loan agreement is made. Did EU governments consider whether any of these loan agreements violated the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights?

In the case of Greece, the ILO's supervisory body along with other supervisory bodies of the European Code of Social Security, the United Nations and European human rights bodies have repeatedly expressed concern that maintaining the course of fiscal consolidation foreseen by the MoU undermined the national social security system's "capacity to maintain the population 'in health and decency' above the poverty threshold." As a result of these policies and the dismantling of the collective bargaining system, real hourly wages in Greece fell by 25% by 2014. The minimum wage has fallen to its level of the 1970s. The minimum pension fell below the poverty threshold. As many as 35.7% of the

population and 44.1% of children aged 11 to 15 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The economic depression became a fully-fledged reproductive crisis, with the population decreasing at the same time as rising emigration and decreasing fertility.

The conditionalities of the loan agreements since 2010 have not only destabilized the economy and society, but they also made public debt even more unsustainable. Research by Gechert and Rannenberg of the Hans Böckler Foundation in Germany show that without austerity the Greek economy would only have stagnated rather than lose 25% of its GDP. Implementing tax increases alone and no spending cuts would have been much more effective in lowering the debt to GDP ratio. The Troika did not adequately take into account the higher than average multiplier effects of cuts during recessions when designing the Greek programme.

Our work at Greenwich for the Foundation for European Progressive Studies shows that the fall in wages alone explains 4.5 percentage points of the decline in Greek GDP. Contrary to the assumptions of the European Commission (EC) and the IMF, falling wages do not stimulate net exports significantly either.

Dealing with the depression and humanitarian crisis in Greece requires measures to reverse both inequality

and austerity, increase the minimum wage, re-establish collective bargaining institutions and the welfare state, and promote public investment in the social and physical infrastructure via a healthy and progressive tax system. This is, unfortunately, not how the creditor institutions understand structural change.

Mario Draghi, the ECB President, has recently warned: "we are certainly entering into uncharted waters if the crisis were to precipitate." To avoid the next potential Lehman moment, the sane response to the crisis would be to analyse the origins of the debt in Europe to shed light on adequate policies to generate sustainable development and social cohesion in Europe. The German export-led growth model also requires debt, but in another country, in Greece or Spain, hence it is as unsustainable as debt-led growth. However the EC, ECB, and the IMF are not guided by rational long-term economic and social concerns, but by erroneous economic concepts that serve the interests of the financial world. Therefore, the initiative of the Greek Parliament is of historical importance, not just for Greece but also for Europe as a whole.

Á-zlem Onaran is a member of the Debt Truth Committee in Greece.

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The Noose Tightens

25 April 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

Two days later, Dimitris Mardas, the deputy minister of finance in charge of state revenue, declared that €400 million were missing to pay for pensions and salaries at the end of the month. A few hours later, he said the money was found and that he was now trying to constitute cash reserves. But according to sources, Mardas informed Syriza members of parliament at a meeting that same day

that the state reserves wouldn't be able to make all payments in May.

And that's despite, in terms of debt payments, May being a relatively "easy" month, with only €750 million due to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), plus another 400 million in interest payments.

June will be more difficult, with €1.5 billion due to the IMF, €700 million

to the European Institutions, and 500 million in interest payments. The burden is without a doubt untenable.

The Blackmail Intensifies

The European Central Bank (ECB) did push up slightly the emergency liquidity assistance (ELA) cap, but

discussed the possibility of curbing the funding of Greek banks beyond that. In an interview in Washington on April 18, governing ECB council member Vitas Vasiliauskas said, "The situation in Greece means that we should have a limit until summer for ELA. Everyone understands what ELA means; it's a temporary measure to give the banks liquidity."

But a more representative sample of the views of the two major European institutions that together hold about two thirds of the Greek debt, the ECB and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), are to be found in the [interviews](#) given on April 22 by Klaus Regling, managing director of the ESM, and Benoît Coeuré, member of the executive board of the ECB.

Both express a particularly tough line on Greece, rejecting two key demands of the Greek government in the current phase of the negotiations: no disbursement of the €1.9 billion to which Greece is entitled before the "completion of the review," which means compliance with the type of "reforms" opposed by the Greek side (this sum corresponds to profits made on Greek debt bonds and should be repaid to Greece, according to the conditions of the ECB's SMP program, since February). And no "gradual approach" to reforms, as proposed by Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis to allow Greece to get liquidity before June and to facilitate an agreement.

Instead a "comprehensive list of reforms" is required, which should include further deregulation of the labor market and cuts in pensions, two "red lines" that the Greeks would not see crossed.

Regling went much further than Coeuré: commenting on the possibility of a "Grexit," that is of Greece leaving the eurozone, he said calmly that this "is not the baseline scenario. But if it were to happen and we work very, very hard to avoid it, then I think there would be a lot of uncertainty because we don't have any kind of similar experience." He added that "of course it would be more manageable than five or six years ago because we have new institutions, the EFSF, the ESM, other countries in the euro area

have made tremendous adjustment progress such as Ireland, Portugal, Spain."

Regling also explicitly opposed the current plans of the Greek government to reduce some taxes and increase the minimum wage and pensions, saying that this amounts to "moving backward" and is putting negotiations in danger. Moreover he made it clear that the disagreement goes deep since the Greek government thinks that the approach of its predecessors is mistaken, whereas according to him, "the strategy was working." "This difference has not been resolved," he says.

He concludes by ridiculing the idea that the creditors might "back down because they don't want a credit event, or accident," saying that "our procedures for providing loans are very clear, and very well established. They are linked with conditionality, it is clearly written in the ESM treaty. We need a unanimous decision of our shareholders and the approval of six EU parliaments, and the parliaments definitely will check very carefully whether the conditionality "is met."

It's worth remembering that the hypothesis that despite their intimidating declarations the Europeans will at the end of the day make concessions and, to [quote Varoufakis](#), "admit their mistakes," is the one adopted so far, publicly at least, by the Greek government. But the soundbites coming from the creditors' side point to something radically different: either Syriza accepts continuing the policy of the memoranda, or it will have to endure until the end the consequences of the ongoing strangulation.

Without Friends

The Greek government's isolation has become even more perceptible after the recent statements by President Obama and US Treasury Secretary Jack Lew urging the Greek government to move quickly down the path of "reforms" and comply with the demands of its creditors.

Relations with the US have further

deteriorated since the decision of the Greek government to let Savvas Xiros and other members of the left-wing November 17 armed struggle group serve the rest of their sentence out in prison, in conformity with the newly passed law on prison reform. The US reacted very strongly against what they consider "freeing terrorists," despite the fact that Xiros is in extremely poor health.

It is absolutely clear that we are fast approaching the "moment of truth."

At the same time, the prospect of immediate relief coming from Russia, as a result of the recent visit of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to Moscow, seems to have faded. The agreement on a gas pipeline that was expected to be signed this week, with a cash advance on future revenue of €5 billion, was finally postponed after Tsipras's meeting with Gazprom's president in Athens on April 21.

It may not be a coincidence that the Russian retreat happened the same day the EU launched a legal attack on Gazprom on the rather dubious charges of "market abuse" and "breaking the EU trust rules."

Options Going Forward

At this stage, the options remaining for the Syriza government seem to be restricted to the three following ones.

The "good scenario," the one which is still favored by the Greek government, is that the Europeans will make concessions, and a compromise will be reached very soon. However, as the IMF president [made clear](#), in order to get the €7.2 billion at stake in this four-month bridge agreement, Greece needs to get a positive "review" and to conform fully to the "reforms" agreed by its predecessors. In any case, this possibility has already been explicitly ruled out by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, German Finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble and others, who made repeated statements these last days saying that the only deadline to be

considered is now June 30, and that no money will be transferred to Greece before a “big deal” — in other words, another “rescue package” coming with the usual conditions.

The Greek government gives up. This is of course the avowed aim of the Europeans. But in a recent interview with Reuters, Tsipras [made it clear](#) that there are “political, not technical disagreements” on four key issues: labor legislation, pension reform, a hike in value-added taxes, and privatizations, which he referred to as “development of state property” rather than asset sales. Making concessions on that bottom line would amount to surrender and to political suicide for Syriza.

The Greek government defaults on the debt. In a [recent interview with the Huffington Post](#), Varoufakis said that if the government had to choose between paying its creditors and paying salaries and pensions, it would prioritize the second option. But of course such a choice means a decisive rupture and exiting the eurozone (the scenario of a double currency within the euro cannot last for more than a few weeks at the very best).

The complication here is that defaulting in May means defaulting on IMF repayments, and this can entail enormous complications at the level of trade (the IMF can take sanctions that will make access to private credit for trade nearly impossible). Greece should preferably default on the ECB/EFSF loans, but these repayments are due in the summer and it seems nearly impossible to hold firm until then.

Preparing for Confrontation

It is impossible at this stage to formulate which of the two last scenarios, the only realistic ones, will prevail. The signals sent by the government these last weeks are increasingly contradictory: on the one hand, the dominant tone is that of confidence and optimism about the

possibility of reaching an agreement that would materialize the “[honest compromise](#)” which is now Alexis Tsipras’s aim.

On the other hand, ministers belonging to Tsipras’s close circle, such as Interior Minister Nikos Voutsis and Labor Minister Panos Skourletis, [made statements](#) such as “we’d like to stay on the ship called Europe, but if the captain pushes us overboard, we need to try to swim.”

Along the same lines, Deputy Finance Minister [Euclid Tsakalotos](#) declared on March 26 that “if you don’t entertain the possibility of a rift in the back of your mind, then obviously the creditors will pass the same measures as they did with the previous [government].”

Contradictory statements have also been made on the issue of a referendum in the case of a failure in the negotiations process. Such a move appears necessary since it is true that Syriza’s mandate doesn’t address such a possibility and has been explicitly based on the hypothesis of breaking with austerity while staying in the euro.

In recent statements, senior ministers such as [Varoufakis](#) and [Alekos Flabouraris](#), who is the state minister and is close to Tsipras, referred to that possibility, only to be contradicted by other Syriza figures such as the member of European Parliament, [Dimitris Papadimoulis](#).

The state of public opinion reflects this uncertainty. The enthusiasm and the combative spirit of the first three weeks have now given way to a mixed picture: the support for the government’s strategy is still high, but significantly below its level of the [previous months](#). There is calm in the streets.

The recent mobilizations seem restricted to certain sectors (the anarchist milieu and local communities against gold mining in Skouries, in Northern Greece) and their effects contradictory: the

anarchist agitation accelerated the vote in parliament of a bill liberalizing the conditions of imprisonment and ending the “high security” prison regime.

But the situation looks more confused in Skouries, with the police turning against the demonstrators and the workers of the gold mines marching in Athens to support the continuation of the extraction, strongly backed by their Canadian-owned employers and the right-wing opposition.

The main element fueling this troubled atmosphere is, however, the fact that the scaremongering on the theme of the “Grexit” remains unchallenged at the level of broad public opinion. The right-wing opposition and the mainstream media, increasingly hostile to the government and using all possible arguments to push it towards full surrender, associate the break with the eurozone with an apocalypse — as they have done relentlessly since the start of the crisis.

But the response on the part of the government tends to be that this perspective will be avoided thanks to the “honest compromise” to which the Europeans will finally have to agree. Hardly a discourse, to say the least, that can mobilize Syriza’s base and prepare society for an eventual rupture with Europe.

With the Communist Party still firmly holding to sectarian opposition, and its secretary general declaring that it would [refuse any support](#) to the government even in the case of a break with the eurozone, and the [far-left Antarsya](#) repeating that the government has already surrendered, it is the responsibility of Syriza’s left to propose the only sensible approach that could avoid failure: holding firm on the line of confrontation with the EU and prepare the popular movement and Greek society more broadly to embark on a radically different trajectory, both at the domestic and at the international level.

The stakes could not be higher.

Making a killing: Rana Plaza and the global garment industry

24 April 2015, by Jerome Small

Early November, 2014. It's my first day in Dhaka, and the contrasts with my sometimes sleepy home town of Melbourne keep slapping me in the face.

There's the soldiers on street corners, loafing around with shotguns. There's the half million pedal rickshaw drivers, manoeuvring for space in the crush of cars, bikes and packed, roughly panelbeaten buses that is Dhaka traffic. There's the human energy generated by more than 12 million people, living and working in an area just one-sixth the size of greater Melbourne.

There's plenty that is strange to me. But some things are as clear as day.

"Action! Action! Direct action!"

I'm standing in the street outside the National Press Club, with 500 chanting garment workers - most of them young women. A month ago, they were employed by the Ha-Meem conglomerate, making clothes for the high-profile international brand H&M. For daring to organise a union, they have been sacked and the factory shut down. So we're blocking a street, marching up and down, chanting in protest.

A young man approaches me. "Journalist?", he asks. "No, unionist", I reply. I'm one of a six person delegation organised by Australia Asia Worker Links, a Melbourne-based worker solidarity organisation. For a week, I have the honour of talking with some of the workers who produce the clothes that the world wears. I visit some of the crime scenes - where workers have perished in their hundreds and in their thousands. And I get to talk with some of the staunchest fighters I've ever met.

After today's rally we sit with some of

the workers, and I get a rapid education about the garment industry. The first thing I learn is that garment workers don't make garments.

A collar.

A pocket.

A hem.

Labels.

A seam.

Cuffs.

Buttons.

Overlocking.

Modern garment making, like any capitalist industry, breaks a single process such as making a shirt into dozens of different operations, each one performed by a single worker. Again. And again. And again. And again. And again. For every minute of every hour of every long, and often painful, working day.

Garment manufacture is labour intensive. The drive to minimise costs has meant that, throughout the globalised history of the readymade garment industry, women's labour has been most exploited. "Women are cheaper, because women have fewer options", one manufacturer in Bangladesh told researcher Naila Kabeer. Overwhelmingly, women in the industry say that they appreciate the money, the choices and the respect that paid work brings. But the gruelling pace, low wages and the constant fear for their safety are another matter.

"Do you feel pain in your body from your work?", asks one of our delegation. The question is translated into Bangla and there's an immediate murmur of recognition and agreement

from the dozen or so women crowded inside the small office. There are similar rushes of agreement when we raise the issue of hot, dusty air leading to breathing problems, and the bosses' common practice of keeping two sets of books. Some garment workers have pain in their arms, some in their back, some in their shoulders. Many have stories of workmates fainting at their machines. Everyone talks of the unrelenting pressure from the manufacturers, who drive the workers to a point of exhaustion and beyond.

In early October, a worker at the Ha-Meem/H&M factory had their overtime pay docked for going to a funeral. Two workers went to the manager's office to complain. They were assaulted, then sacked. When their fellow workers protested, management shut down the entire factory, put a lock on the gate and walked away. Through our translator the workers explain: "The owner of the factory told the police, 'If there are any workers here, pour petrol on them and burn them.'"

The workers are telling us terrible stories, but they are far from cowed. Anyone who has been on a picket or protest with newly-organised workers would find the strength and spirit familiar. "From going to demonstrations when all this pressure came on", one of the women explains, "we learned that there are other factories, just like ours, which have a union, so the workers started organising."

"If you could say anything to the brand owners", I ask, "what would it be?"

One woman replies, other workers nod: "The workers want all that is owed to them for all the work that has been done. And they want the brand owners to tell the factory owners to

reopen the factory.”

For asking this, of Ha-Meem and H&M, these workers were roughed up and chased off the streets by police a week after we met them.

The industry

The foundations of the garment industry in Bangladesh are sunk deep into a swamp of corruption. This is not a metaphor.

In the week we spend in Dhaka, we several times catch a glimpse of the gleaming office tower that serves as the headquarters of the peak employer body of the garment industry, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). A series of shonky deals allowed the BGMEA to construct its headquarters in the middle of an important waterway in downtown Dhaka. Bangladesh’s High Court found that “a scam of abysmal proportions” was involved in these land deals. The highest court in the country ordered that the BGMEA demolish its headquarters within 90 days.

That was four years ago. The BGMEA tower still stands and no one is expecting it to come down. The foundation stone for this illegal building, after all, was laid by current prime minister Sheikh Hasina.Hasina.

Hasina’s political party, the Awami League, and the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, are thoroughly integrated with the garment industry bosses. Of the country’s 350 members of parliament, around 30 are garment manufacturers. A similar number, I’m told, are in the real estate business – another popular path to riches for a well-connected and ruthless few. According to Transparency International Bangladesh, more than half of the parliament is directly involved in business or manufacturing, with many more having connections via family members.

The garment industry accounts for nearly 80 percent of Bangladesh’s exports. For the ruling elite, the exploited labour of the garment industry is a path to further riches.

The country’s first deepwater port, a colossal coal mine and further “national development” also depend on it.

So it’s no surprise that the state intervenes hard to keep the workers in their place. There are regular police, with some formidable weapons (I’ve seen water cannon before, but I’ve never heard of one that fires a torrent of scalding hot water, with an indelible dye so that workers can be tracked down after the protest). There are industrial police, stationed in the factory areas, with a brief to smash worker protests as they start. And behind the police is the army – especially the Rapid Action Battalion, with a string of extrajudicial killings to its name.

Rana Plaza

Political influence, garment manufacture, and land swindling are three of the most lucrative industries in Bangladesh, and they combine in the person of Sohel Rana. On Wednesday 24 April 2013, he became world famous.

Rana is a local street tough and political fixer from Savar, an industrial suburb just west of Dhaka. He is the local secretary of the youth wing of the Awami League, but his political associates say he really isn’t fussy: “Whatever party is in power, he is there”, one of his associates told Associated Press.

Rana’s dad got in on a shonky deal involving reclaimed swampland. Rana junior had an eight story building constructed on the land despite only having a permit for five floors. He named the building “Rana Plaza” and rented the floors out to garment manufacturers.

Part of the deal included Rana and his thugs making themselves available to intimidate the workforce. It’s a tried and tested business model, and the business was good. A couple of dozen global brands, including Benetton and Walmart, sourced goods from the Rana Plaza factories.

On 23 April, cracks opened up in the building. At least one of the columns

was cracking and splintering. Workers left and an engineer was called, who declared the building was in imminent danger of collapse.

The next day, many workers gathered outside. Some were told that, if they missed one day’s work, they would lose several days’ pay. Others were threatened and some were beaten by Rana’s gang of toughs. Eventually, thousands were forced into the building.

Shortly after, Rana Plaza collapsed.

Crime scenes

“Come over here Jerome”, calls Masum as he heads out across the rubble. “I’ll show you where I found the bodies.”

Moniruzzaman Masum has been taking our delegation around Dhaka, getting us to our meetings and doing much of the interpreting. Now we’re at the Rana Plaza site. I’m staring at half an acre or more of finely smashed rubble. Masum was one of the rescuers here. He’s mentioned these bodies before, but I haven’t understood the story.

Partly, I’ve been a bit overwhelmed: a visitor hears a lot of stories about Rana Plaza, before even going near it.

Stories of workers, still trapped in the rubble after days, amputating their own limbs so they can get out.

Stories of activists and journalists filming bodies going into body bags night after night. The authorities attempt to minimise the official death toll by cramming more than one body into a single body bag. So it’s important that every dead worker is filmed.

Stories of a phone call from a comrade who was watching the rescue on TV. The comrade suggests that rescuers smash their way into the building from the construction site next door. A team with sledgehammers breaks several holes into the half-collapsed floors. Three or four hundred workers are rescued.

Stories about how there still is no money for compensation, just a tiny

amount of cash from charity. One activist explains to us the importance of campaigning for justice as well as compensation. Pushing only for compensation “produces a beggar mentality. And you cannot organise to fight with a beggar mentality”.

We meet the president of the Rana Plaza Survivor’s Union. He explains that thousands of workers, especially rickshaw drivers, rushed into the building to start the rescue without regard for their own safety. Survivors of the collapse, in his opinion, owe a debt to the entire working class of Bangladesh – a debt they repay by joining strikes, demonstrations, and blockades for other workers.

And we hear stories of the army, who didn’t turn up until several days after the collapse. When it did, it was to keep away the people who had been organising the rescue.

I follow Masum across the rubble. He heads to a concrete-lined pit on the edge of the site. It’s the septic tank for Rana Plaza. He’s pointing into it and explaining that, when he found the bodies, there was a concrete lid on the pit and he’d had to crawl on his belly with a flashlight. He saw three skulls, but maybe there were more.

The president of the Rana Plaza Survivor’s Union calls out from twenty metres away. He’s pointing at another spot. He found human remains there just a couple of months ago. The police had chased him away and seized the remains.

It’s only now that it sinks in: we’re walking around, not just on crushed-up bits of concrete and steel, but on crushed up bits of humans. The site has never been properly cleaned up. When the army declared the recovery effort over, 20 days after the collapse, the official tally was the bodies of 1,127 people. The authorities still go to great lengths to avoid adding many more to this number.

Masum explains that, when he found the bodies, he tried to contact families of the missing. Maybe they could sit on the concrete lid of the tank and call the media, demanding a proper cleanup. But the authorities found out quickly and sealed the site off. They

broke open the concrete lid with a jackhammer and seized the remains.

How did Masum know to crawl on his belly with a flashlight to look for bodies in the building’s septic tank? I don’t get to ask straight away because we’re on the road again, heading to another crime scene.

Five months before Rana Plaza, there was Tazreen. (And between Tazreen and Rana Plaza was Smart, and before Tazreen was Eurotex, and That’s It, and Garib & Garib, and Sayib, and Imam, and Phoenix, and KTS, and Spectrum, and dozens of other fires, explosions, stampedes and building collapses – a bloody trail of hundreds of dead workers, and thousands of injured, that winds through the garment industry.)

We get to the burnt-out Tazreen building a little before sunset. Chickens roam around. There are vegetable gardens of the people who live around the building. School kids with knapsacks practise their English: “What is your name?” followed by “Thank you.” Bangladesh, when not taken over for industry, is a fertile garden – and plenty of people call this part of it home. Some are former workers from the factory, or their relatives. Two years after the fire, they are still waiting near the site in case there is an offer of justice or compensation. They know that, if they go back to the village where they moved from, no one will track them down.

A local woman starts telling the story. Masum translates.

The fatal fire was deliberately lit, the woman says. It started on the first floor and took a while to spread. So there should have been plenty of time for workers to get out. But some of the supervisors told the workers not to worry at the fire alarm. “It was only a test”, workers were told. When they finally tried to leave, one stairwell was blocked by flames. Another was locked shut. Bars on most windows meant that workers could not escape. Many ended up on the roof, nine stories up. Some jumped, preferring to leave a corpse their family could bury, rather than a charred mess that no one could identify.

The woman explains that the night before the fire started, a large order was completed for Walmart. The owner, Delwar Hossein, got paid for that. The day after the fire was meant to be pay day, so Delwar Hossein saved on the monthly salary.

Officially, the death toll at Tazreen is 112. But there are many more.

Masum explains that Delwar Hossein owns the Tuba group of companies. Many of the survivors of Tazreen went on to work in various Tuba factories. Some were involved in the desperate, high profile industrial dispute that erupted at Tuba in mid 2014.

During this dispute, some former Tazreen workers quietly told Masum that they had seen bodies being shoved into the building’s septic tank after the fire.

After the dispute, Masum looked in Tazreen’s septic tank. He saw five skulls.

That’s why Masum knew to look in the Rana Plaza septic tank. The find wasn’t some random occurrence; it’s a regular practice.

We’ve heard often enough of the “race to the bottom”. Each country’s population is told that we have to accept lower wages, worse conditions and less regulation in order to compete. The ruling class of Bangladesh sees its advantage as being the bottom of this “race”: the place where the world’s lowest paid manufacturing workers can be ruthlessly exploited, murdered wholesale, and have their remains literally shovelled into the shit.

That pit where workers’ bodies were thrown is the end point of this “race” that no worker can win.

I felt sick. I still feel sick.

The criminals

The biggest criminals are the ones who count the biggest profits with cleanest hands. They are far from Rana Plaza.

Shortly after the collapse, clothes designer Sujeet Sennik was called into

a meeting in Walmart Canada's corporate headquarters. He and others were informed that Walmart had used factories in Rana Plaza. Sujeet described the scene to The Fifth Estate, an investigative journalism program: "One thousand people died; no one said a thing. They didn't, they didn't say anything about them, they just talked about their, the loss in terms of units, how are they going to make up their margins?"

A thousand dead, business as usual.

So normal and so obscene.

A long time ago, Bertolt Brecht summed up the ethos of capitalism in one line: "I do not know what man is: I only know his price."

Organising

To organise against this is no small thing. You're up against the laws of motion of capital, against its owners and their thugs and their members of parliament, against their laws, their cops, their army, and the union leaders they buy and sell.

Officially, around 2 percent of 4 million garment workers in Bangladesh are unionised. Everyone agrees that many of these unions are actually formed by bosses to stop their workers from organising.

A stable, legal union with any teeth is almost unheard of in the garment industry. So struggle takes other forms - some barely visible to those not directly involved, some spectacular enough to demand the attention of the whole world.

We hear stories of workers standing up on behalf of each other, resisting the daily assaults on their humanity. I've heard of the gherao before, a tactic of surrounding (for instance) a harassing or bullying supervisor. In Bangladesh I learn that, many times in a year, garment industry bosses find themselves blockaded in their own house by crowds of workers and supporters, allowed out only to attend negotiations. We meet some worker militants, women organisers, who had lost track of how many factories they had worked in, sometimes getting the

sack, but always leaving behind an organising committee.

Sometimes, workers walk out on strike. They might occupy the nearest highway, and call out workers in nearby factories. At least three times in the last ten years, this sort of uprising has shut down large sections of the industry - and the country. Colossal strikes and demonstrations in 2006 won a series of reforms, especially more widespread adherence to legal minimums on pay, hours, maternity leave, a day off per week, medical facilities, and issuing identity cards to workers.

Another uprising occurred in 2008, demanding the enforcement of a wage structure agreed out of the 2006 rebellion. According to the human rights group Odhikar, "What started out to be an isolated dispute between the management and workers of a single garment factory, spread out like wild fire across hundreds of factories. As a result of this massive outburst, nearly 300 factories, including 21 factories in the Savar Export Processing Zone, were damaged or partially damaged. Total loss for the garment industry was around \$70 million."

An explosion of protest immediately after the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, and a further uprising later in the year, forced the government to grant a 77 percent minimum wage increase. Some recent surveys indicate that Bangladesh workers are no longer the lowest paid manufacturing workforce in the world.

The elite have reacted with fury. On the job, production rates are pushed to extreme levels until bodies break, as bosses compete for the business of the global brands. Many workers remark that their pay rise has been gobbled up by increases in rent and food prices.

Left unions and left wing activists, inspired by long traditions of struggle and resistance in Bengal and Bangladesh, play a crucial role in these struggles. More than once during our visit, garment worker militants explained that the struggles of the garment worker are the front line of the struggle of the entire

working class for its liberation.

From Dhaka to Melbourne

The products of the garment worker's labour are everywhere. Knowledge of their conditions of work, and support for their struggles, should be just as widespread - not for the sake of kindness, but out of a sense of solidarity. If the workers at the bottom of the "race to the bottom" win better conditions, that takes a little of the competitive pressure off all of us.

From Dhaka to Melbourne, the workers who produce the wealth are denied control over that wealth, and are used up and spat out as we produce it. Working class communities that supply Melbourne's electricity get poisoned wholesale. Warehouse workers speed-ups up until bodies break. A construction tycoon such as Daniel Grollo admits that his company kills three people by negligence and gets a fine of \$250,000 - while a union that shuts down a dangerous building site gets fined well over \$1 million.

Whether in Dhaka or Melbourne, the real crime, at least in the eyes of the elite, and the law, isn't killing people - its disrupting capitalist production.

A monument to resistance

There's a monument at the site of Rana Plaza: a giant hammer and sickle embedded in a solid concrete block. Half a dozen socialist groups worked to build it, and to rebuild it after the authorities demolished it. The monument serves as a memorial and as a rallying point.

After we walk around the site filled with rubble, labels and human remains, I ask Masum to translate the plaque on the monument. He reads aloud:

"A monument of resistance, the Martyr's Tomb. In the history of the Bangladeshi garment industry, there has never been such a horrifying murder of labourers as occurred in

Rana Plaza. On 23 April, the workplace was declared unsafe and to be abandoned. Yet, on 24 April, the building's profiteering landlord and greedy owner forced the workers back into the factory with physical violence and the threat of the sack. When the building ultimately collapsed, ordinary people desperately intervened, saving a few."

As Masum continues reading, a small

crowd gathers to hear his impromptu speech: "On 29 April, government authorities forced out rescue volunteers from the Rana Plaza compound, and the army took over the rescue operations.

"In a fashion typical of the government, they claim to have removed 1,100 corpses and 2,308 people were rescued alive. But ordinary people and workers suggest

that the death toll is much higher. In protest of the murder of labourers and to show the unity of the workers, we have erected this martyr's tomb."

The government has removed previous monuments, I remark. What if they come again to remove this one?

"Don't worry", Masum smiles. "The foundations are deep."

[Red Flag](#)

Fortress Europe and a Mediterranean Cemetery for Migrants

24 April 2015, by [Cinzia Arruzza](#)

In face of between 700 and 900 deaths, it is difficult to write a series of numbers and data, when anger, sadness, and shame would seem to be a more appropriate response. Yet, the risk of a merely emotional response is that, after a while, these continuous reports about people starved to death, frozen, or drowned on these miserable boats, trying to reach a far off dream of safety and well-being, will end up anaesthetizing us all, to the point that these deaths will become part of our everyday normality. To avoid ending up feeling nothing, then, it is necessary to understand. And the first thing we should understand is that the migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East, running away from wars and extreme poverty, die in the Mediterranean Sea of hunger, thirst, hypothermia, violence, and shipwrecks, but most importantly, they die of the European Union.

The number of deaths has seen a decisive increase starting from 2003, reaching a peak in 2011: more than 2500 in a single year, to be contrasted with the less than 500 a year between 1993 and 2001. This significant increase is not fortuitous. It is rather the outcome of specific policies implemented by the European Union for the control of immigration. This process started in 2002, when the

European Council of Seville began the process of joint management of migration flows. But the decisive steps arrived in 2004, when exiles' camps were created outside Europe, European governments reached the first agreements about asylum with Libya, and the European Council created Frontex, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, which became operational in October 2005.

Among its various tasks, Frontex is responsible for the coordination of operational border security cooperation among EU States, for assisting the training of border guards, and for operationally and technically assisting EU States in moments of increase of migration flows. Bilateral agreements among EU and non-EU States, for example between Mauritania, Senegal and Spain or between Italy and Libya, have not only allowed Frontex to operate directly within the territory of non-EU States, but also those very non-EU States to participate in the various operations for the patrolling of the Mediterranean Sea. It is important to notice that the participation of non-EU states in these bilateral agreements and in the operations of control, repression, and discipline of

migration flows have been implicitly bought through import-export contracts or joint ventures offered to them by EU States. In spite of the European institutions' and mainstream media's efforts to present Frontex as an agency that has as one of the main goals the rescue of migrants who try to cross European borders in dangerous circumstances, as a matter of fact Frontex is nothing but the military *longa manus* of the European Union for patrolling borders, managing camps outside EU borders, and, to put it simply, keep migrants away from Europe or regulate migration flows according to the interests of European labor markets. As a report by Human Rights Watch stresses:

Although Frontex has insisted it is less 'actor' than 'coordinator,' it has quickly developed into a powerful actor that plays a key role in enforcing EU immigration policy. The Frontex budget has grown exponentially in recent years, reflecting this development. From a €6.2 million in 2004 (just under US\$9 million), Frontex's budget grew to more than a €88 million (or over US\$120 million) in 2010.

Many of Frontex's joint maritime operations have as their aim

preventing boats with migrants to reach the European borders. This not only prevents asylum seekers from having access to procedural rights that apply in EU territory, but also greatly increases the probability of shipwrecks.

Moreover, not only are there no clear mechanisms for investigating the

violation of human rights in joint operations or areas of operation in which Frontex is present, but in some cases Frontex directly participated in activities that were clearly violating basic human rights, for example by cooperating with national authorities in transferring migrants to and detaining migrants in detention facilities in conditions that violate international human rights standards.

The enormous increase in shipwrecks and migrants' deaths in the Mediterranean Sea in the last years is directly related to the implementation of European immigration policies through Frontex. These deaths are no accidents. They are a mass murder.

From the blog [Public Seminar](#).

Against Daesh and Al-Assad: Urgent call for international solidarity with the Syrian and Kurdish populations

23 April 2015, by LCR-SAP secretariat

The result of the last attack by the Islamic State (DAESH) death squads on 30 and 31 March against the village of Maboujah, in the eastern suburbs of Salamieh in Hama, was about fifty deaths including women and children and dozens of casualties.

The terrorist groups attacked the small village from several places and targeted the ordinary citizens. They executed several people on the spot, some of whom were beaten or burnt to death, before plundering dozens of dwellings, and setting fire to several others. They then carried off several women with them.

The populations of the rebellious cities and villages are still living under the threat of the incursions of the terrorist groups or the regime's indiscriminate bombardments on residential districts. These days they fear that the scenario of Maboujah will be reproduced in Salamieh. Already during the last month of March the terrorist groups attacked the locality of al-Qanafez in the suburbs of Salamieh; this attack resulted in several dead and wounded.

After four years of the Syrian revolution, 215,518 deaths are recorded of which one third are civilians, including more than 10,000

children. There are more than 3 million refugees and almost a third of the total population (that is to say more than 6.5 million people) has been displaced in its own country. The Syrian refugees are surviving under very precarious conditions and in conditions of great need. Those who succeed in reaching the continent of Europe are confronted with enormous obstacles to obtaining asylum and protection when they are not forced to return, and their situation in neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Egypt...) is no better.

The international powers and their allies in the area scandalously are engaged alongside the dictatorial regime of Al Assad, or in the best of the cases are seeking a "political solution" of which Assad and his regime would be part, at the same time their weapons are arriving easily between the hands of the various terrorist groups which they intend to fight! These last weeks, as everybody knows, the imperialist powers and their allies in the areas are more concerned about the situation in Yemen and "rise to power" of the houthis than about the expansion of DAESH which is taking under its control whole areas of the Syrian and Iraqi territories, reducing thousands

of people to slavery, especially of women, and threatens to cut the throat of other populations.

Following the terrible massacre in the village of Maboujah, revolutionary militants and activists of the suburbs and the town of Salamieh who fear for their security and that of their families launched an appeal to all the progressive forces that they should affirm their solidarity and their support for the Syrian people and their just aspirations

More than ever, the revolutionary and progressive activists and organizations and the people of the whole world must affirm their solidarity with the fight and the resistance of the Syrian popular masses who have stood up for dignity, freedom and social justice. Only international solidarity can help to restart the revolutionary process.

We invite you to build this solidarity in order to consolidate the fight against the dictatorial regime of Al-Assad and his allies in the area and elsewhere, and against the obscurantist Jihadists groups until they are dismantled.

Down with the dictatorial regime!

Down with the terrorist Jihadist groups, enemies of popular emancipation.!

Yes to all forms of assistance for the self-organization and self-defence of the Syrian popular masses!

Yes all forms of assistance and solidarity for the revival of the revolutionary process!

Live international solidarity!

“””””””””””

The purpose of "Association Solidarité Syrie" (a registered association in France) is to aid the Current of the Revolutionary Left.

The association's account:
SOLIDARITE SYRIE
LIEU DIT LA VOLINIERE
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Mindanao, the peace process and the Mamasapano incident: the murder of peoples' democratic rights - Part 1

23 April 2015, by Mark Loyola

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13 March 2015

The said mission of the SAF/PNP troopers was known to the Commander-In-Chief President Aquino and the suspended PNP Director General Allan Purisima but unknown until morning of 25th January to PNP OIC Director General Leonardo Espina, Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Mar Roxas and even to the Anti-Terrorism Council Chair - Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa and member Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Voltaire Gazmin and according to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, they were not also informed on the said mission. Together with PNoy and Purisima are the US agents who knew and directly involved in the whole operation.

Forty days have passed and the families of the 44 slain SAF troopers, 18 BIAF combatants, not less than 5 civilians and the whole country were still mourning and asking for answers to the questions, why such avoidable tragic incident happened, who must be held accountable to bring justice to the victims.

In his two-time appearance to the

national television, President Aquino continued to blame General Napenas, the relieved SAF Head of not following his orders to coordinate other law enforcing institutions on the ground and even to the GPH-MILF Ceasefire Mechanisms. To add to his statements is his cover-ups on the involvement of the suspended close friend PNP Director General Allan Purisima whom General Getulio Napenas was directly receiving orders (even Purisima is already suspended) and to whom the President himself is getting updates and briefings on the OPLAN Exodus to get Marwan and Usman.

It is now known to the general public that: Mr President has known the mission from square one including the details; Mr President allowed suspended Director General Allan Purisima to take charge of the OPLAN Exodus but he continued to save Purisima's face; Mr President has known the Mamasapano encounter as early as 5 o'clock in the morning; Mr President knew the participation of the US in the said mission; Mr President knew that for a long period terrorists like Marwana and Usman are living in comfort in the claimed territory of the MILF; Mr President did not make action to mobilize the confused Armed Forces

of the Philippines to at least intervene and save the lives or minimized the loss of lives of combatants from both sides and civilians since he is the Commander-In-Chief; and Mr President knew importantly, the mission would affect the peace process between the GPH and MILF.

Now, the Draft Bangsamoro Basic Law's passage in the Senate and Lower House of Philippine Legislature is at stake because of the said incident.

While the country has focused its attention to the investigations and the cry for justice and the opposing calls for all-out war and all-out peace, one thing has been missed here - the Democratic Rights of the Peoples to peaceful and sound environment, to free participation in all decision-making and in future defining undertakings, to be consulted and be engaged, cultures and rights shall be respected and recognized, to live and to life.

Finger Pointing

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front and its mouth pieces in the government peace panels and civil society

organizations blamed the SAF/PNP of non-coordination and non-recognition of the Ceasefire Mechanisms of the Peace Process; the PNP blamed the AFP of non-reinforcement as they are just near to the clash site and have been informed thru mobile cellular phones; the PNP also raised to the MILF's misencounter stand of the incident that has taken almost thirteen hours dawn to dusk fire fights; grand standing politicians blamed PNoy and GPH Peace Panels of surrendering to the MILF's side; and PNoy blamed again and again the relieved SAF/PNP Chief Napenas.

As of 9th of March 2015, more than 72, 585 (and rising) individuals have been displaced from eleven (11) municipalities of Maguindanao province after the Armed Forces of the Philippines declared all out war against the BIFF as its retaliation to the BIFF's participation of the Mamasapano carnage. According to reports, it takes 2 Million Pesos a day to answer the IDPs' needs.

It must be accepted (not yet realized as of this writing) by the GPH and MILF sides that for more than 17 years of negotiations and signing of the Ceasefire agreement and the establishment of the instruments and mechanisms they failed to bring such mechanisms fully to the rank and file (by heart) and to the local government bodies and communities. Given that SAF/PNP failed to coordinate, why MILF local commanders were not able to hold their men and stop the fighting at least within the longest time of is two or three hours? And if and only if, the local community leaders and the whole communities were engaged and involved in these mechanisms or at least the latter has been known to them and therefore they can intervene to prevent and avoid the incident.

How about the civilians who died and were displaced? To whom shall they claim justice? Of course basic is from the Philippine government, but take note MILF also has participation to this chaos and these are their communities. The following are initially the identified failures:

1. The full participation of the civilian population to the ceasefire mechanism at the ground level. Meaning, the

ceasefire mechanisms remained at the top; 2. MILF leadership has no full control over their local base commanders; 3. MILF and GPH failed to bring the whole peace process to the communities and failed to involve the mass populations and stakeholders of peace; 4. The government failed to make its anti-terrorism campaign understandable and meaningful to the lives of civilians; 5. The absence of real social, economic and political services to these communities making terrorists with resources and connections maximized the sufferings of the peoples by providing what are non-existence; and 6. The unlimited US intervention in the anti-terrorism campaign of the country.

Now, who's to blame? It is the over-all framework of the peace talks being heavy top-level making the mass population as cheerers at the sidelines and evacuees and the assumption that the parties (GPH and MILF) fully represents the whole stakeholders (which is not).

Rise of the New and Collaborationist Elites

What Peace are we building? Is Bangsamoro and Bangsamoro Basic Law synonymous to Peace? No, it is not.

Though it must be recognized the role of the peaceful negotiations between GPH and MILF to bring the national struggle of the Moro people to the national and international attention and recognition, it should not be forgotten that the main reason of the negotiation is to bring difference to the lives of the common Moro people from their current situation of politically isolated, economically deprived and socially marginalized.

This means the betterment of the lives of the broadest section of the Moro people.

Both GPH and MILF must have to offer and mutually agree on concrete, viable and sustainable programs as to what and how would be the common Moro people benefit before and after the establishment of the new Moro political entity. The case is only to open the Moro territory and vast natural and human resources

(including those of Indigenous Peoples') to the salivating mouths of multi-lateral institutions like the World Bank, multi-national corporations like the plantations, foreign and local capitalists. If this is what has become of the MILF political objective, then it simply lost its meaning.

The Philippine government has to deliver its task in the international community through opening Mindanao to the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippine - East Asian Growth Agreement (BIMP-EAGA) regional integration, and the peace process closure is a requirement to this project. The peace negotiation has provided enough time for the investors and countries of interests to the natural wealth of the Moro and Indigenous Peoples territory inside the proposed Bangsamoro (ARMM right now) to position themselves and established lines to the MILF commanders and local economic and political elites for possible partnerships with or without the Bangsamoro establishment.

To make a brief review, the assertion of the Right to Self-Determination of the Moro People started in the 1900s or earlier is to gain back the full control of its economic, political, cultural and social life and future. Politically, the feudal Sultanate and Datuism would be replaced by an electoralist and bureaucratic democracy of the elite politicians in the proposed Bangsamoro. The common Moro will remain to be a voter and beggar of services from the powerful clans and old collaborationist and new elites. The common Moro people will continue to be isolated, marginalized and deprived.

Who would later enjoy the fruits? For sure it would not be the basic masses of the Moro.common Moro. It is the traditional politicians who have been already in direct contact with the investors and have full control over some territories inside the proposed Bangsamoro; It is the brave armed MILF commanders that have opportunities to met multi-national corporations' representatives offering capital for the vast land where they he and his armed men have full control and influence; It is the Philippine and Bangsamoro government which have

opened up the vast human and natural resources of Mindanao and the Bangsamoro to foreign and local capitalists.

The incumbent politicians of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) have tried to prove to be different from the past administrations. But it was just for a show. The 2011 Regional election postponement was supposed to be to establish necessary reforms in preparation for the 2013 - 2016 administration and for the setting and establishing the Bangsamoro government. At first it was popular since it was also the project of the popular PNoy (because of his parents). There were investigations of ghost employees and corruptions in the ARMM agencies as exposed by Mujiv Hataman (the anointed one of Malacanang), but until today no one was held accountable and reports of corruption and ghost employees and projects have continued.

Right now, politicians are again in the front seat of the promotion and support to the peace process and the Bangsamoro government's establishment. It is only logical for them to stay in their control and influence using the nod and support from the National leadership of the country. By the establishment of the new Bangsamoro political entity, they remain in power and in full control. Not much difference.

For the peace process to go on, these supports from the elite are necessary but unnecessary to the lives of the common Moro who offered their children, husbands, brothers, wives, sisters and relatives to the struggle for self-determination. And Self-Determination does not only mean political but also economic and socio-cultural gains for the mass stakeholders of the struggle.

It is also notable in this process, that there is the mushrooming of Non-Government Organizations (NGO) among Moro tribes and professionals. In fact, if we are to roam around Cotabato City and Lanao del Sur we can certainly find many NGO offices led by the intellectuals of the Moro people. They are those articulate and well-trained to develop concepts and

proposals for the foreign funding institutions that are also from the countries of huge interests over the proposed territory. These NGOs are the ones to mobilize the masses of the Moro people in public gatherings to pressure GPH and MILF to talk and talk and be true to the agreements signed which is good enough. But we cannot hear NGO organizing the masses of the Moro people to be politically empowered in order to be heard and participate fully in the discourse of the future building of social and political infrastructures. We have heard sectoral representations in public gatherings but they are only showcases and even the MILF has no strong organizational structures on the ground level. And later on, as the new political entity to be established, these intellectuals will sit in line agencies of the entity to implement and defend the interest of its government - government of the new and old Moro elites.

Why mention these? It is always necessary to look back, why there were revolutions and assertions. It is for the Moro people and not for the intellectuals, politicians and Moro Revolutionary Fronts only, again for the Moro people. And Peace Talks and peace building efforts must be in this frame.

It should also be remembered that a historical injustice cannot be corrected by making another injustice.

Imposed Inclusive Peace Can Never be Peace at All

Sections and tribes of the Moro people have been actively participating in the peace process and among other democratic venues same as to the Indigenous Peoples airing their sentiments and assertions of democratic rights to ancestral domains, sectoral representations, participation in the peace discourse among others since the beginning of the GPH-MILF talks.

Particularly for the Indigenous Peoples, learning the lessons from the Government of the Republic of the

Philippines (GRP)-Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Final Peace Agreement (FPA) giving their ancestral domains to former MNLF/BAF combatants to enter into logging and commercial concessions without them being asked or consulted. They want to make it clear enough right now in the GPH-MILF Agreements that their ancestral domains and cultural integrity shall not be compromised.

While it is true that in the Draft Bangsamoro Basic Law that there are provisions on their justice system, traditional governance and others but without their ancestral domain, where are they going to make meaningful practice of their justice and governance systems without a territory?

Even the Draft Bangsamoro Basic Law is still under debate, investors thru local politicians and local base commanders have been surveying lands for plantations and conducted soil samplings for possible mining projects inside the ancestral domains of the Indigenous Peoples earlier or post-Bangsamoro establishment. Community reports that investors were either escorted by local police, Philippine military, MILF's BIAF and or private armies of local politicians.

Worst here is the imposition of both GPH and MILF that all inhabitants in the proposed Bangsamoro territory shall be called Bangsamoro including the territories where they have not been consulted the Indigenous Peoples if they do agree and other people like the Christian population. The government of the Philippines through its Peace Panel and the Office of the President failed to protect the right of its people in the negotiating table. The MILF has to continue to refuse and to acknowledge the history prior to the Sultanate system.

The Murder of Peoples Democratic Rights

By continuously catering to the interest of the foreign powers sacrificing the interest of the mass

population, PNoy and the whole peace process will then be held accountable to the Mamasapano bloody incident and this includes the MILF. It is clear enough that prior to 2008 MOA-AD conflict up to the Mamasapano incident, foreign fundamental Islamists and the likes of terrorists Marwan and Usman have been on the comfort zones inside MILF claimed territory and even inside their camps training the BIAF and among other exchanges of technology and resources. While this is true, the Government must have already known this reality but never raised the point in the negotiating table to make it later if it is outmaneuvered as justification in the negotiation as an escape goat - a reason for the collapse blaming the MILF and now the BIFF.

Also true is the huge interests of foreign and local capitalists over the vast rich natural and human resources of the Moro and Indigenous Peoples domains. They are hungry vultures investing their resources funding the peace negotiation and community building as their entry points - wise enough (of course!). This is not after the establishment of the Bangsamoro but even prior to its creation by tapping the MILF commanders and local political clans and elites.

The Mamasapano incident, the Marwan killing and the continuing pursuit for Basit Usman and the other so-called terrorists have been used to delay the process or for some dictionary "sabotage" the process. Both MILF and GPH are to enjoy this situation since, they can continue to enjoy immunities and the pouring of supports since both are projecting as if they wanted peaceful means of solving the Moro problem.

But PNoy's continuous evasion to tell the whole truth about his knowledge and participation in the OPLAN Exodus, the BBL might suffer big difficulties in Congress. Well, the 2016 election campaign fund (Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) and Discretionary Funds -Pork-) will somehow assure BBL's passage but not as what have been written by the MILF led Bangsamoro Transition Commission. And then, the question of acceptability on the MILF's side is the problem here.

Bring those involve and have contributed to Mamasapano carnage before the bar of Justice fairly and squarely including the President himself if found accountable.

While the whole country is in anger

and in opposing ends of the Mindanao complex question, there are also various questions that might be left out and flooded by the incident. Justice must be served to all victims and we have to bring into the surface the issues like the Maguindanao Massacre, continued assaults and killings of journalists, privatization of social services, neglect to agriculture and environment, casualisation and informalization of labor, corruption, migrant workers situation, unemployment, rise of massive hunger and poverty situation, foreign interventions among others.

So?

Do not use the Moro masses as a mere audience and recipient and so as the Indigenous Peoples and Christian civilians. Get them involved essentially and value their participation from the top to bottom and vice versa.

Let us stand with the Moro people in their aspiration to achieve the real essence of Right to Self-Determination without compromising the democratic rights and welfare of the Moro masses and other peoples in the region.

March 12, 2015

Rights to Water and Land, a Common Struggle Movements

21 April 2015

To date, more than 200 million hectares of land have been grabbed globally by private firms, governments, elites and speculators, often with the support of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the G8 and other institutions and consortiums. The minority's appropriation of our Commons leads to concentration, forced evictions and the oppression of peoples. This is implemented in the name of environmental protection, the prevention of climate change, the

production of "clean" energy, mega-infrastructure projects and/or so-called development, often promoted by Public-Private partnerships, such as the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa. Entire areas and territories are thus dispossessed and local populations evicted, while the loss of identity and ecosystems makes life impossible! Communities whose rights and dignity have been abused find themselves with broken up families, or obliged to become refugees, forced to migrate, lose their

rights, and are impoverished and starving. It is estimated that 3,000 persons die each day due to lack of water. The access to and management of spaces of community life are destroyed by military and armed groups that perpetuate war and occupation, criminal State authorities, supported by economic, financial and political elites. This undermines local food systems and many local producers who feed the majority of the world's population. When people resist they are criminalized, jailed and killed.

The huge profits of elites are thus built on the systematic violation of human rights of the majority of peasant farmers, informal settlement and slum dwellers, fisher folk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and communities, nomads, rural and urban workers and consumers, especially youth and women, who are dispossessed of their land and livelihoods through violence, intimidation and torture. Land grabbing always goes hand-in-hand with water grabbing, and takes different forms: cases of unsustainable water-consuming farming, through the privatization and management of water utilities (stealing this vital resource from those who are unable to pay for it), contamination of aquifers caused by unregulated mining, the change of river courses and waterways through the construction of dams and the resulting eviction of communities, the militarization of access to water points, the dispossession of pastoralists and fisher communities of their livelihoods through practices such as coastal sand mining.

The criminalization of activists fighting for the protection of the Commons has become widespread, albeit hidden by the authorities. Land and water resources are increasingly scarce, and therefore critical to the security of societies and the sovereignty of States. However, the scarcity underpinning the water, land and food crises is not a given; it is a political, geo-strategic and financial construct.

In response to these threats to our lives and wellbeing, we are fighting back, asserting our rights and providing real solutions. We believe that peoples' access to and control of land and water is essential to peace, to stopping climate change, as well as to fulfilling fundamental human rights and guaranteeing a dignified life for all. Equal distribution of land and water, and gender equality are central to our vision of food sovereignty, based on agroecology (as outlined in the Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology in Nyéléni, in February 2015), local food systems, biodiversity, control of our seeds, and respect for natural water cycles. This vision applies to rural, urban and peri-

urban populations and includes respectful producer - consumer relationships of mutual solidarity and cooperation.

Our solidarity, grounded in our commitment as activists, is built upon the following principles and convictions that unify our struggles:

1. That the human rights to water, food and land are fundamental, and crucial for life. All people, men, women, adults, children, rich, poor, rural and urban dwellers, are entitled to them.

2. That water and land are not only vital natural resources, but are also part of our common heritage, whose security and governance must be preserved by each community for the common good of our societies and the environment, now and for future generations.

3. Water, land and seeds are Commons, and not commodities.

4. We recognize that States are legally and constitutionally mandated to represent peoples' interests. States are therefore duty-bound to oppose any policy and international treaty that undermines human rights and their own sovereignty, such as Investor-State Dispute Settlement schemes as included in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the majority of investment treaties.

5. Land water management policies should promote the achievement of social justice, gender equality, public health and environmental justice.

5. We take a firm stand against foreign occupation and domination in all forms.

We therefore jointly with civil society organisations from around the world, pledge to:

â€¢ Raise awareness, educate and organize communities in rural and urban areas in order to build a strong and united movement struggling for the recognition and enforcement of our human rights to food, water and land and territories

â€¢ Always defend the right of citizens and communities to free, prior and informed consent and full participation in the governance of natural resources in citizens' legal institutions

â€¢ Build synergies between civil society actors across constituencies struggling against land and water grabbing in order to build national and regional platforms that support the building of an international convergence of land and water struggles

â€¢ Reclaim our lands, waters and seeds; reclaim the legitimate political spaces that we as rights-holders have fought for, such as the Committee on World Food Security and Nutrition; and oppose co-optation of our language in a way that supports false solutions such as "climate smart agriculture"

â€¢ Express our solidarity with and support for human rights defenders and those who resist land and water grabbing, especially when they are criminalized

â€¢ Oppose national policies and international treaties promoting the privatization and commodification of natural resources, as well as land and water grabbing, including prepaid meters, automatic tariff adjustments and the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and ACP countries, for both goods and services

â€¢ Denounce the World Bank's "business" climate ranking and biodiversity offsetting systems, that are drafted solely to support speculation and foster land and water grabbing, while completely neglecting human rights and social and environmental standards.

We call on international governmental organizations, States and Local Authorities to:

â€¢ Recognize the indivisibility of human rights and their international obligations towards their realization, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups, women and youth. They must systematically apply the human rights approach, stop

violations and prevent and prosecute human rights abuses

â€¢ Implement adequate policies of agrarian reform, land reform, genuine land restitution, equitable redistribution and sustainable management of land, water and other natural resources

â€¢ Adopt coherent policies including on development that benefit communities' empowerment rather than economic and geopolitical interests

â€¢ Respect, protect and fulfil the human right to water and sanitation that was recognized and made explicit by the UN General Assembly resolution 69/2010, and adopt the constitutional and legislative regulatory frameworks that guarantee everyone the availability and accessibility of water and sanitation, as well as the effective justiciability of the human right to water

â€¢ Recognize, respect and protect the collective customary rights regulating the access, security and governance of land and water, our Commons, by ensuring women's rights

â€¢ Strictly uphold their obligations not to recognize illegal situations, including and especially prohibited acts by occupying powers, and not to cooperate or transact with any parties that engage in, or benefit from illegal situations

â€¢ Guarantee peoples' free, prior and informed consent and full participation when decisions are made

about the management of land, water, and other natural resources. And not just hear us, but address our demands, including our right to say No to land and water grabbing

â€¢ Implement the International Labour Organization Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

â€¢ Explicitly endorse the promotion of human rights, including the human rights to water, food and land, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN post-2015 Agenda

â€¢ Implement the CFS/FAO Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, and the FAO Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries immediately and with our full participation as rights holders; and enact national laws that make their provisions upholding peoples' rights fully justiciable

â€¢ Support and adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People working in rural areas as currently being developed in the Human Rights Council

Adopt and implement a Binding Treaty to prevent and prosecute crimes committed by transnational corporations and other business enterprises

â€¢ Adopt the relevant measures and instruments of international law, especially in the framework of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of

the United Nations, in order to effectively strengthen the human right to water and sanitation, and to clarify and specify its content and States' obligations, and to prevent any form of water grabbing

We call upon civil society, social movements, grassroots organizations, workers' unions and NGOs of the world to engage in this discussion, to strengthen this declaration and support its claims by all available means. We need to foster the solidarity of our struggles, including the struggle for our rights to the essential resources required for life, we need to make civil society's voice heard in the negotiations towards the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda post-2015, in the application of international and regional guidelines on land and natural resources, and the COP 2015 in order to stop climate change.

As we continue to build this convergence, we recognize and appreciate our diversity, and welcome diverse initiatives that are emerging and which we will debate and discuss. To do this we commit to disseminating this declaration widely. We will take it to our territories and communities in order to involve them further in the process of shaping this Convergence. Water and land: same plight same fight!

Dakar to Tunis: Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles (Tunis, 28 March 2015)

Counterrevolutionaries on the march

20 April 2015, by **Hamid Dabashi**

With the Saudi military airstrike against Yemen, in active cooperation with its US, European, and regional allies, the counterrevolutionary forces mobilised against the aspirations of Arab revolutions are now in full gear and require a quick assessment.

This invasion is the thematic finale of a successful counterrevolutionary mobilisation by a transnational coalition of entrenched forces trying to put an end to Arab revolutions.

Mercenary army

Joining the ranks of reactionary ruling Arab regimes is the mercenary army of Pakistan now put squarely at the service of safeguarding intransigent

potentates.

Pakistan has a long history in such services, against the will of the Pakistani people. According to a recent analysis: "Dating back to the 1960s, Pakistan's experienced military helped train the undermanned and underprepared militaries of a number of fledgling Arab states. The former Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq once even commanded a unit of troops in Jordan tasked with combating Palestinian fighters."

We may not be able to reverse that reactionary course but we must read and record it accurately. Fresh out of a military coup against a democratically elected government, Generalissimo Abdel Fattah al-Sisi promises to send a military force into Yemen, in support of the Saudi invasion of a sovereign nation-state, you know the nastiest forces of the counterrevolution mean business.

The Saudi military strike against Yemen is symptomatic of the larger frame of counterrevolutionary forces. According to reports, "Saudi Arabia . . . begun military operations in Yemen, launching airstrikes in coordination with a coalition of ten nations. The strikes came as Yemen was hurtling closer to civil war after months of turmoil, as fighters and army units allied with the Houthi movement threatened to overrun the southern port of Aden where the besieged president, Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi, has gone into hiding."

These are not "ten nations" - these are ten ruling regimes that those nations meant to overthrow when they were crying for the whole world to hear: "People Demand the Overthrow of the Regime." Changing the political parlance of our realities is what the counterrevolution seeks to achieve. We must not yield.

A significant minority of Yemenis are Zaydi Shias, manhandled by the Saudis to the point that under the leadership of Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi they were radicalised with the active patronage of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its own regional hegemony.

The Saudis and Iranians are fighting a

proxy war in Yemen for the same strategic and regional advantages that have seen them faceoff in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

But that does not change the historical fact that when millions of Yemenis poured into their streets and launched their revolution an entirely different political vision was at work than the one the Saudis and the ruling regime in Iran now wishes to register and routinise.

The ruling interests in Saudi Arabia and Iran are adversaries in their hegemonic claims over the region, but identical in their mutual intentions to derail Arab revolutions to their advantage. In order to see this, we need to come closer to understanding the Saudi invasion from a larger frame of reference.

The ruling interests in Saudi Arabia and Iran are adversaries in their hegemonic claims over the region.

The Saudi air strikes against Yemen is not the first time the backward potentate flexes its military muscles to dominate the region to its retrograde advantage and change the historic course of Arab revolutions.

Exactly four years ago, in March 2011, soon after the commencement of the Arab revolutions, the Saudis launched yet another military strike against Bahrain (aided and abetted by the British) to quell its revolutionary aspirations.

At that time, everyone saw the military invasion as launched decidedly against the revolutionary aspiration of Bahrainis.

But today, the Saudi-Iranians sectarianism and power mongering has succeeded in putting a different spin on the military strikes. It is imperative that we see the March 2011 invasion of Bahrain and March 2015 invasion of Yemen as indications of one and the same counterrevolutionary momentum.

Proxy war

The Saudi militarism (fully endorsed by its regional, European and US allies) cannot be assessed in isolation.

There are other, equally pernicious, counterrevolutionary forces at work for the last four years that require equal attention, without which the Saudi-generated narrative will dominate the politics of their adventurism and distort the historic course of Arab revolutions in their darkest moments.

Who and what are these counterrevolutionary forces that have come together to frame and occasion the Saudi militarism? We may identify at least four particularly powerful and pestiferous factors.

First and foremost: Arab revolutions have endangered the US imperial domination of the region and all its active and passive allies, ranging from its European and Israeli partners to countries extending from Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey to Sisi's Egypt and beyond.

President Obama and President Erdogan may have paid lip service to the will of the Arab people at the commencement of the revolutions, and the ruling clergy in Iran certainly sought to put an Islamist spin on it.

But all of these interests were simultaneously endangered by the Arab uprisings that were geared to alter the very political DNA of the region, endangering the racist apartheid of Israel with the same measure that released the Kurdish revolutionary aspirations on the model of Kobani.

Israel is integral to this counterrevolutionary syndrome. Netanyahu would not have dared to bomb Gaza and murder more Palestinians in July 2014 were it not for Sisi's military coup in Egypt exactly a year earlier in July 2013. Neither Sisi's coup in Egypt nor Netanyahu's mayhem in Gaza could have happened without US knowledge and approval.

Second and most ferociously come the murderous machinations of the Islamic State group (IS, formerly known as ISIS), al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, etc. These are the most bloodthirsty counterrevolutionary forces throwing a monkey wrench at the civic and entirely non-violent

course of the Arab revolutions.

Each one of these militant bands of thugs and armed robbers has slightly different genealogy. But by far the most potent counterrevolutionary force among them is IS: born out of a number of conflating factors, including the US-led invasion of Iraq and the process of de-Baathification it initiated, Bashar al-Assad's cruel repression of the peaceful Syrian uprising, the Iranian intervention in Iraq and Syria that in conjunction with the Saudi-led resentment injected a militant sectarianism in the region.

And the Israeli intervention to fish in the muddy water that has resulted in stealing more of Palestine and murder more Palestinians. IS is the epitome of counterrevolutionary forces turning the cause and course of counterrevolutionary forces into a "war on terror".

Third: the active rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran for regional domination, which has turned an otherwise entirely non-sectarian, decidedly cosmopolitan revolutionary environment into viciously sectarian hostility.

Here the Iranian domination of the Iraqi, Syrian, and Lebanese scene is much a counterrevolutionary culprit as is the Saudi massive funding of militant thugs to resist an up the ante against the Iranian influence.

The very introduction of Shia-Sunni factors in these revolutions is the direct result of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for regional hegemony, and has absolutely nothing to do with two mutually complementary branches of Islam.

The ludicrous assumption and repeated utterance that Iran is "the leader of the Shia world" and Saudi Arabia "the leader of the Sunni world" categorically distort the reality of our lived experiences.

No one died and made the tyrannical Islamic Republic or the reactionary tribalism of a Saudi family the leader of anything or anybody. A plague on both their ruling houses has been the cry of freedom of Iranians and Arabs from the Green Movement to the Arab

Spring.

Fourth: No tallying of the counterrevolutionary forces actively working and writing against the ideals and aspirations of Arab and Muslim revolutions is complete without the inclusion of a particularly noisy, racist, morally corrupt, and intellectually bankrupt segments of the European and American "left" that from day one has been aggressive in its advocacy of murderous tyrants like Bashar al-Assad or Muammar Qaddafi.

This small gang of irredeemably illiterate and pathologically immoral busybodies with a ludicrous claim of being "left" has no principled investment in these revolutions and has been consistently writing in active support of tyrannical monstrosities like Bashar al-Assad in the guise of an inept, clumsy, and sophomoric reading of imperialism they have regurgitated since their high school years "thus incapable of forming a single sentence with multiple subordinate clauses that opposes imperialism and defies tyranny at one and the same time.

In their illiteracy, incompetence and immorality they are particularly angry at those among the Arab and Muslim left (the real left) that have left them behind in their critical thinking and have nothing for these racists but contempt.

The only good Arab or Muslim for these racist white-supremacist, bastardised "leftists" are the dead Arab and Muslim left "tortured, murdered, and burned alive in the dungeons of their favourite tyrants in Syria and elsewhere.

If an Arab or Muslim who identifies as left has a voice, a vision, a critical imagination that is beyond their pathetic reach and refuses to play second to their broken violin, she or he robs them the wrong way and puts them out of their business.

In their despicable white-supremacist racism they hallucinate that with a mere high school diploma or half-baked college education or through their pathetic monolingual myopia they can teach leading Arab and Muslim thinkers the meaning of imperialism (the sheer obscenity of

the assumption boggles the mind), thinking them infants incapable of charting the course of their own critical thinking and world-historic events.

They are as detestable in their racism as the tyrants they support are in their murderous repressions.

Saudi Arabia has launched this attack on Yemen to throw a monkey wrench at the US nuclear deal with Iran.

Clearing the path ahead

On the surface the current counterrevolutionary mobilisations may be confusing: the US is helping the Saudis in Yemen to fight the Iran-backed Shia Houthis, while in Iraq it helps Iranian-backed Shia fight IS. But it is not.

The ruling interests in the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, et al have a single common interest: to thwart and derail the Arab and Muslim revolutions and drag them into perpetual sectarian infighting.

If we allow for the discourse to be determined by the rapidly changing headlines we will lose sight of the historic moment. The Saudi-Iranian regional rivalry is one nasty piece of a smokescreen blinding the sight. We must see through the charade.

Saudi Arabia has launched this attack on Yemen to throw a monkey wrench at the US nuclear deal with Iran, and in this the retrograde kingdom and its allies are in solid solidarity with Israel.

Consider these critical dates: Netanyahu's speech at the US Congress on 3 March, the letter 47 Republican senators sent to Iran on 9 March, and the Saudi-led airstrike against Yemen on 25 March are all integral to a nasty counterrevolutionary force, not just to torpedo the looming deadline of the US-Iran nuclear deal by 31 March, but far more importantly to change the revolutionary dynamics of the Arab world towards regional conflicts and sectarianism.

The times we are living between the

rise of Arab revolutions in 2010 and today in spring of 2015 is reminiscent of the time Europe experienced between the rise of the Spring of Nations during the revolutions of 1848, when Marx wrote his *The Communist Manifesto* and the rise of the counterrevolutionary tides that culminated in Marx writing *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in 1852.

As early as 1850 Marx had come to the conclusion that the revolutionary momentum had come to an end. "The development of the revolution," as David Fernbach summarises Marx's disposition at this interval in his *Introduction to the Penguin edition of Marx's Political Writings* (1973), "which had earlier seemed a matter of a few years, had now to be counted in decades."

The circumstances of global capitalism and its episodic crisis are vastly different today than it was at Marx's time, as are the treacheries of the counterrevolutionary forces, and therefore perforce must be our very notion of "revolution" and its open-ended possibilities.

The lesson we learn from Marx's visionary assessment of the events before and after the 1848 revolutions in Europe is that he remained steadfast in his determination and commitment to the cause of the revolution.

IS and al-Qaeda gangs roaming in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen and the pro-mass murderers, racist European and US "left" clamouring on the internet come together and bracket counterrevolutionary forces in

the region and beyond.

They share one single mission: to deny and derail the legitimate cause and course of these revolutions.

In between them, the real military forces of the region, ranging from the US and its allies to the sectarian power-mongering of Iran and Saudi Arabia, form an unholy alliance to change the very discourse and dynamics of daily politics in the region.

They succeed to bomb and destroy their ways into the daily headlines. The singular mission of revolutionary thinkers of this time is to dismantle that mission and keep the ideals and aspirations of our democratic future alive.

al-Araby

An election Labour should win hands down

19 April 2015, by Alan Thornett

As parliament is dissolved at midnight tonight and the official campaign is poised to be launched, Labour and the Tories remain more or less neck and neck in the polls. It's still too close to call.

All three main establishment parties are in trouble. Labour and the Tories are stuck at around 33% in the polls and the Lib Dems face wipe out, or near wipe out. Labour has had a 4 point boost in the polls as a result of the first TV debate, but that would still only make them the largest party, and there is no guarantee that this will hold up.

With the polarisation of politics that has taken place under the impact of austerity—the rise of UKIP on the one hand and the Green and SNP surge on the other—their base of support continues to decline.

The result is a breakdown of the old three-party system into a five or six party system—which makes the first-

past-the-post (FPTP) system even more outrageously undemocratic. The number of voters in marginal constituencies where their votes would actually count if they voted for the party they support is minuscule. This has also opened up more space for the smaller socialist left parties to get established. Such parties are hard hit hard by FPTP, of course, though much of the left remains in denial over electoral reform.

The fact is that this is an election that Labour should have won hands down, and still could win—and win outright—if they were prepared to advance a real alternative in the shape of a radical anti-austerity programme aimed at improving the lives of the majority.

They are facing a Tory Party that has failed in all its targets including its principal, much-vaunted objective, which was to abolish the debt by the end of this Parliament. Instead the public debt is still rising by £100m a

year and personal debt has reached a staggering two trillion pounds. Household debt is now 140% of income, higher than either in the Eurozone or the USA.

We have a debt-fuelled recovery that benefits only the rich. The average family is set to be at least £1,600 a year worse off than they were before the start of the Parliament. The gap between rich and poor has widened. Low wages are now endemic and the standard of living continues to fall, despite government spin to the contrary. Zero hours contracts are multiplying, as is self-employment. Welfare is being slashed. The NHS is in crisis.

Young people are trapped between an impossible housing situation, poverty wages, tuition fees and precarious employment. Women have been particularly hard hit and disabled people have been brutally targeted.

Labour are facing a Tory Party that

are not only saying vote for us and we will give you more of the same misery, but that they will cut twice as deep in the next Parliament as they did in the last.

Under such conditions Labour should be way ahead in the polls and heading for a substantial majority. Instead they face the prospect being the largest party at best and with a real danger of losing.

Unfortunately it is not difficult to see why this has come about. Instead of presenting a radical anti-austerity alternative Labour has spent the last 5 years tail-ending the Tories. Their position in the polls has been shaped more by what the Tories have done than anything Labour has done itself.

They collapsed from the outset into the Tory mantra that cuts were inevitable in order to pay off the debt and they have been trapped by this ever since.

As a result of this Ed Balls has repeatedly pledged to continue with austerity if Labour forms a Government. Labour cuts, he argues, would be slower and shallower than the Tories' but they would be cuts just the same. This handed the Tory propaganda machine (which has been vastly superior to Labour's throughout) all they wanted. Every time Labour has challenged them on anything they have been able to say: 'but you would introduce cuts as well'. They backed this up by relentless personal denigration of Miliband himself.

Nor has it been just on cuts that Labour has tail-ended the Tories. They have done so on immigration as well. They collapsed into the Tory anti-immigration agenda and competed with the Tories in a race to the xenophobic bottom.

Labour then compounded all this by self-destructing in Scotland. After standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Tories in the referendum campaign, banging the unionist drum, they are facing near wipe out on May 7. The SNP now have 100,000 members and are heading towards up to 40 seats. Just to make matters worse Labour elected the right wing arch

collaborator with the Tories during the referendum, Jim Murphy, as Labour leader in Scotland.

While there is talk among some on the left of Labour, including within some big affiliated unions such as Unite, of building an alternative after the election such talk is very isolated and lacking in credibility.

Labour also faces a challenge from the Greens. Membership and support for the Green Parties across Britain' the Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW) and the Scottish Green Party (SGP)' has surged dramatically, particularly in the past year. Membership of the GPEW has doubled in the past year and currently stands at 54,500, making it the fourth largest party in Britain' bigger than both the Lib Dems and UKIP. It has also been rising in the opinion polls, topping 10% at one point in advance of the Lib Dems. The rise of the SNP means the SGP have had less room for manoeuvre but the polls indicate that the Party will do very well in the next PR elections for the Scottish Parliament in 2016.

The Greens will also gather a lot of support that we hoped would have gone to Left Unity' people that would be its natural constituency. Although Left Unity is a new party with a very low media profile it is a far more democratic party (i.e. a far better model on which to build). It is also far more consistently anti-cuts and anti-neoliberal and more consistent in its politics and its practice.

Not that this increased support the Greens will be reflected fairly in the general election results, of course. The Greens might out-poll the Lib Dems in total votes but only get a fraction of the seats (even though the Lib Dems will be greatly reduced). Under a democratic voting system GPEW would have had a substantial group in Parliament for some years. A particularly critical issue is to support the re-election of Caroline Lucas, who has been one of the best left MPs in this parliament.

Labour is facing all this when it has been clear from the outset that bold radical programme' aimed at ending

austerity, relieving low pay, lifting people out of poverty, tackling the housing crisis, defending young people, abolishing tuition fees, controlling rents, re-establishing workplace rights, defending the NHS' would ensure a Labour victory. People are crying out for such a programme.

Labour are doing some things to distinguish themselves from the Tories, of course. They are pledged to raise the minimum wage to Â£8.00 by 2020, to repeal the Health and Social Care Act, to raise Â£2.5bn for the NHS from a mansion tax, to repeal the bedroom tax, to freeze energy prices and a ban on zero hour contracts that restrict alternative employment and restore the 50% top tax rate. They also pledged to build 200,000 new houses and do something about climate change.

The problem is that this is far from a radical anti-austerity programme. Most of these proposals are half measures at best. The minimum wage would be Â£7.50 anyway by 2020 and Â£2.5bn is a fraction of what is needed to stabilise the NHS after 5 years of frozen spending under Tory rule. It is good that they have pledged to build 200,000 new houses and tackle climate change. However explanations as to how this is going to happen are largely absent. It is unclear, for example, how many of these houses will be affordable and for private sale.

Labour's policy to reduce student tuition fees to Â£6,000 is a step forward though it is a long way from the return to free education demanded by the left. It does, however, help Labour to relate to young people under conditions where the coalition treats them with complete contempt. Hopefully the Labour manifesto will contain a pledge to lower the voting age to 16.

Fortunately for Labour the Tories have serious problems as well. Osborne's budget on March 18, his last big chance before the election, failed to bring about any shift in the poll, in fact the polls moved marginally in Labour's favour. Lynton Crosby's conviction that the polls will break towards the Tories as the election

approached, is proving as elusive as ever.

The Tory flagship strategy of scapegoating immigrants and whipping up xenophobia has run into problems with the spectacular failure of their pledge to reduce immigration to 'tens of thousands'. Instead net migration last year rose from 210,000 to 298,000—three times higher than the Tory target. Suddenly, after months of raising immigration at every opportunity in order to compete with UKIP the Tories have nothing to say on it they are trying to remove it from the agenda—not that UKIP will allow them to do so.

The Tories argue that the reason for increased migration is because growth in the economy is sucking in migrant labour. Ironically the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) has a very different view (in fact the opposite one) on this. They say that to the extent that there is any growth in the economy it is due to the number of immigrants that have come into the country—more than any other single factor. Certainly more than anything Osborne has done.

The Tories also have a serious problem in terms of the women's vote and an even bigger problem amongst ethnic minorities. They are also polling worse in the key marginals than in the country as a whole. They are also saddled with Cameron's blunder in announcing that he would not stand for a third term—which will keep coming up and leaves him open to the charge of being a lame duck.

On top of all this there is UKIP. The UKIP vote has stalled but it has not collapsed—and could well gain more traction as the official campaign gets off the ground.

UKIP is at root a split in the centre-right, reflecting long-standing divisions in the Tory Party itself. The Tory rightwing always resented Cameron's (now abandoned) Tory Party reform agenda from gay marriage to 'green-wash' and to what they have seen as his weak and vacillating Euroscepticism.

The Tory right resented the removal of the climate denier (and arch

Eurosceptic) Owen Patterson as environment secretary in the summer reshuffle. They are strongly attracted by UKIP's core racist, anti-immigration, and anti-EU message. And Cameron has no answer to this. Each time he panders to the racist agenda he is outflanked by UKIP—and Labour is no better.

UKIP's rise has been made possible by a significant shift to the right in the whole political spectrum in the last five years and also by a compliant media—which has endlessly done their bidding and has given Farage the status of a mainstream politician. UKIP has been allowed to make racism appear respectable.

How many seats UKIP will win in Parliament, however, given FPTP, is another matter. They will be lucky to get five or six. This does not mean, however, that they won't become an important player in the event of the Tories being the biggest single party but short of an overall majority. A Tory/UKIP coalition, maybe with the DUP, is the nightmare prospect of the election—and the Tories have refused to rule it out. The DUP have said they would support a Tory government for a billion pounds into the North of Ireland economy.

The other side of this—as the Tories complain about at every opportunity having fought for Scotland to stay in the union—is that the SNP are set to be a major player in the new Parliament and could well be in a strong position either to keep a minority Labour government or indeed (as Alec Salmond has indicated) destabilise or bring down a minority Tory government. The SNP has been talking in terms of a "progressive alliance" in parliament with the Greens in England and with Plaid Cymru in Wales.

A Labour government reliant for its survival on the SNP is the nightmare for the right as well as for Labour. The SNP is well to the left of Labour even though it is an establishment party. It is talking of anti-austerity and demanding an end to the Trident programme. This is a prospect that the left in Britain should relish since it would open up politics in England and create new opportunities. It might

even bring into politics in England some of the radicalism and enthusiasm that was so inspiring in the referendum campaign.

As far as Socialist Resistance is concerned our most important task in the general election and the council elections in May is to support and promote Left Unity candidates, including those who are joint with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), wherever this is possible. Given that such candidates will be limited in number at this stage, however, we will decide our voting priorities constituency by constituency.

Our aim will be to maximise the left vote, particularly around candidates who oppose the cuts, the war, privatisation and other anti-working class measures. We will therefore vote for credible socialist, left green, radical left, anti-cuts/defend the NHS particularly National Health Action Party (NHAP) candidates and for particular left Labour candidates. We will vote for credible TUSC and/or Respect candidates unless there is a better placed/politically superior left/left green alternative candidate available. Unfortunately, the attempt by TUSC and others to stand without regard to a realistic assessment of forces on the ground means that some left candidates will lack credibility.

Where there is no opportunity to support a credible left candidate as described above, Socialist Resistance will call for a critical vote for Labour in order to oppose the Tories and UKIP and stand with the millions of working class people wanting to stop them. In Scotland our first preference will be the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) where they are standing and in Wales we will generally vote Plaid Cymru against New Labour candidates.

A hung parliament where no party holds overall control is still a highly likely outcome. Left Unity needs to build on its currently modest efforts to support resistance against the austerity assault of whatever government or coalition emerges, and prepare for battles ahead, including the forthcoming elections in 2016 and the possibility of any further general

election in the near future.

One of the reasons why Syriza in Greece was able to grow from less than 4% to over 35% of the polls in

just over 5 years was because as well as building struggles on the ground it also focused on the need for a solution to the political and economic crisis at

governmental level. The British left would be wise to learn from that lesson.

30 March 2015

A New Era - The normalization of U.S.-Cuba political relations

19 April 2015, by **Janette Habel**

This doesn't mean that the revolution was a walk in the park. The Cuban people greatly suffered for decades. They paid a heavy price for the Island's isolation, the North American military and economic embargo, and the policies of the Soviet Union. On top of the economic situation were political constraints and the authoritarian style of Fidel Castro—*itself a product of being a besieged fortress.*

The normalization of U.S.-Cuba political relations was possible due to the changed geopolitical situation. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of Latin American dictatorships, the emergence of popular regimes brought to power by mass mobilizations, and the relative decline of U.S. hegemony in its own backyard made Cuba's reintegration into the region possible. Two other factors also helped make the reestablishment of relations possible: first, Obama is now a lame duck; and second, today's Cuban diaspora is less aggressive and more open to dialogue with Havana.

Uneven Pace of Change

Many sectors of the population will not immediately feel these changes due to the continuation of the economic and commercial embargo. It will take an act by the majority of the U.S. Congress to abolish it, but Republicans would be opposed. Yet they are not a homogenous block. The big multinational agro-business

corporations favor the lifting of the embargo. On the other hand, a minority of the Democrats oppose lifting the embargo.

Obama has some room to maneuver. He could make some changes on his own, such as lessening travel restrictions between the two countries. The amount of money permitted to be sent from the United States will be increased; tourists will be able to spend more and use credit cards. Financial reforms will be made in order to stimulate more imports. Travel laws and the issuing of visas are already being discussed. Let's not forget that cooperation between the U.S. military and the Cuban coast guard around Guantanamo Bay and drug trafficking has been going on for some time. But the focus of U.S. policy has been to help the private sector, especially small entrepreneurs, and to open up the Cuban internet which has so far been tightly controlled. For the White House, it's all about "putting pressure on the Castro regime" in order to support the economic reforms begun by Raul Castro.

The Cubans are guardedly optimistic. As is often the case in Cuba, jokes abound like "¿Cuba si, Yanqui no', but what's taking them so long to arrive?" Different parts of the population will be affected differently. Independent workers, those connected to the tourist industry, artisans, and those with family ties in the United States will benefit. Others like retired people, single mothers, and low wage workers will suffer from the scaling back of social spending. Social

inequality will grow and may even lead to political tensions. Institutional changes are inevitable. In 2018 Raul Castro's presidential term will end. A new era will begin, the outcome of which cannot be predicted.

The return to dialogue will be difficult but will proceed. Negotiations in Canada and at the Vatican took place for eighteen months. The Cuban Catholic hierarchy has been secretly involved in these discussions for years. The official visit to Havana by Roberta Jacobson, John Kerry's deputy for Latin American affairs, marked the beginning of what was a complex process given the contentiousness between the two parties. The most aggressive sectors of the exile community have mobilized in order to demand restitution of the thousands of properties nationalized after the revolution. As the Cuban government has clearly explained, any negotiations on nationalized north American property must involve the embargo's cost to the Cuban economy, and the property of those who emigrated to the United States are not to be included in these negotiations.

The threat of numerous Latin American governments to boycott the April 2015 Summit of the Americas in Panama if Cuba was not invited meant that Obama risked facing a nearly empty room at the gathering. On December 17 (2014) Obama acknowledged the failure of U.S. policy toward Cuba. Obama's declaration that "we are all Americans"—those in the United States as well as Cuba—is a credit to

Gay Rights Movement mobilizes and wins victory against discrimination

18 April 2015, by **Dan La Botz**

The controversy was over religious freedom versus gay rights. With more and more states passing marriage equality laws—37 of 50 states and the District of Columbia now have such laws allowing same-sex couples to marry—some conservative state governments reacted by attempting to pass religious freedom laws, ostensibly to protect religious rights, but actually to allow religious conservatives to discriminate against gays and lesbians.

The current batch of religious freedom laws are based on a U.S. federal statute called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 that was originally intended to protect Native Americans whose religious involved using drugs such as peyote.

Conservatives then decided to pass similar laws at the state level not to protect the indigenous peoples' right, but to protect Evangelical Christians who oppose same-sex marriage. Under such laws, private individuals or businesses would not have to serve LGBT folks, for example, a baker could refuse to make a cake for a gay wedding. Some 19 states passed such religious freedom laws intended to build an impermeable wall between Evangelicals and the gay movement.

But it is clear that times have changed. When the Indiana legislature passed and Governor Michael Pence signed a religious freedom law that would, for example, have allowed private parties to discriminate, the LGBT movement spoke out and organized against it at once. At about the same time Governor Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas was signing a similar bill passed by the Arkansas legislature, with a similar reaction

from gay rights groups.

Gay organizations called the new laws “a license to discriminate” and immediately organized protests in Indiana and Arkansas as well as turning the issue into a national debate. LGBT organizations, Lambda Legal, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Human Rights Campaign joined together in legal and lobbying efforts, while many local LGBT organizations and grassroots activists went into motion.

What was astonishing in this political fight was the enormous amount of public support from around the country for the LGBT movement and for marriage equality. The National Collegiate Athletic Association, which is based in Indiana and organizes all university sports events, expressed its concern about how LGBT athletes might be treated in Indiana. The NCAA was joined by the National Basketball Association, and the Women's National Basketball Association.

Many major corporations, under pressure for years now from the threat of LGBT boycotts, came out against the bill and after it passed, demanded that it be revised to ensure no discrimination against gays and lesbians. In Indiana, Apple, Angie's List, Eli Lilly, and Anthem were among nine major corporations that came out opposing the religious freedom law as originally proposed. In Arkansas Axiom, Apple, and Wal-Mart—the country's largest retailer—joined in opposing the religious freedom law for discriminating against gays and lesbians.

Under pressure from the LGBT

movement, the corporations, and the public at large, the governors Pence and Hutchinson and the Indiana and Arkansas legislatures revised the legislation to protect LGBT rights. The strong reaction and rapid retreat by conservatives probably means the end of any similar bills during this legislative season.

This stunning victory is the latest expression of what has been a decade of successes by the marriage equality movement. It was only in 2004 that the first legal gay marriage in the United States took place; today more than two-thirds of the states permit gay marriage. In 2004 only 30 percent of Americans supported same-sex marriage; today the figure is 59 percent according to a recent poll. Support for gay marriage, though still less than a majority, has even risen significantly among conservatives and Republicans, while some 74% of Democrats support same-sex marriage. About three-quarters of young people (18-35) support same-sex marriage.

Many on the left in the LGBT movement have criticized the emphasis on marriage equality laws, arguing that they play into the most conservative views about marriage, nuclear families, and religion.

Still there is no denying that the LGBT marriage-equality movement has had an enormous impact on American society, winning in the last decade legal rights and political influence comparable to the black civil rights movement at high tide in the 1960s and the women's movement's accomplishments in the 1970s. Gay marriage rights have now been institutionalized in laws, court

decisions, and in changes in public consciousness that will make it

difficult to turn back the clock.

New Politics

Local elections reveal crisis of popular representation

17 April 2015, by Patrick Le Moal

In this system local elections, such as the departmental ones [equivalent of county council elections] held on March 22-29, 2015, are only an indicator of political developments. The change of local political personnel has only a slight influence on the course of national political and social life. The government was also anxious to declare that the results changed nothing, that the policy of austerity and anti-social offensive of the Socialist government headed by President Hollande and Prime Minister Valls was going to continue.

A deep political crisis continues

The lull of “national unity” following the Charlie Hebdo killings in January was of short duration. The fundamental effects of the systemic crisis of capitalism have resumed, and the institutions are an obstacle to any policy of UMP-PS national unity, which actually corresponds to the politics of these two blocks. Valls-Hollande no longer have a stable parliamentary majority, with a number of PS deputies expressing dissent. And forced passage through an expedited procedure (under article 49-3 of the constitution) to silence disagreements within the majority is only possible once in a parliamentary session.

The electoral defeat of the PS

The government resorted to a slick and widespread media operation. The results were less bad than the polls

had predicted, “it could have been worse”... what a victory! While the PS had won these elections hands down in 2011, with 21.8% it came in third position behind the alliance of the parliamentary right around Sarkozy (29.4%), and the far right Front National (25.2%). It lost a third of the departments, leaving the right with 69 departments out of 101!

This result derived for a good part from abstention which affects primarily the popular neighbourhoods. It averaged 50% at the national level in the first round, rising to 70% in some working class and popular towns. For example for the Parisian suburbs, 71.2% in Aubervilliers, 68% in Bobigny, 67-69% in Saint Denis. Without forgetting the number of unregistered voters, which would be, according to a study in 2012, nearly 3 million, or 7% of the electoral body. It has increased since the 1960s, and particularly affects “persons without a diploma” of which 15% are not listed. To this should of course be added foreign residents who do not have the right to vote.

In the second round, when it was still in contention in PS-FN duels [11], the PS played on “all against the Front National”. Overall this worked, with the candidate of the parliamentary left obtaining more votes than the sum of the votes of the left-wing candidates in the first round, either by a mobilization of abstentionists in the first round, or by the displacement of the votes of the parliamentary right against the FN.

A few posts were saved, but this should not hide the results when in the second round the PS was opposed

to a candidate of the right. In the latter case, there was no shift to the candidate of the PS of the totality of votes which went to the left-wing candidates in the first round.

The political significance of these results is clear. The abstention shows the repudiation of government policies, of the parties which are involved in them, and the fact that its representatives are today largely in the minority at the electoral level in the country. If many constituents and voters are ready to vote PS, or even UMP to prevent the election of the FN, they do not choose between the PS and the UMP!

The electoral victory of the FN

Because these elections are a victory for the party which has campaigned against the “UMPS” [12]. Traditionally, departmental elections favour the established parties and broad coalitions, such as that built around the UMP by Nicolas Sarkozy. Despite this the FN was present in 760 duels in the second round and obtained 62 elected representatives, something never before seen! Even if it did not win a majority in any department, contrary to what it had hoped, its results represent a new progression.

Because the most important thing is that it won 25% of the voters, while in a number of areas it scored more than 40-50%. This represents 5.1 million voters, less than the presidential elections of 2012, where it won 6.4 million votes with 18% (these are the

elections where abstention is lowest), but this is by far the most important result in a local election.

Prevented by the electoral system from having a parliamentary representation reflecting its electoral strength [13], the FN accumulates elected representatives elsewhere, in the European Parliament (23 deputies out of 74), municipalities (1,546 elected representatives out of 587,335, including 22 mayors out of 36,635), regions (112 regional councillors out of 2,040) and now departments. In all, over 1,700 elected representatives, virtually all fully devoted to the strategy of Marine Le Pen. Which of course, is a point of support to build a party, at the activist, human, and financial levels.

The splinter group has become an electoral party

In the 1990s, starting from the analysis that Marxism was dying, and that there would no longer be any alternative on the left, the FN changed direction. Convinced that it could become the expression of social anger, it took a national-social orientation, defending social gains for the French through national preference, and argued that right and left were the same thing, the only solution was the Front National.

This orientation took on a new dynamic from 2008-2009, both because of the exacerbated crisis of the PS, and the discrediting of Sarkozy, who had limited the electoral breakthrough of the FN, and the arrival of Marine Le Pen at the head of the party. She embarked on a strategy of “de-demonization” aimed at integrate within the institutions, municipal first of all, then regional, to prepare for the presidential election of 2017. She revived the national-social discourse of the 1990s, eliminated the provocations and anti-Semitic slurs, and adopted a discourse incorporating notions from elsewhere, on the damage caused by globalization. The substance did not change, that of national solutions, a capital/labour alliance, protectionism, the rejection

of immigration. On all the issues it presented a modified form of a reactionary substance.

During the demonstrations against the draft law on gay marriage organized by Catholic fundamentalist currents, which reject abortion, contraception, are homophobic and for the return of the woman to the home, the FN as such did not support the biggest demonstration, but the elected representatives were there! It conducted a campaign on the theme that this distracts us from the real problems of unemployment. At the same time the homosexuality of one of its European elected representatives and the mayor of Henin Beaumont does not prevent him from being one of the vice-presidents of the FN.

What is the political project of the FN?

In the current context of economic, social and political crisis, this policy has allowed incursions into a part of the popular electorate, both that which traditionally voted right, and a part of the left electorate. The popular categories, when they vote, are heavily oriented to the FN with a total of 43% of the vote of which 38% among employees and 49% among workers. The vote is significantly lower among senior executives and the liberal professions (13%), the retired (20 %) and women, at 22% against 30% of men.

This insertion among the popular classes is found among the 62 elected representatives, a third of them employees of the private sector, one-third civil servants, the last third made up of pensioners, liberal professionals, executives, business leaders, artisans and so on. In the town halls held by the FN since 2014, the results of these elections of 2015 are very good, sometimes even better. The FN is beginning to be an important party. It claimed 42,100 members at the day of contribution in October 2014, and 53% of these adherents, or 22,329, voted to re-elect Marine Le Pen. Its website now claims 83,000 activists.

Whatever the reality of the figures, the presence of FN activists in the course of the election campaign was very significant, and accepted by the population. The most violent activists feel empowered: threats against journalists, participation of FN elected representatives in the militias of the productivist farmer’s association (FNSEA) against the occupants of the site of the proposed dam at Sivens, not to mention numerous provocations and racist insults.

One of the paradoxes of the current political situation is that the institutions that are supposed to guarantee stability through the game of bipartisanship have become a machine to promote the FN while the PS and the UMP are threatened with disintegration (7). Marine Le Pen wants to transform this logic to her advantage to unblock the political relations which exclude the FN from possibilities of access to t government. This strategic choice imposes a profile of “best opponent of the existing system”, dynamic and rooted in the popular classes. At the same time it preserves and cultivates its image as a reactionary force, “conservative on morals”. This policy of being alone against all is reinforced by the present attitude of Sarkozy, in the second round, neither for the PS, nor for the FN.

While the leading nucleus around Marine Le Pen plays to the full this card of demagoguery “contesting the system” in its economic and social character, some in the party see this with increasing concern. They make the calculation that an alliance with the right would open to them the doors of government departments, and of business.

Nothing is decided between these two options. For the bourgeois class, the central areas of capitalism who build their domination through the European Union, the willingness of the FN to get out of Europe is for the moment still incompatible with their choices. But the evolution of the relationship of electoral forces can have an effect on the calculations of the privileged. All the reflections on the possibility of dealing with an FN majority or an FN presidency will grow. The mainstream right/FN

electoral porosity amplifies these reflections. A poll indicates, for example, that 50% of UMP supporters would vote for "local alliances on a case by case basis" with the FN. And already the weight of the FN acts as a spur on a right more to the right than ever before, or to release the most rightist tendencies. Which also affects the governmental left.

The Socialist Party IS the system

Because one of the reasons for this evolution of the situation is the evolution of the main electoral party of the left, which traditionally represents the largest part of the popular classes. The PS has become the system, in the same way as the UMP, the parliamentary right, in its economic and social policy, but also in its values, including its lies. Its political personnel has only conflictual links with organizations of struggles of the exploited and oppressed, whether the trade union organizations whose bureaucratic leaderships have their own dynamics, or the associations of struggle for human rights, links that have no bearing on the important decisions. On the other hand the Socialist leaders have strong and multiple links with the capitalist establishment: they come from the same schools, pass through ministerial offices, from the Ministry of the economy to the directorates of businesses, attend the same places, are of the same world.

The vote for the PS expresses this deep division: 28% among executives and professionals against only 16% from popular milieus and 29% among public employees against 18% in the private sector. It sees the numbers of its activists melt. According to the figures provided by the party, it had 235,511 members in November 2008, 209,000 in September 2009. Today it claims 150,000. Given that the PS has 18,300 elected representatives, we see that membership of the PS looks more like a political career plan than the will to fight to change the world, or even to improve it [To compare the main party of the right, the UMP claimed 268,000 members in November 2014]].

On all the issues, the choices, these are the same decisions as those of the governments of the right, of attacks on social gains, gifts for the employers, restraint, cuts for those at the bottom, the disappearance of public services, the desire to reduce drastically the amount of wages (direct and indirect), to the order of 20 to 30 %, while increasing the profits of the shareholders of large capitalist companies, so they "continue to invest in France". At the national level as in the departments and regions, the PS elected representatives are the allies of the capitalist groups of the BTP in imposing useless and even harmful major projects, marked by a productivism without limit, on people who don't want them.

On those social subjects which were markers for the left, the slide toward reactionary positions is impressive. The repression against the Roma is shameful, the attitude to immigrants unbearable, the daily attacks against Muslims are feeding a state racism of a force unknown since the end of the war in Algeria, the security policy involves a suppression of mobilizations, demonstrations, and convictions more serious than under Sarkozy. For example the refusal to conduct an ideological and political fight on the question of medically assisted procreation at the time of the vote on the law on marriage for all has left the possibility for the reactionary offensive to take its full extent.

Politics is seen by the Socialist leaders as a market to which it must respond. The general idea provided from tribunes, speeches, polls is that society is going to the right, that realism is of the right. It must, therefore, respond to this evolution and move to the right to remain in government.

If it is true that the defeats accumulated since 2010 do not favour the emergence of answers for those at the bottom, this policy of the Socialists is a self fulfilling prophecy. In nurturing these reactionary ideas, the leaders of the PS are powerful actors in manufacturing an ideological hegemony that we must combat.

Over the last century this governmental left, which places its prospects in management within the

framework of the capitalist system, has shown to the wealthy that their economic, political and ideological domination over society was not challenged by a Socialist government, even with Communist participation. It has crossed a threshold over these past 15 years, and what has disappeared is the very idea that we could transform society. It is the triumph of success and capitalist legitimacy. This is the TINA ("There Is No Alternative) of Margaret Thatcher À la française.

The impotence of the Front de Gauche

One might think that the Front de Gauche, which is not in the government, could occupy a position like that of Syriza. This is not the case, even if here and there, the results of its candidates during these elections were very good. Because to offer an appropriate response to the situation, it is not enough to be outside of the government. It is necessary to oppose the PS and its politics everywhere, to be the force which is everywhere fighting against its vile measures and which offers an alternative political perspective.

The Front de Gauche is composed of three parties of unequal strength. The PCF (French Communist Party) is dominant, followed by the Parti de Gauche of Jean Luc Mélenchon and the group Ensemble!, made up of former NPA members, what remains of the PCF oppositions and alternative currents.

The PCF is a party in regular regression. With these elections it lost one of the two departments that it controlled, and the same proportion of elected representatives as the PS. In 2013 it claimed 130,000 members, but less than 40,000 voted at the last congress. It is now wholly turned towards electoral politics. Its leadership, its intermediary cadres, and its financing are entirely linked to positions occupied in various institutions, notably the town halls. The contribution of the elected representatives accounts for 46.4% of

the total resources of the party (as against 26% for the PS, 28.4% for the Greens and 13% for the Parti de Gauche). The distinction between the apparatus leaders and the elected representatives, who have their own concerns, has disappeared. Because of the increasingly technical nature of local activity, they are surrounded by public management cadres and are transitioning away from activist or associative relays and towards professionals who resemble them socially. The social universe of Communist elected representatives is detached from that of their citizens. An interview with a defeated PCF candidate at the last election in Le Havre is significant, indicating her distance from the voters: "It is hard to swallow. A township historically to the left that I had won covering every inch... I think I have done a lot for these neighbourhoods ... I am sensitive ... I spent my life helping these people and they are not there for me ... To see the FN coming top really hurts me. I do not know where I will find the strength to continue to fight for them".

However, the electoral results are directly related to the agreements concluded locally with the PS in municipalities, departments and regions where the PCF often rules in common with the PS and draws from this all the material benefits derived therein. It is therefore very widely identified on the left with the PS. If the strategy of the Front de gauche has halted its electoral decline, it is not for now going to make it a left opponent to the PS government, there are too many obstacles to such a rupture.

The policy of the PG is different, because it is not dependent on alliances with the PS

Its leadership has understood the need to have a clear independence in relation to the PS and a policy of more frontally opposing the government. This translates into little in fact, but at the political level is reflected by a campaign for the 6th Republic. But this loses any credibility, the essential questions of democracy are erased behind the desire of Jean Luc Mélenchon to be a credible alternative during the presidential elections. Thus it appears, not as a political objective,

but a policy for a place, places, it cannot be a mass perspective.

These differences between the PCF and the PG materialized during these last elections in the second round, the PC calling to vote PS against the right, even by removing its candidates to allow the election of the PS, the PG not giving any voting recommendation. This makes the existence of the Front de Gauche very limited. It is now no more than an electoral label and even at this level it is wobbly.

As for Ensemble, its political future is so tied to the existence of the Front de Gauche that its present policy is centred on the maintenance of this front. During the last elections, the FG tried to establish an axis with the Greens, a small current originating from the PS, Nouvelle Donne, and contacts with the "frondeurs" (PS dissidents). Nothing which is a radical alternative to current policies. Their opposition is an institutional opposition which seeks to gain a majority to run the government, not an opposition to the capitalist system itself. This culture of government, of realism, pervades the whole of their activity, and makes them unable to offer a perspective to build a new political representation of the popular classes, exploited and oppressed. The same differences divide the Greens, between those who wish to return to government and those who have made a covenant with the Front de Gauche. It can be questioned to what extent this organization can avoid splitting given such a level of confrontation.

The far left was not visible in this election. The NPA was present in 5 cantons, two unitary lists (one of which obtained 16.8%), three NPA lists (one of which obtained 8.5 %) but it is not possible to draw conclusions from such piecemeal results. As for LO, it was present in 16 cantons, scoring around 3 %.

A new political representation of

those at the bottom

These elections confirm the observation which becomes more evident every day: the exploited, the oppressed, and those at the bottom, the popular classes, do not have a party that represents them, that is a point of support for struggle, for ideological battle, for political battle. The NPA has not managed to bring together all the anti-capitalists. The Front de Gauche is not this representation. All the parties which we have just talked about have a certain implantation, a certain activist strength, a certain electoral echo, but none is perceived by a significant fraction of those at the bottom, entire sectors, as a party which is useful to them, which serves their daily existence as a class, which allows them to have an expression.

In a number of enterprises, some union branches, some unions play this role in relation to the employer. It is far from being the case for the confederations, widely perceived also as institutions. The ejection of the secretary general of the CGT, after the revelation of the luxurious work done on his apartment at the expense of the membership, can only reinforce the feeling of not being represented by them.

Even the combative sectors of the trade union movement are today little involved in forming a single expression against the government, taking refuge often in activity at enterprise level, it is truly increasingly difficult. In a number of areas some activists are perceived by the milieu as being useful for the struggle. But this is not enough to build a political perspective, any more than the upsurge of strikes in some sectors during the annual wage negotiations.

It is this absence that basically explains the political and social situation, the electoral results, the difficulty of organizing struggles even on an ad hoc basis. This is what allows the bourgeoisie to pursue its offensive without an appropriate reaction, even if in France the resistance since 1995 has limited the erosion of social gains.

The construction of a new representation of those at the bottom is what we should devote all our forces to, by changing our organizational practices, on the basis of the experiences of struggle, by opening ourselves to all the political confrontations, working for the convergences of all those who are the essential elements for this objective. We will not begin by saying that this will be a party, in view of the experiences of this century, the forms of democratic organization will inevitably be new, we will build ourselves by moving forward. We will not begin by defining a program that will have to be explained, it will be constructed on the basis of needs, concerns, struggles and will be far richer than anything we could write.

We will work for this tirelessly with an unrelenting compass of class struggle: total political independence in relation to the old political world, even if many of the activists will originate from that world, they will agree to do something else, in all honesty, and with the

enthusiasm to participate in a new adventure in the fight against capitalist society, exploitation and all oppression.

How can we progress?

On the one hand, to work on the construction of the broadest possible mobilization against all governmental measures, but also of a left opposition to the politics of the government. For example, by seeking to federate the whole of the social and political left, as much as is possible, against the Macron law, despite the difficulties due in part to the difficult relations between political parties, trade unions and associations. To be useful activists in the mobilizations which often take place outside activist frameworks, such as those of the precarious, the intermittent, the opponents to the large useless projects and so on.

On the other hand to give new

meaning to the political struggle. It is political battle which builds the unity of the exploited class, which allows a real fight against oppression. It is production by struggle of a political alternative that allows democracy, action for partial objectives. There is no need to be a majority to weigh on the whole of the political debate, to influence the situation, to build a vision that becomes hegemonic, inescapable. People mobilized on a just, understandable cause weigh more than their arithmetical weight.

For example, we must see how the popular layers respond to a request for free public transport, which poses all kinds of economic, ecological, management issues to measure the extent to which current forms of political struggle do not meet popular aspirations. The answers can be subversive, the world as it is being unbearable, as millions of exploited and oppressed people know. Faced with the current political, institutional crisis, we are charting a new project, a new schedule for those at the bottom.

Yemen's crisis and the reactionary imperialist interventions

16 April 2015, by Joseph Daher

The military intervention is conducted under the leadership of Saudi Arabia under the pretext of opposing the Houthis sectarian militia (from Zaidi sect close to Shiism), or also known as Ansar Allah. The Houthis took total control of the capital Sanaa in January 2015, but there was already a significant military presence since September 2014, with the complicity of the Air Force units close to former dictator Ali Abdallah Saleh, pushing the Prime Minister at the time to resign. The Houthis have since late March extended their operations to the South of the country.

Meanwhile, four provinces of southern Yemen, including that of Aden, decided to refuse orders from the

capital Sanaa since the capture of the city by the Houthis and of the military units and security forces in these regions. The second largest city, Aden, remains the scene of clashes between supporters and opponents of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi supporters have called the coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia to send ground forces in Yemen and not to limited the intervention to air strikes. However, the possibility of Saudi Arabia to embark in a new military ground operation in Yemen is very risky after their 2009 defeat in the country, already against the Houthi militias in the mountainous regions in the north of Yemen.

The Houthi forces have been according to various sources supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in terms of weapons, money and military training, while a senior Iranian official declared in December 2014 that the Quds Force, the external arm of the Revolutionary Guard, had a "few hundred" military personnel in Yemen who train Houthi fighters [14]The Houthis have also received some small assistance from Hezbollah that provided military logistical support. According to some sources, Hezbollah's Military Unit 3800 commander Khalil Harb has also been spotted in Yemen already in 2012 training Houthi rebels in Yemen and has been accused of facilitating the movement of large amounts of

currency to them [15]. In addition to this, Sheikh Mohammad Abdel Malek al-Chami, one of the leaders of the Houthis, who died of his wounds in a terrorist by the Islamic State in Yemen in March, was buried in in the "martyrs cemetery" in southern Beirut, where leading Hezbollah figures are buried. He lived for 17 years in Lebanon, previous to his death. He was the Special Representative of the Houthi leader Abdel Malek al-Houthi in Lebanon and Syria.

The IRI, just as the Gulf monarchies, has indeed intervened in the region (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen) to support authoritarian regimes or reactionary forces to expand its political influence in the region, in the backdrop of Shi'a Sunni sectarian religious tensions exacerbated by the IRI and the Gulf monarchies.

The IRI has condemned the military intervention in Yemen by Saudi Arabia, and the Iranian Supreme's leader Khamenei described it as "genocide". Iran has called for a halt to the Saudi-led military operation against Yemen's Houthi rebels, suggesting "holding dialogue in a neutral location with the participation of all Yemeni political factions to reach an agreement on a national government".

Yemen's internal issues

The Yemeni government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, a former vice president of the country and close ally to Saudi Arabia, where he has taken refuge, and the Gulf monarchies, was completely defeated by military advances of the Houthis allied in this circumstance with their former enemy the former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had fought them between 2004 and 2009 (the fighting had caused more than ten thousand deaths and over 300 000 people displaced) and accused them of being subservient to the IRI. Saleh was actually also a former ally of the Gulf monarchies and the United States.

Saleh was pushed out by a solution negotiated by Saudi Arabia and the United States in 2011 after the beginning of a popular uprising in the country, but which kept the regime

intact with the inclusion of some political forces including supporters of Al-Islah party, which is composed of the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, of Salafists and of tribal leaders in the north, notably the powerful tribe of the Al-Ahmar. Saleh continued to benefit from the allegiance of a significant part of the security apparatus and army, while he continued to act as Chairman of the General People's Congress, the ruling party in his time. Salih also benefited as a result of a negotiated solution in 2011 a legal immunity and kept the money accumulated as president (for more than 30 years!), estimated at more than \$ 60 billion according to a UN report in February 2015.

The territorial conquests of the Houthis have been facilitated by the weakness of the state since the uprising of 2011, in the backdrop of deep social and economic problems. Socio economic problems such as the lack of work for graduate students, and the stopping of subsidies to essential products such as gas and fuel oil fuelled anger among the popular classes. In addition, the peasants, such as in Jahachine, are victims of land grabs by tribal chiefs.

The military offensive also took place while the Yemenis were still waiting since September 2014 for the implementation of the results of the national dialogue conference (which included a federal system, renegotiation of the powers of the president, etc) concluded under the auspice of Saudi Arabia, but which many Yemeni actors criticized its limitations, including the Houthis.

The reasons underlying the crisis in Yemen are political and socio-economic one side as we saw above and on the other side also linked to regional tensions with the north (with the Houthi movement) and the South (secessionist will) of the country against the central authority in Sanaa. In the addition to this, the conflict in Yemen has taken increasingly a sectarian color, without being the dominant characteristic. This has been observed with the assassination of the Houthi intellectual Abdel Karim Al Khaywani on March 18, 2015, and two days later with the attack against the two Zaydi mosques in Sanaa that

killed more than 150 dead. These attacks have been claimed by the organization of the Islamic State (IS), previously inactive in Yemen, illustrates a devastating dynamic ... Indeed the Houthis advances in Sunni areas of some northern regions of Yemen, Taiz especially and now Aden, have produced a deep resentment, in addition to the confrontation against Sunni jihadist groups close to Al Qaeda or today claiming to be from the IS.

On the other side, in the South, where the population is exclusively Sunni, a rejection of the Houthi rebellion has increased and thus of Shiism but also of the North. In addition, the main bulwark to the progress of the Houthis is Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is allied with the tribes of the border areas between North and South in Al-Baida, Al-Dhala or the Yafea. In this context, anti-houthism, turned into anti-Shiism, is a powerful cement of opposition.

A counter revolutionary military intervention

The military campaign against Yemen led by Saudi Arabia has the support of the imperialist Western governments, of Turkey, and a large majority of Arab regimes in the region. President Barack Obama authorized the provision of logistical and intelligence to support the military operations of the coalition, while a common planning cell with Saudi Arabia was established. The interventions of the reactionary monarchy of the Saud in Yemen are not new, already in the 1960s, it supported by all means the royalist forces in North Yemen (composed at the time of the Zaydi tribes) against the Yemeni revolution at the time, supported by the Nasser regime, although this latter did not support the peasant and popular demands of the Yemeni revolutionaries.

As a reminder, Saudi Arabia with the assistance of the reactionary Gulf monarchies intervened in the various revolutionary processes in the region by playing a massive counter-revolutionary role in supporting the old regimes (Tunisia and Egypt) or fundamentalist reactionary forces (Syria or Iraq), with the exception of

Qatar that supported the other side of the counter revolution the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. These differences are outstripped in the case of intervention in Yemen, where we see all these counter revolutionary forces support this military campaign. It reminds us that tactical competition and differences between Saudi Arabia and Qatar may be surpassed when their common interests are threatened, as in the joint military intervention of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in March 2011 in Bahrain to crush a popular uprising against an allied regime.

The military intervention in Yemen is led, according to the Saudi propaganda, to “rescue a neighbour and the legitimate authority”, but this intervention is of course made for other objectives: to defend the sphere of influence of the Gulf monarchies, especially of Saudi Arabia, and prevent Houthis reaching Aden and Bab el-Mandeb, which, with the Strait of Hormuz is the crossing point of oil, nearly three million barrels per day of crude oil, and of the Gulf gas. In addition to this, the intervention is also a message sent to the Shi'a oppressed minorities in Saudi Arabia to remain calm.

Moreover, since September 11, Yemen is a key centre in the “war against terror” and some US special forces were stationed there, coordinating actions against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (including drone attacks). The United States has actually evacuated their base of Al-Anad following the progress of the Houthis to Aden. This did not prevent the US to continue to use their drones to attack AQAP basis. An American drone strike has actually killed Ibrahim al-Rubeish, a top ideologue

and spokesman for Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen. Al-Rubeish, a 35-year-old Saudi citizen, had been held for five years in the United States military prison at Guantánamo Bay.

All this is occurring in the context of inter-regional imperialist battle between the IRI and the GCC led by Saudi Arabia. The Saudi massive military deployment demonstrates the importance attached by the monarchy to Yemen: more than a hundred combat aircraft and 150,000 troops would be massed on the border with Yemen. It should be added that this intervention is happening in the backdrop of the relative decline of US imperialism since 2003 that allows regional imperialist forces to play a greater role in the region and give them more autonomy.

In this perspective, the fact that the military intervention led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen occurred at the same period than the agreements concluded between the Western powers and Iran around the nuclear issue is not fortuit. It is a clear message from Saudi Arabia to the US to take into consideration their political interests and that any kind of US rapprochement with Iran should not be made at the expense of the Saudi Monarchy. This latter is indeed worried and has complained on several occasions that the US administration is not taking into serious consideration the expansion of the political influence IRI's in the region.

Conclusion

The Saudi led military campaign is therefore not for the purpose of defending the self-determination of the Yemeni people, and to allow them

to continue the objectives of the popular uprising began in 2011.

Moreover, the first victims of the bombing of the counter revolutionary coalition are the Yemeni civilians, several hundreds of dead, including children, few thousands injured, and ten of thousands of displaced, not to mention the widespread destruction caused by the fighting and bombing. Many humanitarian organizations have declared that the situation on the ground for the civilians is catastrophic.

Progressive organizations must oppose this military intervention led by a counter revolutionary coalition led by the Saudi monarchy and supported by Western regimes, as well as oppose the IRI interventions supporting the military coup of Houthis with the assistance of former dictator Saleh. None of these two forces carry or support the will of political and socio economic changes upheld by the popular classes of Yemen or elsewhere in the region.

Solidarity with the Yemeni popular classes who started the revolutionary process in 2011 for freedom and dignity and who are opposing all counter revolutionary forces.

April 15 2015

[Syria Freedomforever](#)

1)
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/us-yemen-houthis-iran-insight-idUSKBN0JT17A20141215>

2)
<http://iswiraq.blogspot.ch/2014/08/echoes-of-syria-hezbollah-reemerges-in.html>

Bangladesh left slams Islamist murder of Avijit Roy

16 April 2015, by Badrul Alam

It is clear that Roy was killed by fundamentalists because there were similar cases in 2004, when a professor from Dhaka University, Humayun Azad, was murdered.

Extremist groups admitted killing Azad, because they held him to be an atheist.

Roy came from a rationalist family. His father was a teacher of physics at Dhaka university; it was a family tradition to be scientific-minded.

Roy was considered by the extremists to be an atheist because on his blog he posted articles about atheism. Extremist groups followed his blog and targeted him for a long time.

People who are rationalists and free thinkers attend book fairs in Bangladesh. The extremists target these book fairs as well.

Secular people think that Roy should have had a right to write anything and publish any books he likes, and should

not have been treated like this. As a human being, he has a life to lead, whether he is an atheist or religious-minded or whatever. What the extremists did is completely illegal and it is an expression of their extremist mentality.

Students at Dhaka University, where the incident took place, protested on the streets.

There are some people who think that it is not rational to prod religious-minded people. Better, they think, to approach the matter more carefully. There are a lot of fundamentalist groups in the country who can block radical progress. There is only a small minority which is atheist. So, better to go slow.

On the other hand many people in the country are criticising the religious fundamentalist group for their actions. On the whole it is against the fundamentalists.

Things are moving for the free

thinkers in this country, but progress is very slow. Although there is a strong secular culture in Bangladesh, there are millions in the rural areas who are religious-minded. They love religion. But they are not fundamentalist-minded.

Fanatics are few in number. But they are on the rise because of promotional efforts, such as madrassa education or mosque education. The increase in fundamentalist attitudes in this country is alarming.

The CPB-ML are against the murder. Atheists should not be killed by extremists. They have a right to live and express their opinions. After this incident we strongly criticised religious extremists.

We also asked the government to take action against the murderers. We didn't get much hostility.

18 March 2015

[Solidarity](#)

Quebec City: Huge march raises temperature

15 April 2015, by [Judy Rebick](#)

BY JUDY REBICK |

A meme instantly appeared on social media under the thermometer: "We are reaching the boiling point, so has our planet." It was a combination of genius and good organizing.

More than 25,000 people came from around Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and even a few from British Columbia. Organized by major environmental NGOs and supported by a broad spectrum of First Nations, social justice, trade union, feminist, and student groups, the march was led by Indigenous contingents. In addition, there were major demonstrations in cities across the country from Halifax to Victoria. All had the same demands, stop the pipelines and tar sands expansion.

"Today's march is undeniable proof that people in Quebec and across Canada want meaningful action on climate change," said Christian Simard, General Director of Nature Québec, the march's main organizer. "Our political leaders must accept this responsibility, put in place ambitious measures to combat climate change and keep tar sands pressure out of provincial climate talks."

While the Canadian Labour Congress was listed as a sponsor, there was little official union presence. Yet hundreds if not thousands of trade union activists marched with their union flags.

I came from Toronto on a bus sponsored by the Toronto District of the Steelworkers with 50 union activists who were greeted with a warm welcome by the organizers. On

the Sunday following the march, the FTQ, the largest union central in Quebec sponsored a forum to further the dialogue between the labour and environmental movements, a most important development. Many of the placards and banners oppose the Energy East pipeline, which is supported by much of the labour movement. Rather than assuming an irreconcilable difference an ongoing dialogue combined with the pressure coming from grassroots trade unionists whose presence on the march showed their leadership that they want to be on the right of side of history on climate change might lead to significant progress.

The last time I was in a march in Quebec City, there was little dialogue between the union movement and the more militant anti-globalization

movement. The youth challenged the fence surrounding the Free Trade of the Americas Summit and were greeted with a phalanx of riot cops and volley after volley of tear gas. I was there as a reporter for rabble, which launched on April 18 from the streets of Quebec City. That Quebec City protest was the first sign of a major criminalization of militant protest in Canada that came along with the imposition of neoliberalism. I had flashbacks to the terror of police violence 14 years ago as I walked through the streets. Some might want to see this historic march as a new chapter but I doubt it. The organizers insisted on "a family friendly demonstration," and had the biggest marshals I've ever seen to make sure.

The police were wearing red hats, not riot gear and people were in such a good mood they thought the police were in solidarity with the march because protesters were asked to wear red. I thought that was too good to be true so I asked and it turns out the red hatted police were protesting their own union negotiations and it was just a coincidence. Just last week, police in Quebec City brutally arrested and tear gassed students who didn't ask permission. Turns out freedom of association is just permitted if you follow the rules. We still have to stand up to police brutality and the criminalization of protest.

Most of the placards and banners were focused on climate change. There was little visible connection

between the mass anti-austerity demonstrations organized by students and unionists over the last few weeks and this week. Nevertheless, the Act On Climate march was an historic moment in the fight against climate change in Canada and a major step forward in the movement towards merging the environmental and social justice movements as promoted in Naomi Klein's new book, not to mention a rare common action between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Congratulations to the organizers and all the participants. It was an important if not historic moment in our struggle.

Rabble.ca

April 12 2015

Fundamental rifts: power, wealth and inequality in the Arab world

15 April 2015, by Adam Hanieh

In assessing the current moment, though, we need to look beyond the headline coverage of war, displacement and sectarianism. The Arab uprisings were not simply struggles against authoritarian rule; they were ineluctably wrapped up with a decades-long stagnation in living conditions and profound inequalities in wealth and power. Without addressing these socio-economic roots of the region's malaise, there is no way out of the current impasse.

Even prior to the 2008-9 global economic crisis, the Arab world ranked near the bottom of the world in numerous development indicators. Average unemployment rates for Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia were higher than any other region in the world, while labour force participation rates were the lowest (less than half of the population). [16] For the Arab world as a whole, youth and female participation rates also ranked at the

bottom of the globe. [17] In addition, those actually in employment tended to be in precarious, low-paid informal jobs; the countries of North Africa, for example, had one of the fastest-growing informal sectors anywhere on the planet. [18] There are many other statistics like these that could be recounted for poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and other measures of social conditions; these are trends that have remained virtually unchanged for over two decades.

Key to explaining these outcomes are the IMF and World Bank-sponsored economic policies pursued by Arab governments since the 1980s. Of course there were important variations in pace and scale, but virtually all Arab states moved to implement the standard menu of neoliberal policies: cutbacks to social spending, privatisation of land and other state assets, labour market deregulation, financial and trade liberalisation, and so forth. These policies were focused upon the

promotion of private-sector growth, while shifting more and more people into a reliance on the market and simultaneously eroding forms of collective social support. Western states applauded and drove these moves; indeed, the poster-child of Arab neoliberalism, Mubarak's Egypt, was anointed the world's "top reformer" by the World Bank in 2008. [19]

Not everyone, however, lost from these policies. Indeed, for several key countries, growing poverty levels occurred in tandem with high economic growth rates, demonstrating that wealth was flowing towards some and away from others. In Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan, for example, real GDP per capita rose consistently from 2003 up to the onset of the global crisis in 2008, while stock markets boomed. [20] With reference to Egypt, the United Nations has puzzled recently over the co-existence of these two trends - growing wealth on one side and

growing poverty on the other - claiming that this constitutes a "paradox" and an unexpected outcome of standard economic models. [21]

The supposed paradox, however, disappears once we reject positive-sum, mutually-beneficial assumptions about how markets operate. As social and economic life become more deeply embedded in market relations, those who hold the most power in those markets tend to benefit. The result is polarisation and inequality, not a uniform downward spiral (or, indeed, a steady upward climb) felt alike by all. In this regard, the neoliberal experience in the Arab world has been completely unexceptional; the same pattern can be seen replicated across the globe.

This polarisation of wealth and power is critical to unpacking the social roots of autocracy in the Middle East. As the handmaidens of neoliberal reform, autocratic rulers not only enriched themselves and allied elites but also moved to quash any domestic opposition to these policies. Simultaneously, they acted as dependable partners for Western policy in the region, receiving ample financial, political and military support in return. The problem is thus not simply "political"; that is, the existence of corrupt and nepotistic rulers. Rather, these forms of political rule reflect, protect and reinforce differences in socio-economic power. Politics and economics are fused.

Widening gaps of power and wealth are not only apparent within the borders of individual Arab states; they are also manifest at the regional level, most notably between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states on one hand, and other Arab countries on the other. These regional hierarchies have grown larger in the wake of recent multiple political, social and

economic crises, illustrating once again that the impact of crisis also needs to be disaggregated between winners and losers.

According to an October 2014 report by the Institute of International Finance, net foreign assets (gross foreign assets minus external debt) of the GCC states rose from \$878 billion in 2006 to a forecast \$2.27 trillion by end-2014. [22] This compares to a decline in the net foreign assets of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco, from a surplus of \$11 billion in 2006 to a forecast deficit of \$46.7 billion by end-2014. [23] Likewise, in 2014, the six states of the GCC were estimated to have a total current account surplus of just under \$300 billion (17 per cent of their GDP), more than four times where they stood in 2009. [24] During the same period, the current account balance of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco reached an estimated total deficit of \$25.9 billion in 2014 (-4.6 per cent of GDP), compared to a deficit of \$18.8 billion in 2009 (-4.3 per cent of GDP). [25]

Within the GCC, privately-held wealth grew by 17.5 per cent each year from 2010 to 2014, with the total dollar amount doubling from \$1.1 trillion to \$2.2 trillion over this period. [26] Up to 5,100 Gulf families are estimated to hold more than \$500 million per household in liquid assets; their combined total assets exceed \$700 billion. [27] This figure, it should be noted, does not include so-called "illiquid" assets such as real estate holdings, business equity or collectable items like works of art.

Once again, we find evidence of the mutually-reinforcing trends of growing inequality and growing wealth, this time duplicated at the regional level. While the consequences of the recent drop in global oil prices remains to be

seen, the very real potential for further downturn in the core zones of the world economy - most notably in Europe - means that this regional polarisation will likely remain an ever-present feature of the contemporary situation.

These inequalities in power and wealth are essential to understanding the counter-revolutionary moment and have provided a fertile ground for the growth of sectarianism. Of course, the varied forms of foreign and regional intervention - political, economic and military - would always seek to block any fundamental challenge to the regional order. The predictable outcomes of the Western destruction of Iraq over the past two decades helped nurture the rise of sectarian groups and Islamist irredentism. In Syria, the bloody hand of the Assad regime fomented these processes deliberately, and appears to have won tacit support from the West.

However, throughout all of these events, Left and progressive voices have remained largely marginal and too easily swayed by a Manichean geopolitical worldview or illusions in their own "patriotic bourgeoisie". Without addressing questions of social and economic justice and presenting an alternative to the market-led policies of recent decades, there is little hope of building a progressive pole that is opposed to both existing elites and the disastrous course of sectarianism. This is not simply an economic question but is in essence profoundly political; one that must involve challenging the coterie of high-ranking political and military officials, wealthy businessmen and large corporations who continue to benefit from the status quo.

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[Middle East Monitor](#)

Protesting Rape Culture

14 April 2015, by **Soma Marik**



At the same time, it was evident that political forces were using rapes and sexual violence, on one hand to intimidate political opponents, and on the other to use rape as a campaign to garner votes by appearing as champions of the “correct” kind of rape victims. Above all state backed aggressive-consumerism has been reinforcing the rape culture which thrive also on valorization of masculinity

So an attempt was made to call forces beyond Maitree. A series of notified meetings were held. Even while these were happening, rape was becoming more and more a daily occurrence, in West Bengal, in India. In Birbhum, a man joined BJP. So his aunt, living in a part of Burdwan near Birbhum, was assaulted, sexually abused, and even refused medical treatment. In Ranaghat, a 74 year old woman, a nun, was raped. And following the death of Suzette Jordan one of the accused was seen moving around proudly, as though telling the world that they had nothing to fear.

In order to ensure that the widest range of forces were able to come, the date was fixed for 19th March, so that we can have many rights groups by our side from different parts of West Bengal.

The basic political outlook was worked out in the meetings, involving a concept note, which put forward a brief explanation and a set of demands. A few key issues were:

That this was a mobilization that did not see any mainstream party, including the mainstream left, as saviours. A set of basic demands were presented, mainly to generate public awareness about what can be our demands. Hence, for example, the stress was not so much on new laws, but on implementation of laws, creation of rape crisis centres, etc. We also focused on State violence, AFSPA and neo-liberal violence which

escalate sexual violence

Two debates had been conducted. One was over whether there should be any attempt at a lasting structure. While this was not fully answered, the slogan of the march was From Ten to Ten Thousand, We Will Come Out on the Streets Repeatedly. Clearly, this implied the need for sustained campaigns and therefore hinted at the formation of a issue-based forum



The second debate was over whether there should be organizational banners of the mass organizations including students. After considerable debates, for this programme, it was decided that there would not be separate organizational banners. We were keen on highlighting plurality of organizations and clean politics. Our aim was to ensure that organizations willing to stand up for the rights of women, of marginal sexualities, should own the programme, and come as organizations. But given the debate, we agreed upon coming without a banner for the moment.

The demonstration was to be preceded by a gathering at College Square, at 2-30 PM. By 2-30, there was a mass that spilled out of the Square. The police were clearly taken aback, as they had been predicting a turnout of around 250-300. By 2-50, when the demonstration could finally be organized and when it started moving, over 2000 people had already gathered. People were still coming in, and by the time the demonstration marched along Nirmal Chandra Street, then on to Bow Bazar, and finally up S. N. Banerjee Street, one of us had walked up and down, trying to do an actual count. It appeared that the figure was between 2500 and 3000. The huge pressure at the front made a more accurate count impossible.

The demonstration was remarkable for its diversity cutting across class,

community, gender. At least a dozen of the constituents of Maitree had come, including very senior members. Remarkable were the women who were walking with crutches, or using tricycles. Women with disabilities, they had come to draw attention to the sexual violence on women with disabilities which are being daily invisibilized. A large number of women workers, united in the Karmajibee Mahila Parishad with women in unorganized sectors. Indeed, they had brought far, far more people to the demonstration than some of those who had insisted that they could come only if there was no banner. Some of these latter were noticeably conspicuous by their absence.



Both APDR and MASUM, two human rights organizations, had come. The USDF, a student organisation had come, as had Campus Resist, a collectivity including students, teachers, and concerned citizens. The All India Progressive Women’s association and the All India Students Association had come with quite a number of activists. We cannot list every organization, for three reasons. First, none had brought banners, though many had placards with slogans where their names also figured. Second, because there were no banners, many were seen as individuals, who in reality might have come from some organization. Finally, we do not feel any need to post the names of every organisation whose members had come, in a public Facebook post, which is often trawled, as past experiences show, by both people in right wing politics and the police.

A good number of sex workers, united in their organization Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee, had come. And there were a number of LGBTs, some coming from the organization Sappho for Equality, and others not necessarily organized, but coming out,

because they saw a need to express their problems, notably the sexual violence on trans-people. Cultural activists had come, including Ganabishan, and various individuals.

The demonstration started after a short talk explaining why we were organizing the programme. It ended in Esplanade, after a human chain, followed by a cultural programme. I am trying to bring out the whole

diversity through the pictures I post along with this note.

This is of course a personal account, and does not pretend to be an official stance. But having had the privilege of working with a good many comrades, women as well as some men, who were key to mobilizing, planning, and making the programme such a vibrant and successful one, I feel it necessary

to stress that without those people, who had been working tirelessly in the organizational meetings, in deciding the politics of the campaign through the concept note and the leaflet, in getting in touch with diverse organizations, in negotiating a united programme, the rally would not have had even half the numbers it did have. This was possible because commitment to the struggle was paramount for them.

Eduardo Galeano - ¡Presente!

13 April 2015, by Dan La Botz

Born Eduardo Germán María Hughes Galeano in Montevideo on September 3, 1940, Galeano began his career as a journalist in the early 1960s working as a correspondent for Sol and then as an editor for Marcha, which published such writers as Mario Vargas Llosa and Mario Benedetti. When a rightwing military coup took power in Uruguay in 1973, Galeano was jailed and subsequently went into exile, first in Argentina, where he edited Crisis, and then in Spain where he wrote his trilogy Memory of Fire (Genesis, Faces and Masks, and Century of the Wind). Memory of Fire mixed history and journalism in vignettes and biographical sketches written in a creative prose style that reminded American readers of John Dos Passos' 1930s classic U.S.A. trilogy (The 42nd Parallel, 1919, and The Big Money).

Open Veins of Latin America was a detailed, systematic, and sustained attack on European and U.S.

imperialism in Latin America over five centuries, showing how first Spanish conquistadores, then English bankers and merchants, and finally U.S. corporations had dominated Latin America's economy and pillaged the country's natural resources while exploiting its enforced cheap labor. The book became a classic of the Latin American left and of the left around the world. In a famous [gesture](#), Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez gave a copy of Open Veins to U.S. President Barack Obama at the opening of the Fifth Summit of the Americas held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tabago, in April of 2009.

In 1985 Galeano returned from exile to Uruguay, establishing himself in the capital, Montevideo.

Galeano created a [stir](#) in March of last year with his comment made at a book fair in Brazil where he was being honored on the occasion of the forty-

third anniversary of the publication of Open Veins. Asked what he thought of his book today, he said, "I wouldn't be capable of reading this book again; I'd keel over. For me, this prose of the traditional left is extremely leaden, and my physique can't tolerate it." Conservatives pounced on his remark as a repudiation of his leftist politics, when in reality it was the judgement of a mature author looking back at a book written in his youth in an altogether different period.

Galeano remained a leftist until his death. He supported the campaign of Tabaré Vázquez and the leftist Broad Front in the 2004 election and in 2005 he became a member of the board of TeleSur, the pan-American television network based in Caracas, Venezuela. For fifty years, Galeano's voice spoke truth to power and inspired the oppressed.

[New Politics](#)

Podemos: between populism and social movements

12 April 2015, by Alona Liasheva, Jaime Pastor

There are several factors, which make Podemos a successful platform. Firstly, it uses the discourse of participation, a “new way of doing politics”. Secondly, it critiques austerity. Thirdly, it emerged from 15M, the mass protest movement, which mobilized people in response to the country’s economic crisis. In addition, crucial was the ability of leaders and organizers of the party to be present on mainstream media - TV and radio. Although the party does not call itself left-wing, a huge part of its members have a long-term experience in left-wing movements.

For a lot of Spanish people, as well as for a lot of activists outside of Spain, who are following Podemos, the main source of the information is the mainstream media, which is representing only the leadership of the party. To understand the everyday life of the party, see the problems and contradictions it meets, LeftEast’s Aliona Liasheva spoke to Jaime Pastor, member of Podemos and editor of Viento Sur, a left-oriented academic journal. [28]

Aliona Liasheva: You are one of the main organisers of the initiative Por el cambio en Grecia (“For the change in Greece”). It was an initiative to support Greek comrades during the last parliamentary elections. Can you tell us more about this initiative? And explain how you see the collaboration between the two parties?

Jaime Pastor: The idea of creating such an initiative and writing the manifesto “With the Greek people, and for a change in Europe” comes from the understanding that the future of Podemos is very much linked to the future of SYRIZA. The interdependence inside the European Union and the Eurozone is very strong and the only chance to change the situation in Europe is to extend the struggle against austerity. For our countries austerity became the topic around which the left could unite people. The success of SYRIZA in fighting austerity depends to a large extent on the political situation in other countries and solidarity coming from those countries. So the manifest we made is not a manifest to support

SYRIZA, it is the manifest to show the support to Greek people, who are also willing to change Europe. This initiative is an attempt to rebuild a new internationalism against the Troika, against the German government.

AL: What about other countries and political forces, which could join this internationalist movement?

JP: In the past we were always looking in the direction of France. But now we can see that the left in France is weaker than before and right-wing parties are rising. We could say that countries like Portugal, Italy have big potential, German trade unions as well. Apart from that we are not too optimistic in the present context. But it is important to take into account that a victory of the left in Spain could be a big step forward, it is bigger than Greece. The situation is more likely to be changed in the case of an anti-austerity government coming to power in Spain. In addition, we are thinking to rebuild a Europe-wide movement with other aims than anti-austerity, for example with a strong emphasis on the anti-TTIP campaign. Its purpose would be to unite people from countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

AL: In Madrid, I do not see Podemos to be present as a political movement in the urban space of the city, at least it is way less visible than the anarchist movement. For instance, you rarely see a violent-white poster in the streets of the city. But at the same time, Podemos came into my virtual reality very quickly, through facebook and youtube channels. Is it just my experience or it is the way the party works?

JP: Yes, you are right, Podemos could be called a virtual party, which managed to become an electoral party. Virtual, because it is based on cÁrculos (Spanish for circles), which are communities of activists, formed as virtual communities within one and the same region. They use online-communication discussions to make decisions, such as choosing a candidate, who will represent them at the local elections. Anyone can join a

cÁrculo, even people without a Spanish passport. But although they are a very progressive kind of an instrument, in my opinion, virtual tools have limitations in the current situation. Our experience shows that virtual tools are not enough to create a democratic debate and foster participation. It is important to make the cÁrculos not only virtual, but also real. As we can see from the experience of 15M we need a hybrid of the real and virtual. Communication can happen both on the internet, but also in squares, like assemblies.

AL: Can you tell more about the leadership of Podemos? What is its relationship with the social movements and the common members?

JP: There is nothing to hide; Podemos is a party with a strong leadership. Those people formed the party; they are coming from the United Left, the anti-globalisation movement, also from organisations such as the Anti-capitalist Left and other Marxist organisations. The main problem of the leadership is that they want to maintain the more simple discourse to win as many votes as possible, but this is not enough. They could win the election with this ambiguous discourse, but what comes next?

We should take into account that the development of Podemos is still going on and hopefully it is going in the direction of a more pluralistic organization. There is an open debate going on. A lot of members of Podemos are trying to develop a program for change, for the new constitution of Spain, new relations with Catalonia, and a strategy for solving the debt problem.

We see that now the crucial question for the future of Podemos is to engage with activism, so that more people with the spirit of May15 can get involved. This will give an opportunity to leave the model of a party based on leadership and develop an activist party, with a pluralistic leadership with strong social-democratic demands, not only on the national, but also on the international level. I am not a social democrat, but it is what we can demand for the time being.

AL: Which geographic regions support Podemos?

JP: Madrid is the center of the movement, with many activists especially those with a background from the 15M movement; that is why the elections in Madrid are a hot topic now. Apart from that, Andalucía, the biggest region in the country supports Podemos. The situation in Catalonia and in the Basque country is specific, as right-wing forces are stronger there. And I mean right-wing forces inside Podemos. The people in every community are very heterogeneous. But in Madrid members of Podemos are mostly on the left.

AL: Who are the voters of Podemos in terms of age, class, and political background?

JP: There are studies, which show that the majority are people who define themselves as middle-class, but the question is what does middle-class

mean in a country, which is in such a deep crisis? They are rather people with high cultural capital, often aged 25-50, and mostly living in urban settings. So, no surprises. Politically the people who vote Podemos, are mostly those who are in-between the social democrats and the United Left, of course, also people from the Popular party, and people from UPID.

AL: We saw that during last month Podemos has lost a bit of support? Is it because of the new party Ciudadanos?

JP: Ciudadanos is becoming a political actor competing mainly with the People's Party, the center-right party, so mostly the people supporting them are those, who turned away from the People's Party, also Ciudadanos are competing with Podemos for the center right voters, which is not the majority of Podemos voters.

AL: What kind of prognosis can you make for the future of Podemos?

JP: The future of the movement is still very unclear. At present we are in a contradictory situation, because we can see that the social movements are focused on the electoral perspective, they are waiting for the results of the next election. And I see it as a big problem, because the results of the electoral success are quite limited, as we can actually see in the case of Greece.

But at the same time, the future of the story I am telling you will depend to a large extent on the local and regional elections, which are quickly approaching. The candidates, who will win seats in Madrid and Barcelona can move Podemos away from what we have now, to a virtual party with a strong leadership, or alternatively to a more pluralistic leadership model and an activist kind of a party.

Why should the Greek debt be audited?

9 April 2015, by *Éric Toussaint*

Recently the Athens correspondent for Le Monde wrote, "The Speaker of the parliament promised she would set up a commission to audit the Greek debt in the coming weeks, aimed at finding out whether part of the Greek public debt is odious, illegal or illegitimate. She declared 'People have a right to demand that the portion of the debt that the commission finds to be illegal be cancelled'". [29]

Such is the intricate context in which I write.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, we can propose the following definitions:

â€¢ Illegitimate public debt: debt that was contracted by a government without considering the public interest or undermining the general interest.

â€¢ Illegal debt: debt contracted in violation of the current legal or

constitutional system.

â€¢ Odious public debt: loans to authoritarian regimes or granted on conditions that violate the social, economic, cultural, civic, and political rights of the people concerned.

â€¢ Unsustainable public debt: debt that can only be paid back with dire consequences for the people such as a dramatic degradation of its living conditions, of health care and education, an increase in unemployment. In short, debt that undermines basic human rights. In other words, debt whose repayment makes it impossible for governments to provide basic human rights.

Paragraph 9 of Article 7 of Regulation No 472/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 (which strongly undermines the sovereignty of the member States

that have to implement adjustment policies) maintains that States subject to structural adjustments should carry out a complete audit of public debt in order to explain why indebtedness increased so sharply and to identify any irregularities. Here is the text in full: "A Member State subject to a macroeconomic adjustment programme shall carry out a comprehensive audit of its public finances in order, inter alia, to assess the reasons that led to the building up of excessive levels of debt as well as to track any possible irregularity". [30]

The Greek government, under Antonis Samaras refrained from applying this regulation so as to hide from the Greek population, the real reasons for the increase in debt, and the irregularities linked to it.

In all, about thirty Greek and International experts will take part in

the commission and a preliminary report is expected in June. Citizen participation is fundamental to a rigorous and independent audit process.

Here are some key points that could be revealed by carrying out an audit.

Greek debt, which was at 113% of GDP in 2009 before the onset of the Greek crisis and the intervention by the Troika, which now holds 4/5 of total debt, reached 175% of GDP in 2014. We therefore see that the Troika intervention was followed by a very considerable increase in Greek debt.

Between 2010 and 2012, the loans that the Troika granted to Greece were very largely used to repay its most important creditors at that time, mainly the private banks of the principal European economies, starting with the French and German banks. [31]. In 2009, some 80% of Greek public debt was held by the private banks of seven EU countries. Fifty percent was held by French and German banks alone. In a recent ARTE documentary [32]

Paulo Nogueira Batista, one of the IMF's executive directors, claims that all IMF board members knew that the loan was actually intended to save the French and German banks not Greece. [33] Philippe Legrain, advisor to the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso in 2010 when the Troika granted its loan, specifies that 'IMF decision makers were overruled by the IMF Managing Director of the time, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who was then running for the French presidency and consequently wanted to prevent French banks from facing losses.

Similarly German banks had persuaded Angela Merkel that it would be terrible if ever they should lose money. So the Eurozone governments decided to pretend that Greece was only facing temporary problems.' They had to bypass 'an essential principle in the Maastricht Treaty, namely the no-bail out clause. The loans to Athens were not intended to save Greece but the French and German banks that had been foolish enough to grant loans to an insolvent State.'

Auditing the Greek debt will show that European private banks greatly increased their loans to Greece between the end of 2005 and 2009 (they went from €80 billion to €140 billion, a €60 billion increase) not taking any account of the State's actual insolvency. Moreover their loans were at very low interest rates (0.35% for three-month loans and 4.5% for 10 years in October 2009 [34] whereas the average rate for German bonds at the same time was about 3.3%). [35]. Banks were foolhardy, convinced as they rightly were that European bodies would bail them out in any case.

As previously mentioned, an audit will show that the so-called bail-out of Greece set up by the European institutions with assistance from the IMF, has in fact enabled the banks of some European countries with a decisive influence on European institutions to continue collecting debt repayments while at the same time transferring the risk to the Member States through the Troika. It is not Greece that has been saved, but a handful of big private banks mainly based in the strongest countries of the EU.

Private European banks were thus replaced by the Troika as Greece's main creditor as from late 2010.

The audit will analyse the legality and legitimacy of the bail-out process. Is it in conformity with European treaties (especially Article 125, which prohibits EU countries from taking on the financial engagements of another EU country)? Did it comply with normal EU decision making procedure? Did the public lenders in 2010 (the 14 EU countries that granted Greece €53 billion of loans, the IMF, the ECB, the European Commission etc.) respect the principal of the free will of the borrower, Greece, or did they profit from Greece's distress in the face of aggressive speculation to impose agreements that were against its own interests? Did these creditors impose one-sided conditions such as excessive interest rates on the loans? [36] Did the 14 member States that each granted Greece a bilateral loan respect their own laws and

constitutions, as well as those of Greece?

Another purpose is to audit the actions of the IMF. We know that several members of the IMF Executive Board (the Brazilian, the Swiss, the Argentine, the Indian, the Iranian, the Chinese, and the Egyptian member) had expressed considerable reservations regarding the loan granted by the IMF, pointing out, among other things, that Greece would not be able to repay it due to the policies that were being imposed on the country [37]. Did the Greek government, in collusion with the Managing Director of the IMF at the time, request that its statistics department falsify the exact data in order to issue such a negative report on the country's financial health that the IMF would be justified in launching a bail-out plan? Several highly-placed Greek civil servants say so.

Did the ECB seriously overstep its prerogatives in requiring the Greek Parliament to pass legislation concerning the right to strike, health care, the right of association, education, and the regulation of wage levels?

In March 2012, the Troika organized a restructuring of the Greek debt that was presented at the time as a success. We should recall that George Papandreou, the Prime Minister, had announced in early November 2011, just before a meeting of the G20, that in February 2012 he would call a referendum on the restructuring of Greece's debt prepared by the Troika. Under pressure from the Troika, that referendum never took place and the Greek people were denied their right to express their opinion of the new debts. The mainstream media relayed the narrative which said that the restructuring would reduce Greece's debt by 50%. In reality, Greece's debt is greater in 2015 than in 2011, the year before the so-called 50% cancellation. The audit will show that this restructuring operation, which was in fact a huge confidence trick, was linked to an extension of policies that run counter to the interests of Greece and its population.

The audit must also evaluate whether

the strict conditions imposed on Greece by the Troika in exchange for the loans it received are a fundamental violation of a series of treaties and conventions with which the public authorities on the side of both the creditors and the borrower, Greece, are required to comply. The professor of law Andreas Fischer-Lescano, commissioned by the Vienna Chamber of Labour, [38] has irrefutably demonstrated that the Troika's programs are illegal under European and international law. The measures defined in the adjustment programs that have been imposed on Greece and the concrete policies that are their direct consequence violate a series of fundamental rights - such as the right to health care, to education, housing, social security, to a fair wage, and also freedom of association and collective bargaining. All these rights are protected by many laws at international and European level, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the two UN Human Rights Covenants, the Charter of the UN, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and also the conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which have the status of basic legal principles. The list of articles violated by the Memoranda imposed on Greece, meticulously drawn up by professor Fischer-Lescano, is impressive and the entities who make up the Troika or were put in place by it (the European Stability Mechanism, for example) are legally liable for those violations.

A recent study by Margot E. Salomon, Director of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at the London School of Economics and Political Science, develops the same views as professor Fischer-Lescano. In those pages entitled *Of Austerity, Human Rights and International Institutions* [39] she recalls that the institutions that make up the Troika are bound to abide by European and international conventions such as the European Social Charter or the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In this context they are not allowed to force on States

measures that would result in their violating human rights, as repeatedly mentioned by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). [40]

Next, the study exposes the Troika's legal responsibility in violating the rights of the Greek population since it has been involved in designing and implementing the agreement at all levels. In spite of the IMF's statements about countries having primary responsibility for designing and implementing policies, Greece is submitted to the Troika's oversight with no leeway or room for manoeuvre. [41]

Such illegal aspects, which will have to be substantiated by the audit committee, should result in the former Greek government's commitments to the Troika (now called 'institutions') being null and void, and this covers the loans Greece received in compensation for implementing such illegal agreements.

The audit will need to verify whether, as provided for in Regulation (EU) No. 472/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 May, 2013, mentioned above, "The draft macroeconomic adjustment programme... fully observe[s] Article 152 TFEU and Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union." The audit must also verify whether the following passage of the Regulation is adhered to: "The budgetary consolidation efforts set out in the macroeconomic adjustment programme shall take into account the need to ensure sufficient means for fundamental policies, such as education and health care." It must also be determined whether the following fundamental principle of the Regulation has been applied: "Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides that, in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union is to take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health." The above provisions need to be taken into consideration in the light of the

assessment report published in April 2014 by the EU on the implementation of the second structural adjustment program, in which the authors express satisfaction at the elimination of 20% of all jobs in Greece's public sector [42]]. In an inset entitled "Success stories of the Economic Adjustment Programme," we learn that labour-market reforms have served as the pretext for a reduction in the legal minimum wage and that 150,000 jobs have been eliminated in the public administration ("Decrease in general government employment by 150,000", p. 10).

The state of debt prior to the Troika's intervention in May 2010

[43]

Firstly, there is the debt contracted by the military dictatorship and which quadrupled between 1967 and 1974. This obviously qualifies as odious debt [44]

Following on, we have the Olympic Games scandal of 2004. According to Dave Zirin, when the government proudly announced to Greek citizens in 1997 that Greece would have the honour of hosting the Olympic Games seven years hence, the authorities of Athens and the International Olympic Committee planned on spending 1.3 billion dollars. A few years later, the cost had increased fourfold to 5.3 billion dollars. Just after the Games, the official cost had reached 14.2 billion dollars. [45] Today, according to different sources, the real cost is over 20 billion dollars.

Many contracts signed between the Greek authorities and major private foreign companies have been the subject of scandal for several years in Greece. These contracts have led to an increase in debt. Here are some examples which have made the main news in Greece:

the scandal of German submarines (produced by HDW, later taken over by Thyssen) for a total value of 5 billion euros, submarines which from the beginning had the defect of listing to the left (!) and which were equipped with faulty electronics. A judicial enquiry on possible charges

(of corruption) against the former defence ministers is currently under way.

several contracts were signed with the German transnational Siemens, accused - both by the German as well as the Greek courts - of having paid commissions and other bribes to various political, military and administrative Greek officials amounting to almost one billion euros. The top executive of the firm Siemens-Hellas, [46] who admitted to having "financed" the two main Greek political parties, fled in 2010 to Germany and the German courts rejected Greece's demand for extradition. These scandals include the sales, made by Siemens and their international associates, of Patriot antimissile systems (1999, 10 million euros in bribes), the digitalization of the OTE - the Hellenic Telecommunications Organization - telephone centres (bribes of 100 million euros), the "C41" security system bought on the occasion of the 2004 Olympics and which never worked, sales of equipment to the Greek railway (OSE), of the Hermes telecommunications system to the Greek army, of very expensive equipment sold to Greek hospitals.

In early March 2015 a trial on the OTE affair, one of several corruption cases involving Siemens, opened in Athens. [47] 13 out of the 64 defendants are German managerial staff of the parent company. Siemens is said to have paid up to €70 million

to get a contract to digitalize the Greek public telecommunications network, OTE (the contract was signed in 1997). One of the defendants is the former leader of Siemens Hellas, Michalis Christoforakos, who fled to Germany and whom the German authorities still will not extradite to Greece. Charges include 'money laundering' and 'active and passive embezzlement'. Theodoros Tsoukatos, an advisor to former PASOK Prime Minister Kostas Simitis, [48] is also among the defendants. Other defendants are senior officers of Siemens's Greek subsidiary as well as German citizens who were involved in embezzlement. So far only one Greek politician has been sentenced in this context, namely former Transport minister Tasos Mantelis, who in 2011 received a suspended three-year prison sentence when he was found guilty of accepting DEM450,000 (€230,000) from Siemens from 1998 to 2000.

For the period before 2010 the debt audit committee will have to show Goldman Sachs's active involvement in tampering with Greece's accounts and how it impacted on the debt. [49] It should also show the consequences of the Greek government's presents to Greek banks and how one of the main Greek financial empires, namely that of tycoon Latsis, illegitimately, even illegally, profited by it. The impact on Greek debt of Greece entering the Eurozone will also be examined.

Conclusion

The audit commission should determine which part of the debt contracted by the Greek government both before and after the Troika intervened is illegitimate, illegal, odious, and unsustainable. It will also expose the responsibilities of those who profited by it, both in Greece and abroad, in financial circles, among the CEOs of transnational corporations, and within European institutions.

When she was sworn in as President of the Greek Parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou promised that steps would be taken to ensure that the Parliament made an essential contribution to supporting the claim that most of the debt had to be cancelled and that dispositions containing the current humanitarian crisis had to be integrated. She said parliamentary diplomacy was neither a mere ritual nor the equivalent of public relations. She added that there should be a parliamentary demand for a fair solution that would benefit the Greek people, with cancellation of part of the debt and a moratorium on repayment, and calling upon other parliaments and other European peoples that are already marching to show their solidarity with the Greek people. [50]

As Zoe Konstantopoulou told Le Monde on 7 March 2015 "People have a right to demand that any part of the debt that the commission should prove illegal be cancelled."

Translation : Christine Pagnouille et Vicki Briault

"We have to prepare ourselves for upheavals"

8 April 2015, by Florian Wilde

What is the significance of this year's World Social Forum (WSF) for the Kurdish left?

The social question and the concept of society in general have acquired more and more significance for the Kurdish liberation movement over the last few years. The WSF gives us the opportunity converse with leftist,

socialist, feminist and popular movements from all over the world, to present our own struggle as well as to get impressions from other struggles. This is why it is such an important event for us and we are trying to participate in the program with a series of meetings.

The "Arab Spring" has turned into

an "Arab Winter" in many places. The only example where elements of an alternative form of social organization are visible is the autonomous northern Syrian region of Rojava, which is mainly inhabited by Kurds. Has the Arab left reflected on this experience?

This has been the case so far,

although not as much as we would have hoped. My impression is that the Arab left still clings on to concepts from the 20th century, to nationalism and the fixation on the state. This is where an engagement with the concepts and strategies of democratic confederalism, as conceived by Abdullah Öcalan and currently implemented by the Kurdish movement, can open up a new perspective. But it is also we as the Kurdish left that have a duty to seek an exchange of opinions more actively.

You are the chairwoman of the Kurdish Centre for Women's Affairs in Erbil. Does your work focus exclusively on Kurdistan or do you seek dialogue with the wider region?

We are a very young organization. In fact, it's been less than a year since we were founded. We try on the one hand to strengthen relations between women's organizations in all four parts of Kurdistan and to develop a deeper foundation for our common work based on our diversity. We

participate in the construction of a united women's front in Kurdistan, especially now given the attacks by the "Islamic State". We have to defend our dignity, our people, our gender and our values. We try on the other hand to communicate the experiences of our women's liberation movement beyond Kurdistan to the wider Middle East.

Europe has long been the focus of our work abroad. Today, the Middle East has become more central. The model of a democratic confederalism, like the one we're building in Rojava and based on self-management, ecology and women's liberation, can set an example for other struggles in the region. We've seen during the Arab Spring that the people were not adequately prepared for such a process. We have to better prepare ourselves for the next round of upheavals.

How valid is the impression that socialism as a final goal and as a method has subsided within

Kurdish movement in favour of other concepts?

I don't think that we're moving away from socialist concepts. The leftist Kurdish liberation movement was always inspired by socialism and still is. But it tries to further theoretically develop the idea of socialism and to link the different struggles in the Middle East to a socialist perspective. The change of paradigm within the Kurdish movement was the result of our reflection on the collapse of "really-existing socialism", which spawned a series of entirely new concepts like communalism, democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy. But what we mean by these is essentially a form of democratic socialism for the 21st century.

This translation was funded by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation.

Translation: Leandros Fischer

*The interview originally appeared in the German daily **Junge Welt** on the 28th of March 2015.*

Ciudadanos - the false change

8 April 2015, by Josep María Antentas

Ciudadanos is the relay the system needs when its traditional instruments of domination and political representation are no longer useful. It is the guarantee that the decline of the PP and PSOE does not create a political vacuum that can be filled exclusively by Podemos. The function of Albert Rivera's party is both to facilitate the possibility of an unexpected last-minute support for bipartisanship, and to ensure that in the event of irreversible collapse, the end of the PP-PSOE alternation is not accompanied by a political rupture and to make possible an orderly transition to a post-bipartisan system where everything remains intact. A new "exemplary" transition, reminiscent of the first one and its intrepid and consensual statesmen,

which is precisely what is now collapsing, is what Rivera seems to promise. An exit from the tunnel of crisis by the "centre". Or by the right.

The tranquil change promised by Rivera is in reality non-existent change, change without content. Change whose real substance evaporates into the black hole of unfulfilled promises. Change that leaves everything the same, which feeds on the illusion of change without risk, the fallacy of a positive future for the majority which comes without disturbing those at the top and incurring their wrath. It embodies a superficial, epidermal, regeneration whose sole depth is the lightness of its intentions. It sells a hope empty of content, its formula being the classic combination of promises of renewal

and moderation. Proposals of transformation and regeneration but within norms that in reality do not leave room for anything different, beyond the individualistic wishful thinking of a centrist electorate for an economic and social scenario more favourable to their aspirations, to give themselves and the system a second chance. Its advance comes against a background of de-politicization after decades of devastation and social dismantling, the advance of neo-liberalism and consumerism, and the political-cultural decomposition of the left in all its facets.

Ciudadanos promises a democratic regeneration disconnected from any change in economic policy, delinked from the political, economic and social crisis. It isolates the discrediting of

the party system from the economic and social model, with the hollow promise of democratic regeneration, de facto reduced to a mere replacement of elites, accompanied by a conventional neoliberal economic policy (dotted with isolated social promises which are unreal within a neoliberal schema), and a last-ditch defence of the unity of Spain from a party of Catalan origin. All wrapped up in telegenic renewal and modernity. Regenerationism peppered with a hard-line Spanish centralism and economic orthodoxy is the best news that the Ibex 35 could receive. The best since the Podemos nightmare began.

Rivera is an upstart in Spanish politics but not in politics in general. His party began its journey in Catalonia in 2006, breaking into the Parliament with 3% of the vote and 3 deputies, who were re-elected in 2010 after overcoming a difficult first few years marked by internal dissension and lack of cohesion, and it increased its representation to 9 deputies in 2012 with 7.58% of the votes. In its early days it emerged as a party whose main distinguishing feature was opposition to Catalan nationalism, coupled with a “regenerationist” rhetoric against the traditional parties and an innovative style. Sponsored by a handful of anti-nationalist Catalan intellectuals, many of them close to the PSOE and the PSC, it avoided labelling on the left-right spectrum as much as it could, growing initially to a good extent among the anti-nationalist Catalan Socialist electorate, although boosted by the more conservative media, who saw the new party as a battering ram against the rising tide of Catalanism and separatism. Its recent electoral growth in Catalonia is attributable to former PP voters

disillusioned with cuts and corruption. And it is precisely among the “centrist” voters of the PP that they plan to base their electoral expansion in their leap into Spanish politics. Ciudadanos can be to the PP and UPyD what Podemos has been to the PSOE and IU.

Despite its apparent centre-left origins and attempts to escape any ideological label, in the Catalan parliament it has had a conservative profile, although avoiding stridency except in its visceral opposition to Catalan nationalism, and cultivating a “centrist” image suitable for all audiences. Aspects of its voting record show the actual content of its alleged project of regeneration: in 2014 it voted against the establishment of a tax levied on bank deposits and increased inheritance tax, and it abstained on the proposal to create a standard on the emission of polluting gases, as well as on the law on business opening hours restricting the ultra-neoliberal proposal of the Spanish government, and a motion calling for the withdrawal of the reactionary draft bill on abortion of Minister Gallardón. Not forgetting, of course, its infamous proposal in April 2013 favouring the withdrawal of the European health insurance card to undocumented immigrants, a proposition which however was not presented in person in parliament by Rivera, always willing to cultivate an image of moderation and balance. Guided by its new key adviser Luis Garicano, a neoliberal economist from the London School of Economics (LSE), its recent economic recipes to exit the crisis, including the central proposal of a single contract, also point to a clear pro-market and pro-business vision. Few surprises await us in Rivera’s tranquil change.

We live in a period of intense political volatility, marked by a partisan identification and “fluid” electoral behaviour (to use the expression of Zygmunt Bauman), in which the old electoral loyalties electoral dissolve but the new are not yet solidified. We don’t know if the current bipartisanship will move towards a four party system, or the relative weight that the PP, PSOE, Podemos and Ciudadanos will have in the new dispensation. For sure there will be complicated forms of governance in which all parties may become trapped in a tangle of dodgy policies of pacts and alliances. And, for this reason, Ciudadanos will experience in the medium term a growing tension between reasons of party, which would push against any short term agreement with the PP and PSOE (unless its leaders are very myopic and are happy with a junior institutional role) and reasons of state (as well as “reasons of Troika”) that can lead it to facilitate governance arrangements after the regional elections of May 24 and the forthcoming general elections.

The crisis of bipartisanship is unquestionable and the political situation remains unusually open, creating real possibilities of rupture, but whose realization is far from assured. The risk is to ward off a four party system, which, while complicating the forms of domination and political control, does not entail the necessary uncontrolled implosion of the current political system that can open a constituent dynamic and instead passes to a long political-institutional agony that could lead eventually to a self-reform from above, given the weakness of popular self-organization from below.

4 April 2015: a landmark in the search for the truth about the Greek debt

6 April 2015, by **Éric Toussaint**

Zoe Konstantopoulou read the decree establishing the said committee consisting of Greek and foreign members and defined its essential mission, namely identifying what part of the Greek debt is illegal, illegitimate, odious or unsustainable, in other words establishing the truth about the Greek debt, providing their findings to the Hellenic parliament, the European parliament, to the national parliaments of the EU member States as well as to the Greek and international public opinion. Zoe K. recalled the suffering imposed on the Greek people by the creditors' demands.

Next the President of the Republic, Prokopis Pavlopoulos, made a substantial speech supporting this major initiative. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and some ten other ministers were also present.

The President of the Hellenic parliament invited MEP Sofia Sakorafa to take the floor. She recounted the five year trial of all those who demand an audit of the debt so as to radically reduce it have been involved in.

Éric Toussaint, Scientific Coordinator of the international team within the committee summed up some of the questions for which the auditing committee will seek answers as it investigates the Greek debt.

The following ministers spoke up in turn: the Defence Minister Panos Kammenos (who is also President of the party of Independent Greeks); the Minister for Administrative Reforms George Katrougalos; the Minister of state for the struggle against corruption Panayotis Nikoloudis; the Minister of justice Nikos Paraskevopoulos; the Minister for European affairs Nikos Chountis; deputy defence Minister Costas Isychos; Finance Minister Yannis Varoufakis; the deputy Minister for culture Nikos Xydakis; the Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks Christos Spirtzis.

The head of the Parliamentary Budget Office Panagiotis Liargkovas and the head of the Parliamentary Scientific Service Professor Pliakos also spoke.

All mentioned essential elements for a successful auditing of the Greek debt, and all committed their ministries or

departments to actively supporting the project.

Afterwards three members of the auditing committee took the floor, namely Cephas Lumina, former United Nations Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt on the full enjoyment of all human rights; Margot Salomon, Director of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at the London School of Economics, and Maria Lucia Fattorelli, former member of the committee auditing the debt of Ecuador and Coordinator of the Citizen Debt Audit-Brazil.

The whole session, that lasted from 2 p.m. to 7.45 p.m., was broadcast live on the Hellenic parliament television channel, which is steadily winning more viewers in the country.

The audit committee will continue its investigation on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

The Sunday session started with jurist Georges Kasamatis' intervention. It was broadcast by the [Hellenic parliament television channel](#) or [here](#).

6 April 2015

Eric Toussaint's speech 4th April 2015 - Hellenic parliament

The Committee will audit the Greek debt in the coming months, aimed at finding out whether part of the Greek public debt is illegitimate, illegal, odious or unsustainable.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, one can propose the following definitions:

- **Illegitimate public debt:** debt that was contracted by a government without considering the public interest, a debt contracted in favour of a privileged minority.

- **Illegal debt:** debt contracted in violation of the current legal or constitutional system.

- **Odious public debt:** granted on conditions that violate fundamental human rights (the social, economic, cultural, civic, and political rights of the people).

- **Unsustainable public debt:** debt that can only be paid back with dire consequences for the people such as a dramatic degradation of their living conditions, of access to health care or education, an increase in unemployment.

In short, debt that undermines basic human rights.

In other words, an unsustainable debt is a debt whose repayment makes it impossible for governments to guarantee to the population fundamental human rights (good public health system, good public educational system, good social protection system, decent wages and pensions, etc.)

Paragraph 9 of Article 7 of Regulation No 472/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 (which strongly undermines the sovereignty of the member States that have to implement adjustment policies) maintains that States subject to structural adjustment should carry out a complete audit of public debt in order to explain why indebtedness increased so sharply and to identify any irregularities. Here is the text in full: "A Member State subject to a macroeconomic adjustment programme shall carry out a comprehensive audit of its public finances in order, inter alia, to assess the reasons that led to the building up of excessive levels of debt as well as to track any possible irregularity". [51]

Citizen participation is fundamental to a rigorous and independent audit process.

Here are some key questions that could be tackled by auditing the Greek debt.

Greek debt was at 113% of GDP in 2009 before the onset of the Greek crisis and the intervention by the IMF and the European institutions involved in the Memorandum reached 175% of GDP in 2014. How could we explain that? Are there irregularities in the

huge increase of the debt?

The audit will analyse the legality and legitimacy of the so-called bail-out process.

Is it in conformity with European treaties (especially Article 125 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, which prohibits EU countries from taking on the financial engagements of another EU country)?

Did it comply with normal EU decision making procedure?

Did the public lenders in 2010 (the 14 EU countries that granted Greece EUR53 billion of loans, the IMF, the ECB, the European Commission etc.) respect the full consent of the borrower, Greece, or was Greece acting under coercion?

Did these creditors impose one-sided conditions such as excessive interest rates on the loans? [52]

Did the 14 EU member States that each granted Greece a bilateral loan respect their own laws and constitutions, as well as those of Greece?

Another purpose is to audit the actions of the IMF. We know that at the IMF Executive Board meeting of 9 May 2010 several members of the IMF Executive Board (the Brazilian, the Swiss, the Argentine, the Indian, the Chinese members) had expressed considerable reservations regarding the loan granted by the IMF, pointing out, among other things, that Greece would not be able to repay it due to the policies that were being imposed on the country. [53]

Recently, Paulo Nogueira Batista, one of the IMF's executive directors, claims that all IMF board members knew that the loan was actually intended to save the French and German banks not Greece. [54]

Philippe Legrain, advisor to the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso in 2010 when the Troika granted its loan, specifies that "IMF decision makers were overruled by the IMF Managing Director of the time, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who was then running for the French presidency and consequently wanted to prevent French banks from facing losses. Similarly German banks had persuaded Angela Merkel that it would be terrible if ever they should lose money. So the Eurozone governments decided to pretend that Greece was only facing temporary problems.' They had to bypass "an essential principle in the Maastricht Treaty, namely the no-bail out clause. The loans to Athens were not intended to save Greece but the French and German banks that had been foolish enough to grant loans to an insolvent State.'

Private European banks were thus replaced by the Troika as Greece's main creditor as from late 2010.

Has the ECB respected its mandate?

The audit must also evaluate whether the strict conditions imposed on Greece by the Troika in exchange for the loans it received has respected their international human rights obligations - such as the right to health care, to education, housing, social security, to a fair wage, and also freedom of association and collective bargaining.

These rights are protected by a range of conventions or other instruments at international and European level, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the two UN Human Rights Covenants, the UN Charter, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and also the basic conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The audit will need to verify whether, as provided for in Regulation (EU) No. 472/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 May, 2013, mentioned above, "The draft macroeconomic adjustment programme... fully observe[s] Article 152 TFEU and Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union." The audit must also verify whether the following passage of the Regulation is adhered to: "The budgetary consolidation efforts set out in the macroeconomic adjustment programme shall take into account the need to ensure sufficient means for fundamental policies, such as education and health care." It must also be determined whether the following fundamental principle of the Regulation has been applied: "Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides that, in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union is to take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health."

There are also 3 conditions proposed to define an odious debt

- lack of consent;
- lack of benefit to the population;
- awareness of the lenders.

Conclusions: The Committee will audit the Greek debt in the coming months, aimed at finding out whether part of the Greek public debt is illegitimate, illegal, odious or unsustainable.
notes articles:

Statement by Revolutionary Marxist

Organizations in the Arab Region on Yemen

5 April 2015

At midnight, between March 26 and 27, 2015, warplanes belonging to ten Arab and Muslim (Pakistan) countries, led by Saudi Arabia, launched a raid on Yemen, under the pretext of dealing with the sectarian Yemeni militia (the Houthi rebels) believed to be linked to a foreign state, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which threatens to take control of all of Yemen and overthrow the elected authority represented by the Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

The military campaign has attracted a wide range of supporters in Western imperialist governments and was particularly welcomed by most Arab governments, reunited this time, at a summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh, less than two days after the start of hostilities.

Apart from support to the war on Yemen - until the Houthi rebellion is crushed, disarmed, and authority returned to President Hadi - the summit decided to form a joint military force. It is meant to counter what those governments perceive as a threat to the [Arab] nation as a whole, to ensure its protection, and above all, safeguard their own regimes. They put aside all differences and joined hands to quash all revolutionary struggles in the region, which had proved resilient enough to overthrow them.

Saudi Arabia's current meddling in Yemen's affairs is not new. In the 1960s, it wholeheartedly interfered, with all its means, including its military capabilities, to defend the royalists against the Yemeni revolution, supported by the regime of Nasser in Egypt. During the Arab spring, the Saudi Kingdom played a crucial role in quashing the peaceful Yemeni uprisings, by applying pressure with the help of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to impose a settlement, which led to the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, but kept the regime's apparatus

intact and untouched. This paved the way for Saleh, after a long period of hostility, to join forces with Houthi militias, taking control of the capital Sanaa, followed by most of the provinces and regions of Yemen. However, the Houthis are now the allies of the Iranian regime and carrying out the plans of the Ayatollahs, whose nationalist aspirations of a broader Empire is loaded with religious ideology and armed with the weapons of sectarian division.

However, the current Saudi aggression on Yemen has a clear difference from previous interventions, as Riyadh is able to benefit from the US administration's countless wars in the region and the manner in which it conducts new imperialist campaigns since the war on Iraq in 1991. It formed a broad coalition of 9 Arab countries and one non-Arab country (Pakistan) and immediately called on all Arab government, with exception of Syria, to a Summit meeting of the League of Arab States. This was most likely an attempt to achieve the widest mobilization of their military forces to engage in a costly ground war in Yemen in the near future, which is expected to last several months due to the rugged terrain and mountains in the country.

The ground war could also lead to a civil conflict, fuelled by the sectarian divide, which could spill to neighboring countries, Arab and non-Arab. This is in conjunction with the accelerated pace of an arm race in the region, whose biggest beneficiaries are the Imperialist countries and their military institutions. This is added to potential reactions and instability in a region with unbounded wealth and under imperialist control.

It is clear that the primary victims of the attack will be the civilian population, which has nothing to do

with any of the parties in the conflict, added to the devastation of facilities, infrastructure, and the military capabilities of the people of Yemen. This is all in a country considered one of the poorest in the Arab region and the entire world.

Remarkably, the decisions of the Arab summit had no mention of the Palestinian people, despite the recent Israeli war on Gaza, the tremendous human and material loss, and while many of its people are yet to return to their homes awaiting rehabilitation. Moreover, the Zionist enemy continues with settlement-building policies in the West Bank and Jerusalem, with the intent of erasing the homes and buildings, Palestinian agricultural land, as well as the continuous mistreatment of Palestinians, through killing, imprisonment, forced displacement and limitations on mobility. The Summit did not even take the most basic positions of condemnation and denunciation, if not the threat to take various internationally legitimate actions related to deterrence, encouraging acts of resistance, and providing the means to carry out these acts to a people under a permanent occupation, enabled by the treason and cowardice of these accomplice Arab rulers.

In contrast, these rulers have chosen to declare war on another miserable Arab country. They will form a unified Arab military force to engage in a plethora of wars to come, excluding a war with the Zionist state or even responding to any of its aggression. The only war these regimes are interested in conducting will be directed against potential and current popular insurgencies and uprisings within the Arab world, confining their support to the Palestinian cause by paying premiums owed by the Palestinian Oslo authority in the West Bank.

The revolutionary Marxist organizations signatory to this statement, strongly condemn the various acts of aggression carried out by Houthi militias in alliance with the military, which is still controlled by the former tyrant of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and strongly supported by the Islamic Republic of the mullahs of Iran. These organizations also condemn the recent onslaught perpetuated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its allies in this brutal criminal process and calls for the cessation of hostilities between all the parties involved and the withdrawal of all foreign military presence from Yemen. All intervening imperialist factions, be it Iran or the various Gulf regimes, notably Saudi Arabia, must be forced to offer a huge financial compensations to alleviate the grave losses suffered by the

people of Yemen, in recent years, due to the savage interventions by those regimes.

Finally, we demand that the people of Yemen should be allowed, with full freedom, their right to self-determination, and to form an authority by their choosing and own free will, without any outside interference or coercion.

Down with all interferences by foreign reactionary regimes in Yemen, be it Iran or Saudi Arabia and its allies

Down with the chorus of corrupt traitors who met in Sharm El Sheikh

Down with the imperialist support of the reactionary military onslaught

No to civil war and yes to the right to self-determination for the

people of Yemen

Yes to all forms of support to galvanize the mass revolutionary process in Yemen

Yes to the unity of the toiling masses of the Arab region of all nationalities and creeds.

Signatories:

Revolutionary Socialists (Egypt)

Union of Iraqi Communists (Iraq)

al-Munadhil-a (Morocco)

Revolutionary Left Current (Syria)

Leftist Workers League (Tunisia)

Socialist Forum (Lebanon)

Source: [al manshour](#).

Podemos and the Catalan Independence Process

4 April 2015, by **Josep María Antentas**

This Catalonia, in fact, has been losing its protagonistic character since the workers' movement broke up as a central political and social actor, to be replaced by other social movements with greater weight in the middle classes in the full meaning of the term. Suddenly there has appeared a more diverse Catalonia, which in some ways had already burst abruptly into the public squares in the course of the anti-austerity movement, providing a more complex image of what the country is, of its political system, and of the political alignments of its popular layers.

It was a Catalonia that has not been represented up to now (or which had been represented by forces in decline and unreported), led by an alternative and rising political instrument. And indirectly it has complicated even further the political strategy to be followed by the popular forces, which have a complex interaction between

the social and the national and a complicated political architecture to devise as to which identities it refers.

A homogeneous people does not exist, nor does a linear "popular unity." There is a diverse and heterogeneous people, whose collective identity is under construction and which, in so far as its national identity and its relation with the independentist process are concerned, has diverse inclinations or feelings. It was this "people" who enthusiastically attended the meeting with Pablo Iglesias in the Vall d'Hebron in Barcelona last December 21, like those who participated in the massive actions in the neighborhoods and cities by Teresa Forcades [55] and Arcadio Oliveres, [56] or those who identify with David Fernández. [57] This is definitely a people who cannot be reduced to monolithic representations of "popular unity."

An image of an overly homogenous "people," at the decisive moment, can lead to representing what is politically a minority of these people, taking the part for the whole without generating an attractive pole, a sufficiently powerful magnet to serve as the nodal point of a majoritarian bloc that allows a collective congregation around a coherent but plural project in its (self-)representations.

A New Political Synthesis?

How are we to synthesize politically the popular bloc that today looks to divergent possible futures and that remains partially divided as to its identification with the independentist project? This synthesis, as complex as it is essential, difficult but full of potential, is the winning formula in Catalonia. It is the equation that can

defeat Mas and, at the same time, maintain the sovereigntist challenge in order to deal a well-aimed and perhaps decisive blow to the regime that Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez hope to keep afloat.

On the contrary, the risk to be avoided, and which has no future, is one of a fracture of the Catalan popular layers at the base of the sovereigntist process that results in a dual situation with no way out: on the one hand, a minority alternative left (CUP, the sectors more to the left of ERC, etc.) within a sovereigntist bloc (with a political and electoral majority precariously united in everything else), led by CDC and the ERC leadership; on the other hand, a democratic and anti-austerity pole, represented by Podem, [58] outside of the sovereigntist process and, despite its electoral relevance, without the capacity to have a political and electoral majority in Catalonia. That is the two-part losing formula, the formula that drives a bifurcated lethal spear into the heart of the strategy, provoking a political infarction with a tragic ending.

The synthesis perspective consists of defending after September 27 the realization of an act of effective sovereignty, both formal and substantive, by the Parliament of Catalonia, that breaks with the legality of the 1978 framework but without prefiguring the final result in so far as it refers to the relations between Catalonia and the Spanish state. That is, the opening of a Catalan constituent process that lays the bases for a new institutional framework and a new Catalan Republic, whose relationship to the Spanish state is to be discussed at the end of that process.

Those within the popular and working classes who have an independentist horizon, and those who do not, can now come together around the need for an act of unilateral sovereignty and the proclamation of a distinct Republic, an act that would have a dual consequence. First, it would open the door to discussing what model of country we want, in Catalonia, and therefore to “decide everything,” precisely what Mas does not want. Second, it would pose an

unprecedented institutional challenge to the legal framework of 1978 and the Rajoy government, and substantively take a further step forward along the path expressed on November 9.

The correlation of that focus must be to insert the opening of a Catalan constituent process within the perspective of initiating on a state-wide scale particular national and sovereign constituent processes, and feedback processes, to put an end to the Regime of 1978. A Catalan constituent process is neither subsidiary to nor dependent on one that is Spanish, nor is it something that ignores what is happening in the state as a whole. To the contrary, a strategic articulation of the various sovereignties is what can help to smash the pillars that are still standing of the battered post-Francoist political and institutional framework.

The Independentist Process

Podemos and the independentist process pose a challenge to each other. On the one hand, Podemos is forced to a dual challenge. In the first place, to build a national-popular project in the state as a whole, compatible with a plurinational conception of what is now the Spanish state, with the right to self-determination of the distinct nations that are its components, and in the absence of any hierarchical, political or symbolic relationship among them. This necessarily implies a clear defense of the right of the Catalan people to decide, the guarantee of a binding referendum if it comes to govern the state, and above all the acceptance of the right (which does not necessarily imply agreeing with the exercise that is made of it) of the people of Catalonia to decide unilaterally their future given the impossibility of doing so now in a legal referendum under a mutually agreed process.

Secondly, in Catalonia Podem has to construct its own project, which

inevitably must root itself in Catalanismo and relate (in order to attract them) to a sector of the social bases in the independentist process, beginning with those of an ERC that is having growing difficulties in justifying to a portion of its electorate its permanent subordination to Mas. Between backing the independentist process and moving only outside of its confines there is space for a relevant force in Catalonia, but not for one that aspires to be the prop of a winning majority.

On the other hand, Podemos and Podem propose to the independentist process, and to their principal political and social protagonists, beginning with the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), the need to dialogue with an emerging political movement that crystallizes the discontent in a sense distinct from that of independentism. Podem galvanizes a social sector that is (at least partially) outside the independentist process (but that does not recognize itself in the Spain of Rajoy and Sánchez) and, at the same time, it speaks to sectors within that process that might swing away from it given the new possibilities of change offered by Podemos.

The new Catalan and Spanish political context forces a reposing of objectives and strategies for the independentist movement. The first and most important is to widen its popular social base, which is impossible without inserting an explicit social dimension in the movement, breaking with the strategic taboo that has led to doing precisely the contrary. The second is to be able to articulate a dialectical vision between a dynamic of accumulation of forces peculiar to Catalonia and the break at the state level from the institutional framework of the Regime of 1978, looking for mutual synergies and support through the defence of sovereign constituent processes. Unfortunately, both tasks have shone by their absence in the debate of recent months, which has been ridiculously centred around the advisability or not of a single independentist list on September 27, starkly illustrating the strategic limits of the approach of the ANC and the independentist mainstream. Very big challenges on the one hand, but strategic small-mindedness on the

other. A bad combination, for sure.

With elections having been called for next September 27, the challenge is to put together a successful popular bloc that breaks with the Mas-ERC coalition. One that puts another alternative on the table, that points to new possibilities. This means breaking from the political and discursive framework fixed by Mas (and the other central actors of Catalan politics), but without pretending to play yet some other game or to stand alongside them but rather to reformulate the debate on

independence and sovereignty, carrying those concepts to the end, drawing on the democratic thread, extending them to cover all spheres and thus proposing a democratic and participatory Catalan constituent horizon as a framework for shared convergence of all the processes of change.

Right to decide? Of course, but on all subjects, beginning with economic policy. Independence and sovereignty? Yes of course, but then let us talk about the Transatlantic Trade and

Investment Partnership (TTIP). Plebiscitary elections? Why not. But on all issues, not only on independence. On Mas itself, on the cutbacks, on austerity, on corruption.

With that focus, the possible futures, now bifurcated, can begin to be convergent. And from that point on there is no reason to limit the scope of our dreams or our confidence in our options. â€œ

Translated by Richard Fidler

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