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The Deepening Mediterranean Tragedy and the EU's Military Response

31 May 2015, by **Nizar Visram**

Things are bound to get worse before getting better. It is estimated that in 2015, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 refugees will cross the Mediterranean and land in the European Union. So far some 1,600 people have died during crossing. These figures are the known cases, many more having died in undetected vessels. The numbers are on the rise: in 2011, 58,000 people tried to enter the EU across the waters, while the figure grew to 218,000 in 2014.

Most of the migrants crossing the Mediterranean in fact are not Libyans. They come from as far as the Sudan, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Eritrea, Somalia, Senegal, and Ghana, running for their lives due to either sectarian conflicts at home or pervasive poverty. Many more come from Syria. These are the countries that face serious internal crises

intensified by western military interference. In desperation, these migrants scraped together approximately \$2,000 for the trip across the sea on wobbly vessels, run by gangs of human traffickers.

The coastguards of Italy, Malta, and Greece have rescued thousands of such migrants from the hazard of Mediterranean Sea. They have been feeling isolated and left alone to deal with what they termed "the cemetery of the Mediterranean Sea." The European Union (EU) put forward a proposal to rescue the African migrants, but the suggestion went under with a deadlock as to who is going to "share the burden". The proposals included joint search-and-rescue patrols, establishing resettlement quotas. Some EU members such as France, Spain, and Britain rejected the idea of quotas for

sharing migrants among them, while others suggested deploying military forces to Libya to keep migrants as far away from Europe as possible.

The European Commission reacted to the boat tragedy with plans to set up offshore camps in Libya and Tunisia, to lock up and pre-empt asylum seekers before they cross the Mediterranean. It has been described ingenuously as "outsourcing border control and containment mechanisms to prevent departures." Italy's foreign minister even called for air strikes in Libya against ISIL positions there.

The general agreement among EU is that something needs to be done and the first proposal was to send more ships to the Mediterranean so as to ensure that fewer people die due to unseaworthy vessels crammed with their human cargo. On the other hand,

some European bureaucrats are toying with the idea of military strikes to destroy smuggling vessels before they leave Libya. However, they have been cautioned by activists that the last thing the African refugees need is more assaults and bombing—especially coming from the very countries that they expect to beg for asylum.

EU ministers sanctioned a plan for a new naval force to intercept smugglers before their boats reach Europe. It was reported that the EU parliament was drafting a United Nations resolution to authorize the deployment of military off the coast of Libya in order to “capture” and “destroy” the boats. Two rival “governments” in Libya, however, have indicated their opposition to the plan, saying any deployment of troops to Libyan waters would be a violation of the country’s sovereignty.

Meanwhile, some European political parties have embarked on their anti-immigrant and xenophobic tendencies to obstruct immigrants from entering their countries while deporting those who managed to sneak in. Italy’s ultra-nationalist Northern League called on the authorities to stop “by any means” any accommodation of further refugees. The party said it “was ready” to take steps to prevent their arrival. Similarly, Germany refugee centers have been targeted with fire bombings, while ultra-right groups such as Pegida have conducted racist campaigns, attacking immigrants as “social spongers”. Such right-wing ultra nationalist groups have even received implicit sympathy from governing parties such as Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Meanwhile, it was revealed that the

EU is planning a military strategy against the refugee transport networks in the Mediterranean. Documents disseminated by WikiLeaks say the operation contains “detailed plans to conduct military operations to destroy boats used for transporting migrants and refugees in Libyan territory, thereby preventing them from reaching Europe.” The whistleblower website exposed two classified documents which indicate that the plan was approved by delegates of all 28 EU member states on May 18. The project has no well-defined “political end state” which means they are looking at a sweeping military operation without a clear end goal.

In reaction to this, more than 300 European migration academics and scholars have condemned the EU’s envisioned use of military might against migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean. They have come out against the EU’s plan of military intervention against the boats crossing the Mediterranean. The academics argued that any attempt to justify military intervention by comparing the Mediterranean boats with the 18th century clampdown on the slave trade is “entirely self-serving” and based on “a parody of history.”

It is likely that the military option will do nothing to curtail the flow of immigrants escaping conflicts in their destabilized countries or looking for jobs. For them the long-term solution lies in social development of the countries they come from. This means investment in sustainable development, and an end to plundering of resources. It means better education systems, better medical system, and better shelters. It means a prohibition on the sale of weaponry to these countries.

European and NATO countries need to criminalize the arms trade and cease supplying weapons for wars in countries such as Syria. These Western countries have to take responsibility because they have in various ways created the current turmoil. They can find money for global warfare yet they can’t find the money to rescue the refugees running away from the war zones they create.

Apart from the influx of migrants from Africa, we have also to look at those coming from the Middle East. This is the direct result of the military invasion carried out by the US and its NATO allies. They have sustained and shared the military operations in Iraq, Libya, Syria and now Yemen. As a result the Middle East and large portion of Africa has plunged into disarray and disorder. By 2014, it is estimated that two million of the six million inhabitants of Libya fled the country, as a result of US-French-British bombardments. The current US-led drive at regime change in Syria has driven the country into total disarray, disorder, and deaths, with the subsequent exit of an estimated four million refugees. Most of them fled to the neighboring countries, while many others have taken the difficult and deadly path to Europe.

A new theatre is unfolding with the US and Saudi Arabia embarking on a new battlefield in Yemen. This is bound to lead to a great number of refugees seeking asylum. Meanwhile, as increasing number of distressed citizens seek sanctuary in Europe, the EU is converting the Mediterranean into a graveyard, hoping that this will serve as deterrent to others.

May 29, 2015

Source [Solidarity](#).

LGBT rights: A beacon of liberation for all

30 May 2015, by John McAnulty

It is worth pausing to appreciate the unalloyed joy and triumph of the campaigners and the fillip given to gay

rights across the globe.

In the celebrations that followed the vote it quickly became obvious that the campaigners were not celebrating the victory of gay people alone. This was seen a liberation of young people, of woman, of the working class.

Working class districts in Dublin voted at over 85% for the measure. Young émigrés returned home in their thousands to cast their vote. They were striking back at an alliance of church and state that had kept workers in servitude and forced young people onto the migrant boat. It was a stunning defeat for the clerics.

The referendum was an example of what Marx called the conversion of quantity into quality. The form was of a staid electoral exercise. The content was insurrectionary in character. Although the outcome was expressed in a vote, it had been decided in advance by a whole series of decisions on the streets.

Independent organisation

By far the most decisive of these were the actions of the LGBT community itself. By simply asserting themselves in civic society, by coming out to family and friends, by mobilizing as a social force, they made the old society impossible. As sexual orientation is no respecter of class, the change was everywhere and the referendum was launched with all the major parties supporting a yes vote.

The church launched a formal opposition, but it had already lost. Indeed, after endless revelations about the way in which church and state brutalised women and the poor, the search for revenge became a potent motive for joining the yes campaign.

A third element, largely ignored, was the context over the past year of mass mobilizations and skirmishes with the police in some working class areas around the issue of water charging and privatisation. There is a growing revolt against years of austerity, of

collaboration with the Troika and against a self-satisfied elite that proclaims recovery while workers struggle to survive. That revolt has yet to find full political expression, but is always threatening to break forth.

The ruling class has tried to claim credit for the result with ludicrous assertions about the Irish love of equality while surrounded by a stunningly unequal society where racism and bigotry are openly expressed.

On the other hand, premature claims are made about a post-Catholic society. The church has been humiliated, but despite the loss of popular support, retains a key role in sanctifying capitalist rule, within the state apparatus and in key areas such as health and education.

Extending democratic rights

A number of issues arise from the referendum. Firstly, can further steps be taken in establishing democratic rights? Specifically can we extend LGBT rights in the North and end the barbarous mistreatment of pregnant women both North and South?

Secondly, what mechanisms will be most successful? A broad movement working through state institutions or an activist movement with an insurrectionary flavour?

Finally we must consider if these reforms are readily available inside current structures or if it requires a mobilization of sections of the working class to apply pressure.

Obstacles

In the case of LGBT rights in the North public sentiment is little different to that in the South. Pride marches are widely supported. However there are two immense obstacles to change. The first is the DUP, the second the undemocratic nature of the institutions that gives the party an absolute veto.

There is no chance of the DUP giving way, so the most likely mechanism is a legal challenge to UK courts. Given British reluctance to upset the unionists, mobilizing for reform would clearly be necessary. A major handicap is that many LGBT groups treat the Stormont as a democratic institution, calling on DUP ministers to resign over bigotry while ignoring the party's programme of prejudice and the institutional veto that the DUP hold. A further handicap is the lack of any generalised mobilization - the trade union leaderships recently collapsed a campaign against austerity while mobilization in the South is still a reality.

On the issue of Woman's rights in the South, again there is an immediate issue in that there is no possibility of the major parties supporting reform. Class divisions represent another obstacle, with the well-off able to avoid local restrictions by visiting Britain. Legal and parliamentary campaigns have failed time and again. There is a real need to mobilize and to build a movement for woman's rights across civic society.

We have drawn blood

The existing movement is weak, and a continuation of current mobilizations by the working class could give immense impetus to its growth. At the moment the Right2water movement lacks a united programme or democratic national structure, yet behind it is a growing anger and determination in the working class areas.

They have drawn blood in the decisive victory for LGBT rights. They will be anxious to draw more. Workers, Socialists, feminists, LGBT, should all unite in a democratic and inclusive movement that is willing to step outside the consensus to force change and to give voice to the burning discontent about our imprisonment in a sectarian and undemocratic system offering a future of repression, misery and impoverishment.

Socialist Democracy.

Trouble in paradise: A cautionary tale for big capital in Turkey

29 May 2015, by **Metin Feyyaz**

Industry in Turkey is growing steadily, even while the rest of the Europe has been fighting the effects of the economic crisis and suffering the failed solutions embodied in austerity policies. Especially in the manufacturing sectors, a shift of investment towards Turkey from Europe is readily apparent. Today, Turkey is the world's eighth largest steel producer; in 2011-12, it was the fastest growing one among the top ten steel producing countries in the world. Almost every major automobile manufacturer has a production plant in Turkey and they are shifting partial production from all over Europe to Turkey. Between 2009-2014, employment in auto assembly in Turkey grew 350%. In the first seven months of 2014, Renault, Hyundai, and Toyota plants in Turkey exported 80% of their production; Ford exported 75% and MAN 85 %. Europe remains the largest market for these exports, despite declining demand due to the crisis. FIAT, which has been closing units in Italy, has just announced that they will export 175,000 FIAT Doblo cars from Turkey to the U.S. between now and 2021. This is just one of many examples.

But this profitable business environment for capitalists comes at a steep price for Turkish workers. The minimum wage in Turkey is around 330 Euros; many workers earn only the minimum "according to recent research, more than five million workers. It is quite common even for the skilled workers to be paid the minimum. Turkey has the highest death rate from workplace accidents in the whole of Europe and ranks third in the world. According to official statistics, every year more than 1,000 people die at work, and this is just the official number. Many workers are unregistered so there is no way to know the real figure. Research by a

credible civil organization names 1,886 workers who died in workplace accidents in 2014 alone.

In the past few years a new phenomenon of "subcontracting" has been continually expanding as a new form of precarious work. "Subcontracted" employees work with fewer rights side by side with workers in the same factory who are doing exactly the same job but with different work-conditions. In one factory there might be workers employed by five or six different companies. But this insecure, unorganized "cheap labor paradise" of big capital is not enough for capital. An official government document entitled *National Employment Strategy* declares: "Labor costs other than salaries are too high in Turkey. In order to increase employment, the 'burdens on the employer' must be reviewed and new regulations have to be implemented."

The document explains some of these new regulations in detail. Several new laws are awaiting enactment, including the introduction of a regional minimum wage (a lower minimum wage for some regions of the country), lowering the severance package fund (which would cut severance packages by half) protection of temporary work agencies together with a lot of other flexibility measures.

The vast majority of the Turkish workforce is unorganized; only around 5% of workers are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. This is the lowest unionization rate among the OECD countries. And the majority of these unions are basically company-controlled or "yellow" unions that were not chosen by the workers but got assigned to them somehow. From time to time, there are uprisings against this yellow unionism system. After last year's huge Soma mine massacre

where 301 mine workers lost their lives, the so-called union which is "organized" in that mine could not even enter the region for a while because of the reactions of the workers' families. A worker from the Soma mine interviewed by *Al Jazeera* said: "We didn't choose this union, the employer chose it. Now the employer is in prison because of the deaths, so the union should be there, too."

During the collective bargaining negotiations of 2012, in order to protest the union which they were forced to join, 1,500 Renault workers on one shift stopped production and did not leave the factory. In order to prevent these workers from meeting up with other workers on the next shift, Renault management cancelled that shift. The next day, they dismissed 35 workers in order to put a stop to these workplace actions.

Widespread yellow unionism

Yellow unionism is very widespread in the metal sector. According to official statistics there are 1,400,000 workers in Turkey's metal sector, of which 170,000 are members of Türk Metal, which was built and strengthened during the years of the military junta in the 1980s. As an example, in 1978 Türk Metal had 12,000 members and Maden ?? (an affiliate of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, or DISK) had around 200,000 members. In 1983, just after the military coup, Türk Metal had 130,000 members and Maden ?? was closed down. All of its members, including in workplaces like Renault, Bosch, etc., were taken out of Maden and forcibly given to Türk Metal.

Against this backdrop, the 2014-2016/2017 group collective bargaining negotiations began in the metal sector. Unlike many countries, Turkey has only one level of collective bargaining, the company level. Nationwide or sectoral level collective bargaining does not exist. Group collective bargaining consists of negotiating agreements for a series of companies where a particular union and the Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries (MESS) is represented. So for different workplaces, all three unions separately negotiate with the MESS. This collective bargaining agreement covers around 120,000 workers, which represents only 8.5% of workforce in this sector. Around 100,000 of these workers are "represented" by Türk Metal and a minority, around 12,000, by Birlesik Metal ???. Thus the main force in this so-called "group collective bargaining process" is always the largest yellow union in the country. Every year Birlesik Metal Is organizes demonstrations, actions, etc., during the negotiating process in order to have an impact on the agreement which will be signed by other unions, because in the end the same agreement will be imposed on them. The MESS would never sign a different agreement for 12,000 workers when they have already signed the agreement for another 100,000 workers.

Surprises in 2014 collective bargaining

Everyone was expecting the collective bargaining process to go on in the same way this year. First, the unions presented their contract proposals. Birlesik Metal Is demanded an adjustment of younger workers' wages. In general, there is a huge gap between the wages of older workers and young workers in most of the unionized metal workplaces in Turkey. In some cases, a younger worker who does the same job as their older colleague earns only about half the wage. Since the MESS always wants to introduce pay raises as an across the board percentage of current wage scales, this widens the gap. To help

close this gap, Birlesik Metal Is demanded different pay raises for different wage groups. There were also some political demands which are not normally part of collective bargaining agreements in Turkey, such as lowering the work week from 48 to 37.5 hours, and a demand for employers to pay the increased taxes workers incur because of wage increases. The main intention of these last two demands was to start a public discussion rather than actually win them through collective bargaining.

The MESS put forward their set of demands in these negotiations. They wanted to introduce further flexibility measures, change the duration of collective bargaining agreement from two to three years, and make no wage adjustments for low-wage workers. After a few meetings, the largest union and another very small one signed the collective bargaining agreement as it was proposed by MESS with some minor changes. The MESS withdrew their demands for further flexibility but insisted on a contract duration of three years instead of the two years that had been the practice in the past. In order to sell a three year agreement they gave a slightly better pay rise of 9.78% for the first six months. This would be beneficial to older workers, but for low-wage young workers who make up nearly 60-70% of total workforce in some workplaces, this sort of an increase without any real wage adjustment has little meaning.

Türk Metal suddenly signed the agreement. Their membership was not fully aware of the duration or other details of the agreement; all that was announced was the raise for the first six months. The leadership tried to avoid any discussion on the whole collective bargaining agreement. But this draft agreement stirred a great deal of discontent among the Birlesik Metal Is membership, mainly because of the contract's three year duration. Turkey has high inflation rates and a rather unstable macroeconomic situation. For a majority of the workers, three years is too long a time to predict economic developments. In every previous collective bargaining agreement, it was possible to get some adjustment for the rate of inflation. A three-year agreement would mean

that for every two agreements, workers would lose one agreement, meaning a loss of some extra inflation adjustments.

Closing the pay gap for younger workers

Even though the most visible discontent was around the duration of the agreement, the real reason for most of the workers' discontent was that there is no real improvement for low-waged workers. In some cases, a worker who started after 2005 might be paid around half the wage of a worker who started before the 2000s. This situation creates huge tension among the younger workers. Their wages are so low they cannot see a future for themselves. Since they cannot live on these wages it does not matter too much if they lose their jobs. They have nothing to fear and nothing to lose. This makes them the most militant section of the class.

This generation of workers represents almost 60% of the workforce and perhaps even more for the Türk Metal's membership, which is organized in bigger factories with greater turn-over. This new generation of workers would never accept an agreement without any plans to narrow this wage gap. Even though it was not the plan of the union leadership, the base of the union put so much pressure on the organization during the assemblies that the Birle?ik Metal ??? leadership was forced to take a strike vote during the collective bargaining period.

But a strike during collective bargaining negotiations with the MESS is quite different from a strike at the company level. Since MESS will not sign different agreements with the unions, companies must resign their MESS affiliation in order to sign individual collective bargaining agreements. This causes another problem. For some larger workplaces, ending affiliation to the MESS might be advantageous, but in smaller firms it might mean that in the next collective bargaining round those workplaces will be isolated and the

unions there would have much less influence.

A defiant strike

The strike started on January 29 and was quite successful, covering 15,000 workers in around 50 factories across the country. As early as the first day of the strike, the largest companies started to resign their affiliation to the MESS and signed bilateral agreements with the union. These companies included multinationals like Alstom, Schneider, Bekaert. Then on the second day, the government intervened. The Ministerial Cabinet published a Governmental Decree banning the strike on the basis of "national security." Just after the Government Decree, employers declared a two-day holiday for the entire workforce in order to calm the situation. But sufficient calm was not restored. Even though the workers were forced back to work, they did not do any production inside the plants. This situation was also ended, with further protocols with these employers in addition to the agreement with the MESS.

But for the majority of this sector in workplaces organized by Turk Metal, the low wage problem had not even been addressed. The anger was seething there, ready to explode. At the end of April, Renault workers started to demonstrate at the beginning and end of each shift. Soon after, these demonstrations began in almost every automobile factory in the Bursa region. These demonstrations were sparked by the fact that Turk Metal had signed a better collective bargaining agreement at the Robert Bosch company and a much worse one for their other workplaces. The Bosch contract was better because Bosch workers had changed their union three years ago and resigned from this yellow union, Türk Metal. They were later forced to go back to Türk Metal by the employer after some dismissals and pressures in the workplace. In order to head off discontent and any possible union change again, the company and Türk Metal signed a much better contract. But they did not calculate that this would create much greater discontent in other workplaces.

On April 18, workers at Renault Bursa began demonstrating at the end of their shift by chanting "we don't want a union that's for sale." After that, they organized demonstrations against Türk Metal at the beginning and end of every shift. At one point while these demonstrations were going on with more than half of the workforce participating, workers met with the local union president and told him "you sold us" and he replied "if I sold you, that means I am a good pimp."

There were several points at which the nature of these demonstrations changed. These comments of the local union president were one of these points. After that conversation, the entire workforce started to join the demonstrations. Renault Bursa employs around 4,800 blue collar workers. Since it is a huge factory, most of the workers do not even know each other and there is no effective communication channel between workers in different departments. That is why the internet, especially facebook, played a strong role in organizing these demonstrations. Because of facebook, other workers in the Bursa region also organized demonstrations in their workplaces.

The Renault workers decided to meet in front of the mosque of the industrial zone on May 5 to collectively resign from Türk Metal. This marks the second turning point in this protest. Türk Metal thugs attacked workers at this meeting. One worker was hospitalized. This attack strengthened Renault workers' determination and anger against this union grew among workers in other Türk Metal organized workplaces. Workers from Tofa? which is the FIAT subsidiary in Turkey, organized a massive demonstration during their shift against their Türk Metal shop steward, who had gone to Renault to beat up workers there. During the demonstration workers were chanting "come here and beat us up, too." Ever since these events, shop stewards of this yellow union have not been able to enter the plant.

These demonstrations disturbed employers, who more and more were thinking of measures to stop these actions. At first they tried to threaten workers. At Renault management

distributed a letter to the workforce, saying that "their demonstrations are disturbing workplace peace and constitute a crime and they will be dismissed if they continue with these actions." These threats caused some worries among the Renault workers, especially since these workers knew that 30 workers had been dismissed in 2012 for protesting against this yellow union. They feared dismissal and, after discussions, decided if someone's time card wouldn't work when they entered their shift then the entire workforce would leave the plant and wait in the factory yard. For several days, workers waited in front of the factory until the last service bus arrived and would walk into the plant all together. Finally, on the 6th of May night shift, when the workers of the 24.00-08.00 shift arrived, the cards of some workers did not work. The entire shift left the plant and workers from other shifts and from neighboring factories coming off shift began to arrive in front of Renault and wait in the factory yard. Around 4.00 am, company management made a declaration to around 2,000 workers, saying that the dismissed workers would be reinstated, everyone is free to join or not to join any union they wish, and there would not be any dismissals because of unionization. Management also asked for 15 days to formulate and deliver a promise about the pay rise issue. After this declaration, all the workers went back to work, but they had gained more self-confidence and courage from seeing the strength they have when they act together.

Strike spreads

In the meantime, demonstrations continued at almost every factory organized by Türk Metal in Bursa region and workers massively resigned from this yellow union. On May 13, Renault management announced that the next day before every shift the General Manager would organize a meeting with the workers. Workers were asked to arrive early. Workers from 08.00-16.00 were told by the General Manager, "There will be no pay rises and if there is another work stoppage workers will be dismissed." Workers protested this

and went back to their jobs. When the workers of the 16.00-24.00 shift arrived, they did not join the meeting and at the end of their shift at 00.00, when the next shift arrived, they did not leave the plant and the next shift did not go inside. Workers from 16.00-24.00 shift have been inside the plant ever since and no production is going on.

The next day, workers from Tofa? (FIAT) joined them and also stopped production by not leaving the plant. Afterwards, workers from other workplaces like, Mako Magnetti Marelli, Johnson Controls, Co?kunöz â€” suppliers for the auto industry in Bursa â€” joined them. In a week, these wildcat strikes against the yellow union and for compensatory pay raises started in automotive factories in other cities. Ford and Türk Traktör (Case New Holland) joined them as well.

These demonstrations and strikes all erupted spontaneously. There is very weak communication among workers from different factories; they mainly communicate through facebook postings. This creates a lot of confusion and space for manipulation by the employers. Renault workers are probably the best organized among all these workers. In each UET (small production units in Renault language, consisting of around 20 workers) there is one representative and then there are departments which consists of several UETs. In each department there is one spokesperson for each

shift and there are three shifts, meaning three spokespeople in each department. But from among these three there is one department spokesperson. There are eight departments so there are eight representatives/spokespeople. After a while the company was forced to accept these representatives and started to negotiate with them. The Governor of Bursa met with these representatives several times during which the company presented some offers. Each time the workers' representatives went back to their plant and explained the offer and asked workers whether or not they were acceptable. At the same time, employers were threatening dismissal and arrests. Renault and Tofa? management petitioned the prosecutor's office for criminal charges against these workers and department spokespeople were taken to the prosecutor's office for depositions. Even under this pressure, up to now workers haven't given in to these threats.

The future â€” a new generation

Renault factories in Flins and Le Mans, Dacia Romania and probably Spain will be affected by these work stoppages in Renault Bursa and production may be halted. This situation puts Renault management in a difficult position. At this point they cannot produce any Renault Clio 4's, which is one of their best selling

models. Renault management is ready to give the workers whatever they want, but the Metal Employers Association is blocking them because such a victory would mean that collective bargaining agreements in all workplaces would have to be altered.

Similar actions against the state-sponsored yellow unions of Turk Metal happened in 1998. At that time, the companies managed to contain the situation with false promises to the workers and mass dismissals afterwards. This time, workers seem to have learned a lot from their past experiences. From the very start, they blocked the company from dismissing any of their colleagues and they managed to built strong movement of wildcat strikes and factory occupations around the country.

Naturally, the companies attempt to ensure that production goes on and look for ways to contain this situation and restore the previously established order in the metal industry. They know they have to find a middle ground with their workers right now, but in the medium term they will also try to repress workers again through dismissals of leaders of this movement and try to bring back Türk Metal or built another yellow union. But one thing is clear after all this agitation. Whatever the outcome of these militant actions, the generation of new, young and futureless metal workers have now taken the stage. The successes they have achieved ensure that nothing will be the same again.

Migrating to uncertainty - Debt-trap and exploitation

28 May 2015, by Sushovan Dhar

Only 10 months into his job, he carried a debt of Rs150,000 (\$1,500) which was paid to a broker who arranged it. Puri, who borrowed this amount at 36% interest, is now badly trapped. He needs to spend time in Nepal to

look after his family and rebuild a shelter, but the length of his stay would also lengthen the debt burden. His salary of \$250 a month is insufficient to see off the loan as most of his income is exhausted on his

family's basic needs.

Not only in Nepal but in many impoverished parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, agents demand large amounts of money from aspirant

migrants, forcing desperate men from these regions to take loans with outrageous interest rates to meet the demands. The limited scope of legally-authorized migration, increasing restrictive immigration policies, and tighter border controls by receiving countries make it a lucrative market for migration services flourish. The expanded and wide-ranging fees for their services are frequently very high. This leads to hapless migrants getting entangled in different forms of debt to a variety of parties.

Debt imposes conditions

Such indebtedness may not essentially be to the agents providing migration services. The agents mostly insist upon payment once the journey has been made. This results in a patchwork of loans from money-lenders or other agencies at home or abroad that migrants resort to in order to obtain the huge amounts required to pay for their passage and a job.

It is not an exception that savage means are often used to force their families at home into paying off, throwing migrants under immense pressure to repay the debts by any means possible. In a number of cases, large debts can make migrants defenceless against forced labour in destination countries.

Last November, the brutal murder of two Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong invited a lot of reaction. More so because the two victims, Sumarti Ningsih and Seneng Mujasih, were sex workers and both of them had landed at Hong Kong as domestic workers. But after losing her job, Mujasih overstayed her visa and resorted to the sex trade since she hadn't been able to pay her agency fees. Steep recruitment fees are, in numerous occasions, responsible for pushing women towards prostitution.

According to Hong Kong-based NGO Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, huge amounts are collected in the name of placement and training. Such fees range from 31,000-37,000 Hong Kong dollars while the wage is around

4,110 Hong Kong dollars (\$530). Often, they have to pay their whole salaries to service the debt, leaving them with nothing to survive yet compelled to borrow more and landing permanently in a vicious debt-cycle.

This debt-cycle intemperately curtails people's chances to fend for themselves and, in addition to the anxiety of losing their freedom and being deported, creates conditions in which they dragged into highly exploitative, often lurid, employment relations and extremely pitiable working conditions. The situation for migrant workers, especially in the Gulf countries, is often miserable. Many are forced to take on hazardous work in terrible heat.

Till date, more than 400 migrant workers, mostly Nepalese, have perished on Qatar's building sites since the country won its bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2022, prompting demands of shifting the competition somewhere else.

The Kafala system, a sponsorship procedure used to regulate migrant workers in Qatar and the Gulf countries, confines workers to single employers who sponsor their visas. This infamous practice bestows extensive powers to the employer and imposes massive restrictions on migrant workers.

There are extensive reports of coercion, abuses, exploitation, and other mistreatments by sponsors using this legal system. Stories of torture, rape, and murder are also common. This widely condemned system is akin to modern slavery. However, many migrants in other regions and countries face similar conditions as immigration laws and regulations tie them to specific jobs with specific employers.

These regulations secure the temporal transience and spatial fixation of the migrant workers and hinders their free movement in the "free" labour market to which they belong, in theory. Though such workers are not legally bound to the individual employer, in reality they have very limited mobility and are treated like bound-labourers.

Amran from Bangladesh wanted to escape the drudgery of unemployment back home and longed to work abroad. This 23-year-old borrowed money, at high interests, from wherever he could, managing the \$7,000 needed to pay a local Bangladeshi agent to obtain employment as a construction worker in Singapore.

Only nine months into his job in concrete assembly, Amran fell and broke his leg so severely that his bones popped out through his skin. In spite of doctor's advice to keep him in the hospital for further medical care and treatment, his employer sent him back to the worker's dormitory barely a week later, with a metal plate and 60 screws inserted into his leg.

Left to fend for himself with a supply of pills and food supplied by friends, he's eventually healed but left with a permanent disability and a large debt. He currently finds himself unemployable. Singapore, a model for stability and business-friendliness, employs around a million foreign workers to keep its economy running, especially in its booming construction sector and shipyard operations. However, when it comes to worker-friendliness, numerous stories similar to Amran's suggest something terrible.

Debt-trap and exploitation

Labour migration and the associated debt-trap leads to grievous restriction on workers' freedoms, fixing them into immensely asymmetrical relations of power and dependence. A careful scrutiny would suggest that countries dependent on migrant workers frame immigration policies in such a manner that the latter is deprived of independent access to the labour market or any mobility within.

They are often given short-term work permits, and a range of additional restrictions on their rights and freedoms are imposed, depending on the country, and on the particular type of work permit they are issued. They are sometimes legally prohibited from joining trades unions, and deliberately left out of labour legislations and

safeguards that exist for other workers.

Such conditions create extremely coercive forms of exploitation. On the other hand, it might take months, or even years, for a number of ordinary migrant workers, especially manual workers, to repay debts incurred in order to migrate. Regrettably, during this time, they are most likely to

experience violence and physical confinement, as well as severe labour exploitation due to their indebtedness and other liabilities.

Sadly enough, many countries in the south which depend on migrant remittances to cover their balance of payments and propel their economy, lack the requisite pro-activity to safeguard the citizens. Thus, migrant

workers, caught in a vicious cycle of debt and abominably exploitative working conditions, do not have anyone to look out for them and are condemned to such inhumane conditions for the rest of their existence.

19 May 2015

ESSF

Making the world safe for Big Business

28 May 2015, by Sean Starrs

And when the future of global capitalism seems to hinge on the relations between China and the United States, why is the US not allowing the world's largest exporter, China (which has expressed interest), to join the TPP negotiations?

With the phenomenal growth of many formerly Third World countries (or "emerging markets"), including China, leading to the expansion and heightened integration of global capitalism, the ideal world envisaged by American state planners in the 1940s and 1950s "one open and friendly to American business in particular but Western capitalism in general" is finally being established beyond their wildest dreams. Virtually every state (albeit unevenly) now equates national development with increasing international competitiveness, and making their nations safe for global capital (which more often than not means American capital).

Geopolitically, the destruction of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the ongoing war in Syria, and the US's apparently warming relations with Cuba and Iran, have shortened the list of stridently "anti-American" (in other words geopolitically independent from the US) regional rivals, even if Russia has recently been put back on the list.

But there is a snag in this seven-decade-long expansion and consolidation of global capitalism

under the hegemony of the United States: China is half-in, half-out.

On the one hand, the transformation of China from being one of the twentieth century's leading anticapitalist and anti-Western imperialist nations to, by the twenty-first century, being one of the nations most eager to integrate with global capitalism "has been surprising to say the least, and certainly a boon for American capital.

On the other hand, China, a paradoxical bastion of illiberal/liberal state capitalism, remains relatively geopolitically independent from the United States. Of all the large economies, China is at once one of the most open and closed to foreign capital on Earth. Many sectors related to the commanding heights "such as banking, energy, telecommunications, and utilities" are totally closed to foreign capital. Many other sectors, however, are relatively open, and foreign investment has penetrated China more deeply than most other large economies (like Japan), especially those at similar levels of development.

Nevertheless, despite the central role of foreign direct investment in fueling China's growth over the past three decades, the state maintains far more restrictions on foreign investment than most other countries. In the 2015 Catalogue of Industries for Guiding Foreign Investment, China stipulates

thirty-six industries in which foreign investment is completely prohibited and thirty-eight industries in which it is restricted (foreign firms are often forced to form joint ventures with Chinese firms). While there were many more restricted sectors when the first Catalogue was released in 1995, American capital clearly wants the liberalization of China's industries to go further, faster.

American capital also has a beef with China's lax protection of foreign intellectual property (IP) rights. Sometimes the Chinese state explicitly encourages the copying of Western IP through technology transfer requirements, and copycats and imitators abound. High-speed trains and consumer goods like pharmaceuticals, clothing, and electronics are all fair game. Chinese consumers were even wearing bootleg "Apple Watches" months before Apple released its own version.

China is no longer just the "workshop of the world" and a super-exploitable export platform for foreign capital "it is already one of the world's most important consumer markets across a range of sectors including automobiles, smartphones, luxury goods, and fast food. The rising importance of the Chinese consumer market makes IP protection and investor arbitration a top priority for big global companies. But foreign investors have long since discovered that the illiberal and nationalist

Chinese state, with its capricious legal system, is an unreliable protector of their interests in China.

So while China has certainly abandoned its anticapitalist worldview, and is even now being accused of European-style neo-colonialism by some African leaders because of its investment practices (a charge that is particularly ironic since China supported many anticolonial struggles in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s), China's ruling class "as manifested in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)" does not prioritize the interests of foreign capital nor American hegemony.

Instead, the CCP prioritizes the maintenance of its own power. Sometimes this involves opening up to foreign capital in certain sectors to drive accumulation and technological upgrading, but overall, the Chinese economy is state-owned and state-directed, and Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) still take pride of place in most of the commanding heights. Foreign capital complains bitterly about the preferential treatment given to SOEs, especially via financing and the legal system.

China's economic success over the past three decades has also made its version of state capitalism a beacon for other countries. Brazil has increasingly warmed to it, Russia under Putin has reinvigorated it, and India, not to mention France, have arguably never abandoned it. Of course, the United States also nationalized swathes of its "private sector" (AIG, Chrysler, Citigroup, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, General Motors "to name some of the prominent examples) in the wake of the 2008 Wall Street crash, but these measures were largely seen as temporary and a deviation from the liberal norm of public-private separation "a norm that does not exist in China.

China is certainly not offering an alternative to global capitalism, nor even to American hegemony within it. China does not have the capacity (nor the will) to create an alternative order to American hegemony "it simply wants to increase its share of the pie, and to be treated as an equal partner

instead of a Third World subordinate (or a First World vassal, like Japan).

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the BRICS Bank, the Silk Road Fund, and other Chinese initiatives are not meant to challenge American-dominated institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, both of which China continues to support, fund, and fully participate in.

Rather, they are meant to provide more leverage for China and increase its room for maneuver in the global political economy, in East Asia in particular. Similar renegotiations of global governance occurred in the 1970s when the revival of Western Europe and Japan stirred pressure for the creation of the G7 and Trilateral Commission, for example. But these all remained under the umbrella of American hegemony.

China's desire for increased global leverage is shaped by the political particularities of its economic system "state capitalism under the control of an authoritarian party. While Chinese elites have been the main beneficiaries of China's integration into global capitalism, unlike Japan or South Korea, they are not likely to embrace liberal democracy any time soon and need to avoid appearing too subordinate to the United States.

This is because the legitimacy of the CCP rests not only on continued economic growth but also on atoning for China's "Century of Humiliation," from 1839-1949, when China was continually invaded by Western and Japanese powers. With the phasing out of anticapitalist struggle as a legitimating ideology (though all university students still must take exams in "Marxism"), the CCP now seeks to position itself as the rightful force to return China to its historical place in the sun as the "Middle Kingdom."

Herein lies the uncertainty for the liberal economic order in East Asia, underpinned by American hegemony. Chinese elites have benefitted massively from their integration with this order, but their continued legitimacy within China depends on an ethnocentric nationalist project that has the danger of becoming "too

illiberal" in the eyes of the West. Rapid Chinese military upgrading and rising territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas are aspects of this.

This is where the TPP comes in.

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter understood this well when he stated that signing the TPP is more important than sending another aircraft carrier to East Asia. One core factor behind the longevity of American power in the post-World War II era is its ability to permeate other economies in a way that structurally aligns the interests of their ruling classes with the interests of American hegemony. Japanese elites unwaveringly support American hegemony not because they are forced to, but because it is in their interests to do so.

Chinese elites already depend on global capitalism, but to ensure they continue to do so into the foreseeable future, the US requires their further liberalization and integration with "global capital (especially American corporations), global finance (centered on Wall Street and the US Federal Reserve), and exports to Western consumers (especially American).

Of course, it's not all about China. The US has been pressuring Japan to liberalize its economy since the 1970s, and the TPP continues this quest by targeting Japanese farmers and carmakers. Malaysia, Mexico, and Vietnam are important export platforms that compete with China for foreign capital. Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are important American allies. Broadly speaking, the more countries liberalize, the more open they become to American influence. But everyone, including the Chinese, knows the TPP is mostly about China, making it one of the most geopolitically-tinged trade deals ever.

The TPP is about establishing the norms and rules of the future by locking the most dynamic region on Earth "East Asia, and especially China "into American-centered global capitalism. If the US can forge common standards on IP protection and investor arbitration with Japan and Western Europe (through the

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), the West can continue to shape the rules of engagement for the rest of the world.

So if China wants to continue its integration with global capitalism (which it must, because a sharp decline in economic growth would undermine the authority of the CCP), then China will be pressured to continue to liberalize and harmonize its rules and regulations with "international standards," established by the West. Conforming to increasing liberalization will also reduce the salience of any coherent alternative model of "state capitalism" for others to follow.

This is what some call "structural power" — the ability to shape the rules and norms of the system so that others have little choice but to comply. Structural power is often more effective than "relational power," or simply trying to force others to do something. And it explains why China, despite expressing an interest in joining, is being excluded from the TPP negotiations — so they will not be able to alter the rules.

The architects of the TPP are structuring the agreement to serve their own interests: protection of intellectual property rights and investor arbitration facilitate the continued dominance of the world's top corporations, which remain European, Japanese, and most of all American.

Protection of IP rights ensures that advanced knowledge sectors, like the pharmaceuticals industry, maintain their healthy profit margins (and the poor continue to be denied life-saving drugs). US agribusiness will profit from the opening of Japan's agricultural sector, and Nike will benefit from the further liberalization

of Vietnam (where most of its shoes are manufactured).

To understand whose interests are being served, one simply has to note that US trade representatives are accompanied by over six hundred "corporate advisers" to the negotiations, which are shrouded in secrecy. Labor advisers? Zero.

The TPP will also make it easier for transnational corporations to sue governments for labor, environmental, health, safety, and other regulations, in order to gain taxpayer compensation for "loss of future returns" due to "expropriation." Investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms — already in place in many existing international investment treaties — will be consolidated and strengthened in the TPP to ensure a single, more predictable, standard for the record-breaking number of new cases.

One such case, in 2011, involved Philip Morris invoking the 1993 Hong Kong-Australia investment treaty to sue the Australian government for "expropriation" of its intellectual property. Australia passed some of the strictest cigarette packaging laws in the world, covering the cartons in grisly pictures of tumors and removed Philip Morris's brand logo from the front. The TPP will make it easier for corporations to challenge public health and other policies in supra-national courts, circumventing domestic legal institutions.

The TPP is under pressure in the US, especially from big trade unions who argue that decades of trade and investment agreements have increased the power of capital over labor, leading to the offshoring of manufacturing jobs and skyrocketing levels of inequality. (Many in the EU are opposed to the even bigger Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or TTIP, for similar

reasons, but with more emphasis on investor-state arbitration).

If approved, the TPP would be the most expansive trade and investment treaty in history, encompassing 40 percent of the world's GDP, a third of its exports, and almost half of the world's foreign direct investment stock.

It would likely breathe renewed vigor into the TTIP negotiations, which have stalled due to mass protests, including a petition with over one million signatories. It would pressure China to further liberalize and align with the interests of American capital, as the TPP becomes the model for future mega-regional trade and investment agreements. Most of all, it would further bolster the power of capital over labor in both the US and abroad, ensuring that corporate, labor, and environmental regulations remain lax.

For these reasons, it is obvious we should be against the TPP — not to mention any international agreement that enhances the power of capital. Instead of "free trade" agreements that protect investors and corporations, the Left should fight for international agreements that enhance labor and environmental standards (enshrining enforceable measures beyond mere rhetoric), protect and nurture the independent power of unions, and impose greater regulations and controls on capital, including capital mobility.

But this must happen in the context of shifting the balance of social forces against capital in each nation. With the former Second and Third Worlds (especially China) now more deeply integrated into global capitalism than ever before, this struggle is particularly urgent in the center of global capitalism — the United States.

A note on Syriza's Central Committee meeting

and the text presented by the Left Platform

27 May 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

At the central committee session which ended a few hours ago, the Left Platform submitted the following text, which got 75 votes, with 95 against and one blank vote. The text calls for a break with the lenders starting with a default on the payment of the debt.

In the text adopted by the majority of the central committee, four conditions of an “acceptable compromise” are listed:

- Low primary budgetary surpluses
- No further cuts to wages and pensions
- Restructuring the debt
- A significant package for public investment, particularly in infrastructures and new technologies.

To these the text adds the “indispensable reinstatement of collective conventions and the gradual rise of the minimum wage to 751 euros [its 2009 level]” and stipulates that “any changes in fiscal policy should promote social justice by alleviating the burden of those who are economically disadvantaged and forcing the well-off and tax-escapers at last to pay”.

In his opening report, Alexis Tsipras adopted a firm tone but avoided any precise reference to the current state of the negotiations and what was the basis of discussion of a possible agreement, referring only to the four conditions mentioned above, which do not clarify most of the points of disagreement. The session was also marked by the intervention of the president of Parliament Zoe Kostantopoulou, who supported openly a one-year suspension in the payment on the debt, on the basis of the first conclusions of the Committee for the Auditing of the Debt which are expected to come out in the next few days. She also rejected the very

controversial appointment of Lambis Tagmatarchis as the new director of the reconstituted public broadcasting company ERT. Tagmatarchis is a person very linked to the media establishment and has already served as the director of ERT under the PASOK government of George Papandreou.

The full text of the Left Platform

It has become now clear that the “institutions” are not striving for what some are calling an “honourable compromise”. An “honourable compromise” cannot exist anyway by means of privatizations and new burdens on the popular classes, and it certainly cannot exist without a real end to austerity, without a restructuring of (the biggest part of) the debt and without adequate provision of liquidity for the revitalization of the economy.

What the ruling circles of the EU, the ECB and the IMF are ruthlessly and consistently aiming for in the last for months, is to strangle the economy, to milk even the last euro from the country’s reserves and to push an “unprotected” government to full submission and exemplary humiliation.

This tactic of the EU partners was also on display at the Riga summit.

The government has no other option but to proceed to a counterattack with an alternative plan that is based on SYRIZA’s pre-electoral pledges and the government’s programmatic announcements.

The following measures must immediately be implemented:

- The immediate nationalization of the banks with all necessary

accompanying measures to insure their function along transparent, productive, developmental and social criteria.

- The establishment of democratic legality and transparency upon the dominant media, along with the substantial control of their lending obligations.

- The immediate termination of every grid protecting the country’s scandal-immersed oligarchy.

- The suspension of privilege, privileging adjustments and immunity for big economic interests.

- The substantial taxation of wealth and large properties, as well as the taxation of top earners and of high corporate profitability.

- The immediate and full reintroduction, as well as safeguarding and practical implementation of labour legislation and rights to trade union organization.

The government has to counter decisively the propaganda of the ruling circles that terrorizes the people with the scenario of full disaster that the suspension of debt servicing and of an eventual exit from the Eurozone will allegedly bring upon the country.

The greatest disaster facing the country is the imposition of a new memorandum in one form or another and the extension of the implementation of past memoranda.

This development must be avoided by any means and sacrifice necessary.

Any alternative solution for a progressive policy against the Memoranda, includes first and foremost the suspension of servicing the debt. Notwithstanding all the difficulties entailed, it is much more preferable to any other option for it

offers the country hope and prospects.

If the “institutions” continue with their policy of blackmail in the following days, the government has a duty to clearly state from this moment on that

it will not “strip” the Greek people by robbing them of their savings, that it will not proceed to the next IMF payment, and that it intends to put forward alternative solutions for the country’s course, on the economic, social, political and strategic levels

that will safeguard the implementation of its program.

Athens, May 24 2015

Stathis Kouvelakis [Facebook](#).

The impossible “honorable compromise”

27 May 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

Needless to say that, on the part of Syriza, this discursive slippage amounts to an abandonment of the objective of the break with the memoranda and the troika rule on the basis of which it won the elections.

But what can, in the present context, this all-pervasive reference to something as opaque as an “honorable compromise” mean?

Let us begin with the second word, the “compromise.” In both Greek and Latin, the term “compromise” has strong connotations of reciprocity. “Symvivasmos” is a conjunction of “syn” (together) and “vaino” (go) similar to “compromissus,” which puts together “com” (together) and “promittere” (promise). “Compromise” means therefore that concessions are made on both sides, perhaps unequally, but at least at a scale that allows comparability. For the trade-off to be meaningful, the moves on either side must be if not exactly balanced, then at least subject to a (common) measure.

As a consequence, if one side, obviously the stronger, is not offering the slightest concession, then what is involved cannot be called a compromise. The term becomes just a figleaf to provide cover for the pursuit of total subjection.

But there is a further aspect to the formulation: the ethical. The “honorable” in “honorable compromise” refers to a notion of “honor.” To put it differently, a compromise of this kind presupposes a “code of honor” shared by both sides.

In that sense any real compromise is “honorable.” Speaking of a “dishonorable compromise” amounts to a contradiction in terms.

But here a real ambiguity appears: although it is not at first sight evident, the term contains within itself a normative dimension, which is however, in ordinary discourse, latent. “Compromise” typically implies a “non-ideological” attitude. As a goal, it is allegedly oriented to the demands of a “pragmatic” approach.

“Ideology,” by contrast, is the attribute of those who reject compromise, who are incorrigibly “maximalist,” dangerous “hardliners,” or just inoffensive “dreamers.” The reference to compromise performs an ethical and political function but one that remains implicit, operating in an undercover way. To that extent, we can talk of compromise as an ideology.

Does this mean that the concept of compromise is to be rejected or that compromise in general is impossible? Obviously not. What should then be the criterion to judge its desirability or feasibility? There is only one: politics, the art of intervention in a specific conjuncture.

Herein lies the real meaning of Lenin’s famous text on compromise, which has unfortunately been misused to all kinds of purposes. Lenin ridicules those who reject compromises as a matter of principle, in the name of some moral purity, to have their hands always clean. But also to be rejected is the notion that compromise, again as a matter of principle, is a goal in and of

itself.

Everything depends on the concrete analysis of the concrete situation. At this precise moment, says Lenin in early September 1917, and only for a very short time (“only a few days or at most a week or two”), compromise is possible and desirable “for the purpose of exhausting even the slightest possibility of the revolution’s peaceful development.”

But very soon after, the conjuncture had changed and talk of “compromise” is no longer possible, not because such an idea is morally blameworthy but because it is politically unrealistic. The revolution is not able to develop peacefully anymore. The choice then is not between a “compromise” and a “break.”

The break is in any case unavoidable. The choice is between a Kornilov type of break and a Lenin type of break, in other words between a counterrevolutionary coup and a radicalization of the revolutionary process. Under these circumstances the search for a compromise would mean political impotence, and impotence in such a polarized situation means annihilation.

The ongoing confrontation inside Syriza and Greek society over the capacity for, and feasibility of, compromise (usually without a distinction being drawn between the two) is not a conflict between “realists” who desire it and “hardliners,” “maximalists,” or “ideologues” who reject it and work for a “break.”

Discussing in these terms can only lead to a trap, that of a kind of politics subordinated to abstract moral norms, turning thus to mere moralizing. This conception reproduces the predominant discourse, “naturalizing” politics by assimilating it to the management of an order which by its nature cannot be transcended.

To put it somewhat differently: it is precisely because “compromise” under present conditions is in practical terms impossible, that its compulsive evocation obscures the actual issues, depoliticizing and presenting them as a clash of ethical preferences: “realists” vs. “hardliners,” “pragmatists” vs. “utopians,” and so on.

What is actually reflected in the current discursive struggle is that “honorable compromise” is not possible because the prerequisites for it do exist. The stronger party, the European Union, is not interested in compromise but only in administering humiliation, which by definition entails dishonor.

The unfeasibility of compromise is of course related to the asymmetry in the balance of forces, which makes compromise in a sense optional and so, from the viewpoint of the stronger party, unnecessary. But it does not boil down only to that.

During the only period in history when capitalism, in the countries of the “world center,” functioned on the basis of a class compromise — such as the decades immediately following the Second World War — an

essential role was played by the fact that a sector of the Western bourgeoisie had participated in the antifascist war and had in that context found itself, for a brief but decisive moment, on the same side with the organized forces of the subaltern classes.

This minimal, but by no means negligible, common terrain persisted even through the first phases of the Cold War, at least in Europe. Greece underwent an analogous experience during the struggle against the military dictatorship (1967-74), which prepared the ground for the political compromise that followed its fall and put a definitive end to the repressive regime in place since the end of the civil war (1949).

The neoliberal counterrevolution which, as aptly emphasized by both Naomi Klein and David Harvey, had its beginnings with Pinochet’s tanks putting an end to the Popular Unity experiment in Chile, scattered all the above to the four winds.

The balance of forces that had sustained the postwar class compromise was crushingly overturned to the advantage of capital. The shared references to the values of the antifascist struggle, fundamentally important in the creation and legitimation of the postwar social state, evaporated. They were replaced by reheated Cold War anticommunism, in the guise of “anti-totalitarianism,” mixed with exaltation of the values of the market, of profit, and of “free competition.”

The bourgeois world and the established order in Europe is no longer represented by the likes of De Gaulle, Macmillan, or Jean Monnet but by Merkel, Dijsselbloem, and Draghi.

The shock therapy applied to Greece over the past five years is nothing more than a radical (by the standards of a Western European country) version of this same neoliberal counterrevolution. Those who embody it, inside and outside the country, are executors of an operation of plundering and naked subjection. They are at once violent and vulgar, the antithesis of the type that would seek compromise. In those conditions only the action of the oppressed can open up a perspective of political, social, and ethical regeneration.

This presupposes a decisive reemergence of what Gramsci, quoting the French Marxist Georges Sorel, called the “spirit of cleavage” of the subaltern classes, their ability to break the ideological and ethical hegemony of the dominant groups, to uncover the latent antagonism in social relations and put forward their own world view and their own “ethical reform.”

Only the cleavage is, in the here and now, “honorable” — precisely because it is the vehicle for a break that is both the prerequisite for and the harbinger of the radically new, uniting politics and ethics in the struggle for popular emancipation.

Translated by Wayne Hall.

Jacobin

Defeat for the PP and the bipartisan system

26 May 2015, by Manuel Garí

The key fact of the day is that the Popular Party (PP), although it obtained more than 6 million votes (and was thus the biggest party in terms of votes) lost 2.5 million votes compared to the last municipal elections. It beat the Socialist Party

(PSOE) by only 400,000 votes. The PSOE itself lost 775,000 votes compared to the previous municipal elections, in spite of a significant increase in participation.

The second fact is that the

bipartisanship on which the political regime established in 1978 is based has experienced a major setback; these two parties scored just over 50% of the votes (against almost 80 per cent in the previous municipal elections).

The third element is the strong eruption of the candidacies of Popular Unity (Candidaturas de Unidad Popular-CUP) supported by Podemos who obtained excellent results in Barcelona and Madrid, but also in the city of Cadiz and several others. The same goes for Maras in Galicia in different parts of Galicia.

These successes call into question the monopoly of the conservative right - CiU in Barcelona, or the PP elsewhere - of the governments of the major cities.

The fourth element is that the results for Podemos were good, in the municipal elections as in the regional parliaments, even if they remained below the expectations of an important part of the left. In the best of cases it only became the third biggest force.

For its part, Ciudadanos, the option for the regeneration of the system built from the boards of directors of certain large companies, did not achieve the expected results.

Finally, the United Left (Izquierda Unida-IU) lost its institutional representation in all the parliaments of the autonomies, except in Asturias and Aragon: its electorate has been absorbed by Podemos, which constitutes a failure without precedent for IU.

In terms of institutional political power, the collapse of the PP is still greater than in terms of votes cast. The PP lost the absolute majority in Cantabria, Castilla-la Mancha and the communities of Valencia and Madrid; and it also lost its governments in Aragon, Extremadura and the Balearic islands. For the moment, it holds power only in Rioja and Murcia and it is not sure of keeping in Castilla Leon.

In the municipal elections in Barcelona, Ada Colau (a list supported by Podemos) elected 11 councillors, CIU (nationalist right) 10, Ciudadanos 5, and the PSC (Catalan Socialist Party) with the worst score in its history, 4. In Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre (PP) elected 21 councillors against 20 for Manuela Carmena (supported by Podemos) and 9 for the PSOE. The PP will not govern because the total of left councillors is greater than those of the right.

In Cadiz, Kichi Gonzalez, a member of Anticapitalistas, led the list which obtained 8 municipal councillors, against 10 for Teofila Martinez of the PP, which thus loses its absolute majority. This means that the left as a whole has more councillors than the right for the first time in two decades.

In the same way, in La Coruna and Santiago de Compostela, the Mareas Atlánticas have challenged the power of Feijó, a possible successor to Rajoy as head of the PP.

In trying to make a partial analysis, Pedro Sanchez, leader of the PSOE, has said that the results "are the beginning of the end of Mariano Rajoy as Prime Minister". What Sanchez has not said is in which direction the country is going. His project remains strictly that of social neoliberalism. Not surprising that the socialist pretender to replace Rajoy has also voted for the reform of article 135 of the Constitution, which gives priority to the payment of the debt over social spending.

Sanchez is mistaken if he thinks that the solution is a new edition of alternation between the two dynastic parties. The defeat of the PP is the expression of the rejection of the policy of social cuts and challenges to

human rights and democracy; policies that have led the majority of the working class and the majority of the population into a situation of continuing depletion while the elites are enriched, with the result that Spanish society is the most unequal in the European Union.

In these elections, Podemos and the candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) in which it participated have been consolidated as tools to enable the people and working classes to express themselves. Change continues to advance. The message of the polls is clear: the PP out of all institutions. But the challenge for Podemos and the CUP is to deepen this change to achieve a democratic rupture and prevent the PSOE implementing a cosmetic regeneration of the old regime. To get there, Podemos and the CUP should first make sure the PP cannot govern, but especially they need to develop popular mobilization alongside the social organizations and deepen programmatic and strategic thinking with the objective of defining the future and promoting the active participation of citizens in public affairs, by creating new forms of popular decision making at regional and municipal levels.

The response of the Anticapitalistas current to the results spells out its main task: "It is now time to open a massive and democratic debate in the popular movement to win the coming general elections. We need to continue expanding and organizing the tidal wave of change, with open assemblies in all corners of the state. Popular unity, a radical break with the logic of managing austerity, a clear commitment to involving people in all the decisions that are to come, including the policy of pacts, are the way to win".

Catalonia: Barcelona, epicentre of the change

25 May 2015, by **Esther Vivas**

For a long time we heard the 15M movement accused of being radical and, anti-systemic, and were told “if you want to practice politics form a party”, as if politics can be limited to party politics, understanding absolutely nothing of what the “popular uprising” of the indignant meant - now, the worst nightmares of the establishment have become a reality. The counter-hegemonic discourse erected at that time in multiple places, able to draw a new collective imagination, that showed clearly the link between economic crisis and political hijacking and that connected, as never before, with a social majority beaten down by three long years of cuts assailing the institutions today, overflowing the boundaries of what is possible that had been imposed.

It was not about standardizing the heterogeneity of the movement in a single party but building new political instruments, methodologies, confluences, processes that would move the indignation of the street into the institutions. To convert the social majority hit by the social crisis into a

political majority. Without forgetting that the whole process of real change will come from collective awareness, popular self-organization and sustained mobilization. In short, to occupy the institutions, as before they had occupied the plazas, to put them at the service of the “nobodies”. And that is what has happened now.

The explosive impact of Podemos a year ago, in May 2014, unexpectedly winning 1.2 million votes and 5 MEPS in the European elections, was the best example. A roadmap had been drawn up earlier, in April 2013, by the Proceso Constituent in Catalonia, led by the Benedictine nun Teresa Forcades and the economist Arcadi Oliveres, appealing for the construction from below of a new political-social majority. An example followed by Guanyem Barcelona and Ahora Madrid in these elections. An experience that has been extended to numerous municipalities and communities, with the emergence of new political forces, the result of the social confluence, able to reach the hardest hit sectors, who have been mobilized and have voted on this occasion.

The result of this election breaks the mould of politics as we have known it since the transition from Francoism. The table is no longer set for just two. And the entry of the “voiceless”, of the precarious, the terminally ill, unemployed, in the final analysis of the “outsiders”, into the town hall of Barcelona shows that we can win, and that everything is possible. But, the path of change will not be easy. The pressure of the establishment, from their economic lobbies to its media machinery, will not relent. The obstacles and the disqualifications will be many. The responsibility, as well as the opportunity is enormous.

Today, we live in a historic moment. Four years have passed since the plazas shouted: “They do not represent us”. After the political earthquake of these elections a new slogan imposes itself: “Yes, they represent us”. In Catalonia, the elections to the Parliament are the next line of assault. In Madrid, it’s the Congress of Deputies. As Ada Colau said on this historic election night: “This is a revolution which is unstoppable”.

Danish Parliament discusses Catalanian independence

24 May 2015, by **Michael Voss**

The right to selfdetermination

The debate was called by MP Nikolaj Villumsen of Enhedslisten/the Red-Green Alliance, a broad anticapitalist party that was established more than 25 years ago. Enhedslisten has been represented in Danish parliament since 1994. At the moment it has 12 out of 179 seats.

Nikolaj Villumsen had called on the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Martin Lidegaard, to explain: “How will the government support, that the peoples’ right to selfdetermination is respected in a situation where a large majority of the Catalanian parliament, the Catalanian society and the Catalanian government want to have a referendum on independence?”

Martin Lidegaard is a member of the center-liberal party, De Radikale,

which is junior partner in a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party.

Borders determined by wars

Motivating the question and the debate, Nikolaj Villumsen took the

floor as the first in the debate. Referring to the Scottish referendum and other examples, he said:

“Discussions on independence, selfdetermination and referenda are an important part of our development as democratic states. The borders of the past are often determined as the outcome of wars and power struggles, not democratic decisions.”

He also said:

“In Catalonia, the people has its own language, Catalan, and a long history of suppression, especially during the Franco regime. The discussion on independence also has a long history. Recently the Catalan parliament decided to have a referendum. They approached the Spanish government and asked permission for a referendum, but the Spanish parliament refused and declared the referendum illegal.”

Minister: No right to independence

In a longer statement, the Minister, gave his version of international law in relation to independence. He then went on to the history of Catalonia and its present situation in the Spanish state, saying:

“The Spanish regions have a very extensive level of autonomy, including health and education. Some regions, like the Basque country, Navarra and Catalonia have even more autonomy. For example Catalonia has its own police. Catalan is the main language, used in public institutions, radio, TV and public education.”

The minister concluded by saying:

“In Catalonia there is not such a situation of severe suppression of the internal right to selfdetermination that independence from the mother

country must be accepted according to international law. It is, thus, the attitude of the government that it is neither necessary, nor desirable for the Danish government to interfere in the debate about a possible Catalan independence. This question is a matter for Catalonia and the Spanish government in Madrid.

A matter for Danish parliament?

After this statement, Nikolaj Villumsen presented the proposal for a parliamentary statement, quoted above. It had already been negotiated between the parties before the debate, and it was thus a proposal by all parties except the Danish Peoples' Party.

Then a spokesperson for each party had an intervention in the debate. Of course, they all argued for the proposed statement, but at the same time some of them questioned the need for a Danish parliamentary debate on this issue.

The representative of the main opposition party, Venstre - a liberal party - only said two sentences, formally endorsing the proposal.

Jacob Lund of the Social Democratic Party had a more comprehensive intervention. In conclusion, he said: “I think that we - from Denmark - can contribute to a constructive debate by giving it attention, but not by governmental intervention.”

Søren Espersen of the Danish People's Party used his intervention to argue against having the debate at all.

Homage to Catalonia

The reformist Socialist People's Party was part of the governmental coalition until a year ago. Its spokesperson, Holger K. Nielsen acknowledged the special role of Catalonia, quoting “Homage to Catalonia” by George Orwell. He said:

“It is beyond doubt that in the fight against the Franco regime the Catalan people were in the forefront of the resistance, and they played a most important role.” He also talked about his fascination of Catalan culture, including but not only FC Barcelona.

The representative of the extreme liberalist party, Mette Bock, envisaged a future with not only national states but regions, related directly to EU. But she drew no clear conclusions from this.

Inspiration to other parliaments

After the debate and the vote, I asked Nikolaj Villumsen why he worded the statement proposal so “soft” on independence. He said:

“Most important to me was to raise the debate. Had Enhedslisten been in majority, we would have stated a much more clear support for selfdetermination.

Still, I think that it is positive that we had a broad majority for democratic dialogue in a situation where the Spanish government has refused it.

This was the first debate on the issue in a parliament outside Spain. I hope this can inspire debates in other countries as well. I also hope that progressive forces can use it in their struggle for Catalonian independence,” Nikolaj Villumsen said.

Election in the Spanish State, a change of

24 May 2015, by Josep María Antentas

All the projects that promise change are faced with a possibility that is full of potential and danger: the possibility of acquiring unprecedented institutional power. Never since the transition to democracy in the Spanish state, will organisations that operate more or less consistently outside the established rules of the game, have such institutional weight. It is possible they may even control one or more important city administration, with the city of Barcelona the most likely one. The panic displayed by the Catalan right in the face of a possible victory for Ada Colau is palpable, and a joy to behold. Those of us who live in this city will rarely get to vote with such enthusiasm as we will this Sunday.

So while we are about to pass this new milestone, and while we wait to know the real picture after the 24M elections, it seems important to offer some initial reflections on the role of the elections, the campaigns, the institutions and about the timing and pace of the change that is taking place. Most obviously, we confront a simple equation that is quite difficult to solve: the dialectical link between mobilization, self-organization and elections and, as a result of the latter, the connection between the first two and institutional work. The big problems we have to solve are concentrated here.

The dazzling success of the campaign for the European elections and the ability of Podemos to rearrange the pieces across the political board chessboard, forcing the other players to reposition themselves in response to the newcomer, gave impetus and credibility to a conception of political strategy strictly limited to the electoral arena and the short term, focused exclusively on political communication and winning space in the media. Once the explosion of linear growth came to an end, it gave way to a more complex vision of how to think and act strategically. One

political message was clear: without real and organic roots in society, there will be no electoral victory, and if there were, it would result in a government with feet of clay, shackled in any attempt to impose an agenda of change, however small these might be. The good dynamic shown in recent days by the strongest unitary municipal candidates confirms the central importance of social implantation and working at the grassroots.

This is not to deny the importance of a "machinery of electoral war", to use the words of the Podemos leader, Iñigo Errejón, but to understand that the "electoral machine" is just one dimension, and not only one, of building a more complex party. Not everything can be measured by short-term electoral success which, incidentally, will be much greater for a political project committed to radical change if it is socially embedded, if the battle at the ballot box is inserted into a wider political, social and cultural battle and if the electoral triumph is seen as part of a political victory in the strong sense of the term. This requires a Podemos with real roots, with a presence in the struggles and in the streets, and a close relationship with the social, union and neighborhood organizations and the world of culture, embodying the best of the legacy of the 15M and waves of mobilization.

Political time is anything but linear. It is, as Daniel Bensaid often reminded us, a "broken time", full of jumps, acceleration and braking. There are authentic wormholes, like those in the film *Interstellar*, which act as shortcuts through space and time and allow us to get to places that once seemed impossible. The crisis triggers threats and opportunities and opens gates that previously have been closed and barred. It is not the time for "going slow because we're going far", for "business as usual". It is the time

for understanding the moment and seizing the opportunities. The openings will not be there forever and we mustn't let them slip away. The eruption of Podemos and the campaign for the European elections hit the nail on the head, based on a good strategic reading of the situation. This should be interpreted, however, in a historical sense and should not confuse the window of opportunity that has opened only with the call for the upcoming general elections. These are just part of a longer political period in which the future of the system's crisis will be decided. Knowing how to take advantage of a current situation should not be reduced to a short-term mentality that emphasises tactics while evaporating strategy.

Time has accelerated, precipitating a scenario of continuous heart attacks. But this acceleration is not constant. It's more like a roller coaster than a bullet train. Once the phase of semi-automatic linear growth came to an end, Podemos began to run into obstacles. Political struggle in neither a short-term sprint, not a steady-paced marathon. It is more like a cross-country race over uneven ground full of ups and downs, mud and puddles, that require constant changes of pace. The well-known psychoneuroimmunologist, Xevi Verdager, recommends, along with various dietary advice, exercise with changes of pace to maintain good hormonal health. And it's also good for strategic health. If Podemos wants once again to set the pace, rather than follow the others, now is the time it needs a shake up, a new jolt or a counteroffensive to recover the freshness it has lost. That means linking up directly with social struggles and developing a culture of "the movement" is inescapable. These challenges have already been crucial in this campaign. They will loom even larger after it is over.

The ability Podemos has shown to read the dynamic of the situation, to understand the nonlinearity of political time and to develop a strategy to exploit the opportunities opened up by the crisis, should not lead, however, to a vision of political strategy that pays attention only to the short term (winning elections) and not to the medium and long term. On the contrary, it should enable it to deal with the times and rhythms permanently. The assault on the two-party system may have more than one phase. The elections at the end of this year may be the first round, but not the last one. It does not seem that a Podemos government is a likely outcome at this stage. Although we

have to work for that, we also need to know how to manage its impossibility, so as not to be left in a void with no perspectives. There may be partial experiences along the way, such as municipal and regional governments built around Podemos or unitary municipal candidates. The way these develop and their balance sheet will be decisive: they can really help expand the field of popular imagination and make the unthinkable possible, or can they trap hopelessly all hope for change in a tangle of bureaucracy with no real transformation.

Ambition here and now and an unapologetic offensive strategy should

go hand in hand with a long-term perspective built on solid foundations. We should neither dissolve the policy of a direct onslaught on the two-party system into an endless, passive and linear accumulation of forces, nor should we convert Podemos into a single-barreled shotgun, reducing its strategy to playing a single hand, a final match-ball, with no possibility of extra time or a return match. However intense it may be, we have to be prepared for a fight which is as extended as its ambitions for change are profound. So that we can defeat once and for all, as Walter Benjamin put it in the sixth of his Theses on the Philosophy of History, "*the enemy who still hasn't stopped winning*".

It's time

22 May 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

The argument that was put forward then in favor of that accord was that it "bought time," at however painful a price, so as to prepare the ground for key summer negotiations.

The claim was that for a four-month period the European Central Bank would call a halt to the torture it had been imposing on the country's economy since February 5, when it decided to terminate the most important mechanism for funding the Greek banks. As it is now generally recognized, the government was dragged into signing that unbalanced agreement through pressure from an accelerating outflow of bank deposits and the threat of bank collapse.

Now, with [public coffers emptying](#) to forestall a cutoff of debt servicing and inescapable state obligations, it is evident that the only time that has been bought is time that works to the advantage of the Europe institutions and that the Greek side is exposed to an intensifying blackmail as its position deteriorates.

The unprecedentedly belligerent climate at the [Eurogroup meeting](#) in Riga, with the Greek Finance Minister

Yanis Varoufakis being pilloried and ridiculed by his counterparts (even those from countries of the weight of Slovakia or Slovenia) shows clearly enough how much humiliation the government has had to swallow over the last two months.

Behind the Mistake

In a noteworthy statement on April 23, the deputy minister responsible for international economic relations who has now succeeded Varoufakis as the head of the Greek negotiation team Euclid Tsakalotos said characteristically: "When we put our signature on the February 20 agreement we made the mistake of not making sure that this agreement would be a signal to the European Central Bank to start the countdown for liquidity."

But this "mistake" does not have to do with some secondary aspect but with the central point of the agreement. There is a specific reason for it, and this reason is political, not technical, in character.

The Greek side did not take into account what was obvious from the outset, namely that the European Central Bank and EU were not going to sit twiddling their thumbs when faced by a government of the radical left. The biggest gun in their arsenal is liquidity and it was entirely logical and predictable that they would resort to it immediately. And naturally the lenders have every reason to continue "[tightening the noose](#)" (as Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras puts it) until they have forced the Greek side into total capitulation.

To put it differently, if with the February 20 agreement the lenders had agreed to "ensure liquidity," if they had delinked its provision from the specific austerity plans they seek to impose, they would simply have deprived themselves of the most significant means of exerting pressure they have at their disposal. That Tsakalotos believed they would do this smacks of extreme political naivety, if not willful blindness, particularly when [a major section](#) of his own party has been warning from the outset of the inevitability of this development.

So the “mistake” results from a fundamentally wrong working hypothesis, on which the government’s whole strategy has been based from the outset: that “we will finally reach an agreement with the lenders” allowing Syriza to implement its program while staying the eurozone. This is the doomed logic of “left Europeanism.”

What’s Next?

However much the phrase has been used and misused, we cannot find a better way of describing the country’s present situation than by saying that it is hanging by a thread.

With the method and content of the legislation on the transfer of funds, the government finds itself in a very difficult situation not only financially, but politically. The preconditions may well have begun to be created in Greece for cacerolazos, demonstrations on the model favored by the reactionary and foreign-sponsored oppositions in Latin American countries trying to overthrow left-wing governments.

The only escape route from the threatened confinement in the cage of the Memoranda, and derailment of the government’s project, lies in the

activation of the popular mobilization, recapturing the combative and hopeful climate that prevailed prior to the February 20 agreement.

It is not too late. Now is precisely the time for straight talk, the only that can have an impact and activate the people, precisely because it treats them with due respect, as adults and the agents of their own destiny.

What is at stake in Greece is the possibility of a radical change and the opening of a route towards a political overturn and emancipation of its people, its working classes, but also the future of workers across Europe.

The fear of Grexit should cripple us no longer. The time has come to make it clear for a start that whatever funds are channeled under the new legislation into the public coffers are earmarked for coverage of public and social needs and not for payments to lenders.

The time has come to put an end to the soporific waffle about “negotiations going well” and “agreements on the way.”

The time has come to put an immediate end to the surrealistic references to “mutually beneficial solutions” and the “partners” with

whom we are supposedly “joint proprietors of the EU.”

The time has come to reveal to Greek and international public opinion the data that would expose the relentless war being waged against this government.

And the time has come, above all, to prepare at long last, politically, technically and culturally, for the only honorable solution, the parting of the ways with this implacable neoliberal cabal.

The time has come to make concrete the content, and explain the viability, of the alternative proposal, starting with the twofold initiative of a suspension of payments to the lenders and the nationalization of the banks and progressing, if necessary, to the choice of a national currency, approved by the public through a popular referendum.

The time has come for serious thought but also for decisiveness. This is the time when disaster and redemption stand next to each other.

This is the time to fight back.

6.5.15

[Jacobin](#)

Is Merkel Being Irrational?

22 May 2015, by [Catarina Principe](#)

However, during the negotiations, Germany appeared to have backed down on these stipulations and accepted a better (if not perfect) deal for Greece, in which pensions would not be cut, the minimum wage would be allowed to increase, privatizations would be re-evaluated, and there would apparently be no tax hike — leaving other measures (like the structure of the labor market) untouched and as matter of national decision and sovereignty.

However, now that June (the month in

which the Eurogroup agreement expires and a new bailout plan must be reached) is dangerously close, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has suddenly changed her attitude. The four pillars of the agreement with the former Greek government are to be kept, without German concessions. No more time and no more money.

Well aware that the Greek state is running out of money — and that the debt, exacerbated by austerity, is unpayable — Germany is again forcing the Greek government to

choose between accepting the continuation of austerity or going into bankruptcy.

The architecture of the eurozone favors Germany by positioning it — primarily via the introduction of the euro, which devaluated the Deutsche Mark in comparison to all other national currencies — to export cheap manufactured goods to the core periphery economies. Seen in this light, the German government’s intransigent position toward Greece, and seeming equanimity in relation to

a possible Greek exit (Grexit) from the eurozone and collapse of the monetary union as we know, seems quite illogical. But is it really?

In fact, there is no irrationality in Germany's position. Its inflexible stance is the only one that can save German political elites and induce a collapse of the only anti-austerity government that has had the courage to try to shift the pillars upon which the European project has been built.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Germany's position has been one of defending austerity as the only way out of it. This meant "sacrifices" for everyone in Europe: not only for the southern European populations with neoliberal bombs dropping in their backyards, but also for the German working class, which has witnessed a strong deregulation of the labor market, precarization of labor relations, and a loss of purchasing power.

The ideological story sold to the German working class was that the European project would collapse if they bailed out southern Europeans, whose plight was self-inflicted through over-spending and poor productivity. However, it soon became obvious that austerity does not solve any economic and financial problems " it deepens them (debt has grown in relation to GDP in all countries that have tried the austerity remedy).

When Syriza came to power in Greece, there was finally one voice inside the European institutions that could prove this fact and eventually challenge the hyper-neoliberalization of Europe.

But for Germany to accept Syriza's demands would be to acknowledge that austerity was not a solution but a

problem " that Germany's political and economic agenda over the last seven years was wrong and has completely failed to provide the results it promised. More than this, it would be a concession that the sacrifices imposed on the German working class were actually in vain, and only served to further tilt the balance of power away from labor and toward capital.

German elites are thus willing to let the euro crash (or transform it into something else " an exclusively center and northern European currency, for example) to guarantee their political survival.

There is also nothing irrational about the way they are playing the "blame game." If Germany forces Greece into bankruptcy (which is bound to happen sooner or later), this would create a domino effect that destabilized the European economy for a period of time. The blame would then be placed on the "stubborn" Greek government that refused to negotiate and to accept the "help" and "aid" that Germany was willing to give them.

In addition, political tension in Europe is polarizing. The past several years have seen the simultaneous rise of far-right parties and movements " Golden Dawn in Greece, the National Front in France, Pegida in Germany " and anti-austerity, left-wing formations.

Accepting that a left-wing government is correct and that austerity was never a solution would open additional political space for left-wing movements across Europe. Taking even a small step back from the pro-austerity narrative would forever weaken the political position of German political elites. It might even

their sacrifice their existence as such.

Moreover, it is important to remember that Germany has already been expanding their trade partnerships for some years (probably in preparation for the political situation that is now starting to happen in the eurozone), especially with China. Even if Germany's economy would suffer from a Grexit and the effective end of the economic and monetary union, they have already been building the foundations for an economic recovery in the medium term.

But there is a second layer to the intransigence of the German government: they know that the danger of bankruptcy and the inability of a left-wing government to fulfill their electoral program would likely bring down that government, as well as destroy any other possible left solutions throughout Europe.

Forcing the Greek government to step on the red lines they have imposed in the negotiations (pensions, wages, taxes, privatizations, liberalization of the labor market) in order to avoid an economic collapse will engender strong discontent and opposition inside Greece and Syriza itself. Germany's tactic is, in this sense, to try to demolish a left solution from within.

If there is a way out of this, it will only come through popular struggle. Nothing else can enable Syriza to carry out their electoral program and end the humanitarian crisis still plaguing Greece. Any path the government takes, must answer to the demands for democracy, dignity, and justice that the Greek people have voted for. For their future and their sake. And for the sake of all of us.

[Jacobin](#)

Alberta's Orange Crush

20 May 2015

The NDP's victory in the heartland of Canadian conservatism is cause for

celebration. However, there is little indication that the party's success at

the polls marks a fundamental shift to the left in provincial or federal

politics. Alberta remains a deeply conservative province dominated by powerful oil and gas companies, and the NDP's neoliberal record in other provinces raises questions about its willingness to follow through on its election platform's progressive demands.

Jacobin contributing editor Chris Maisano conducted an email interview with the Canadian activist and academic Herman Rosenfeld to help us make sense of the election and to assess the prospects for the Canadian left moving forward.

Many readers in the US and internationally may not be familiar with the history of the New Democratic Party (NDP). Where did it come from, and what does it stand for?

The NDP was formed in 1961, as a project by the Canadian Labour Congress and a political party called the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The CCF was the country's premier social-democratic party, founded in 1932, in Alberta of all places. It championed many of the social welfare reforms associated with that movement, and although it never was elected federally, the CCF government of Saskatchewan, elected in 1944 under the leadership of Tommy Douglas, initiated North America's first public Medicare program.

The CCF, unfortunately, engaged in red-baiting during the Cold War, and with the mainstream Liberal Party co-opting many of its traditional demands, it ran out of gas by the late 1950s. Also, the party was never successful in developing deep roots in the labor movement. A project to create a new party (partly to move it more to the political center at the time), with the active participation of the Canadian Labour Congress was begun and resulted in the creation of the New Democratic Party. Its first leader (1961-1971) was the celebrated Douglas.

It remained a standard-bearer of traditional social-democratic demands, acting as a kind of conscience of Canadian politics (for example, opposing Prime Minister Pierre

Trudeau's use of the War Measures Act against Quebec activists) and working to implement improvements in the country's weak welfare state provisions.

But like every social-democratic party on the planet, it was unable to stand up to the neoliberal onslaught that began to intensify in the 1970s, and where it was elected it ended up accepting the limitations of neoliberal capitalism: waffling on free trade; accepting that there could be no alternative to private capital accumulation as the basis of economic activity; balanced budgets; and in the Canadian context "in the face of the realities of climate change" not working to replace the economy's reliance on the extraction and export of fossil fuels.

Today, it stands for moderate but useful reforms when out of power. But when in power provincially (it has never been elected to run a federal government), it tends to implement a more moderate neoliberal agenda. Interestingly, in the last federal election of 2011, on the strength of huge (and quite unique) gains in the province of Quebec, the NDP became the official opposition party on the federal level, eclipsing the traditional ruling party of Canada, the Liberals.

What is the current balance of political forces inside the party, both nationally and in Alberta?

The NDP is not socialist, and its political center of gravity "the dominant forces within it" argue for a fairer distribution of wealth, modest extension of social programs (themselves soundly attacked by the hardline, austerity-driven neoliberal government of Stephen Harper), opposition to some of the more authoritarian elements of the ruling Conservative agenda, and limits to the pipelines that would send tar sands oil to the US for refining.

They in no way oppose the entire oil and gas extractive economy, challenge the power of the financial sector, or look to end the free trade regime which facilitates much of Canadian neoliberalism. Like many such parties, the leader and those around him make most of the policies, and Tom Mulcair

"the current leader" is an adept campaigner and parliamentarian, but is no socialist. He is moderate, careful, and seeks to balance different forces within the party.

There is an "old guard" that opposed Mulcair's leadership. It had closer ties to top labor leaders and led the party for the past generation. There are few policy differences between these groups, and they settled in quite nicely behind Mulcair. Much of the NDP's electoral support is in Quebec and urban centers in central Canada.

There is no substantial left within the party, although there is a minority of left social democrats who are increasingly nervous about the party's unwillingness to tax the wealthy, challenge austerity, free trade, finance, or the oil and gas industry. They have little power and less voice in the party, which, although it has several policy conferences, uses them as safety valves and window dressing. In Alberta, most of the left has either worked with or supported the provincial NDP over the years, given the near-total dominance of right-wing parties and interest groups and the lack of any substantial left-wing political current.

The labor movement, through the Canadian Labour Congress, provincial federations, and individual union affiliates, remains in alliance with the party, but the unions often practice forms of strategic voting in order to keep the dreaded Conservatives out of office. Many unions remain the foot soldiers for NDP election campaigns, but the organic unity of the pre-neoliberal period is somewhat frayed, in the face of austerity and the employer onslaught in the private and public sectors.

The Alberta NDP is, like all provincial NDPs, independent of the federal party. They tend to have a more moderate platform, given the intense power and influence of the oil and gas elites and the over-five-decade dominance of conservative politics and ideology in that province (which is also home to Stephen Harper's federal Conservatives).

I'm not all that familiar with the inner workings of the Alberta party, other

than its attraction of a number of young, working-class and professional candidates, and its platform. However, the team of advisers who organized the party's electoral victory included many of the centrist-oriented political operatives who worked to elect the so-called "Orange Crush" campaign of the late Jack Layton in the 2011 federal election. They are noted for crafting "safe" electoral messages.

In the recent election, it called for a public reconsideration of the royalty levels paid to the province by oil and gas companies; raising corporate taxes by 2 percent; raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2018; increasing rates of taxation on the wealthiest Albertans; and locally refining more of the oil extracted from the province (and ending experiments with coal carbon capture). It called for using funds originally intended for carbon capture technology development to be used for public transit; Alberta currently has the lowest corporate tax rates in Canada and has no provincial sales tax.

The new premier, Rachel Notley, is the daughter of a former party leader and led a dogged and impressive campaign to win a majority, with a caucus that includes many young and inexperienced members. Though she supports the Energy East pipeline project, which would bring millions of barrels of tar sands crude oil to refineries in eastern Canada, she has thus far refused to travel around the US to sell plans for it.

Alberta has long been the citadel of Canadian conservatism, and the NDP has long been a marginal force in the province. What allowed them to make such an unprecedented breakthrough?

It was a combination of things, but their victory hardly represents a radical move to the left. The demographics of the province have changed over recent years, especially in the wake of hot-house development of the tar sands. The industry has attracted young working-class and professional people of different ethnic groups, changing the balance of forces especially in cities such as Edmonton, a historic center of more progressive movement culture in the province

(local wits like to refer to it as "Redmonton").

There was also a lot of disgust with the cynicism, corruption, and policies of the provincial Conservatives. In the face of dramatically declining oil prices and the revenues derived from them, the province had huge financial issues.

The budget didn't look towards the industry or the wealthy to contribute. It cut health care, education, and other social services, none of which were lavishly funded even during the boom time of oil and gas revenues. People — especially the younger people who moved to Alberta in recent years — wanted a change. The NDP's honesty, Notley's personality, the moderate campaign, and the tawdriness of the Conservatives all contributed to this dramatic electoral shift.

The opposition — the party that came in second — is called Wildrose, and is a more radical neoliberal party akin to the US Tea Party. It attracted much of the hard right-wing conservatives, as well as some of the corporate oil and gas elite, and this further weakened the Conservatives.

The NDP has formed provincial governments before, and their track record in many cases has not been particularly inspiring. What are the chances that the Alberta NDP government diverges from its neoliberal predecessors in Ontario, British Columbia, and elsewhere?

This is a very positive victory, and a breach (albeit probably temporary) in the monotonous control that Conservative parties have had in Alberta, since the old days of prairie populism was supplanted by a more right-wing populism tied to oil and gas elites. One would have to be pretty cynical and hard-boiled not to feel good about this election. On the other hand, there is little reason to think that Rachel Notley's NDP won't end up reinforcing the neoliberal status quo over time.

But like other NDP governments the reality isn't so simple, and has certain complexities which demonstrate that while the provincial NDP governments

certainly accept neoliberalism, they have provided some limited openings for the labor movement and other social movements.

In the case of Alberta, one would hope that the Alberta Federation of Labour (which has a long history of militancy and organizing) will organize at the grassroots to push the government to implement the more progressive elements of its platform. Social movements need to fight to support and expand underfunded social programs. Environmental activists (and especially eco-socialists) need to fight to limit and ultimately end the tar sands projects, and use what has been extracted as a way to transition to renewables.

On the other hand, the overwhelming power of the oil and gas interests (most US and international energy conglomerate-owned) shape the form of capital accumulation in Alberta. Challenging them requires a radical anticapitalist perspective, which the NDP does not have.

Already, Notley has pledged to work in partnership with the industry. Of course, to be in a position to do the opposite would require building a base for an alternative set of policies within the working class, which in turn requires education, mobilization, and years of organizing. This is not what the NDP is, and the acceptance of the status quo as the framework for implementing their electoral program, especially in the context of the decline in oil prices, doesn't bode well for the medium and longer term.

How does the NDP's unexpected success in Alberta alter the political terrain heading into this fall's federal elections?

I am not sure. Like many others, I think that beating the Conservatives in Harper's main bastion will certainly hurt them. Provincial and federal politics do not work in sync, but he will have to divert resources to address this breach. It also demonstrates that the political status quo can be changed (although how and what that means isn't clear). Just the idea that they can lose in their backyard is the subject of many a toast in progressive households across

Canada this weekend.

What are the prospects of the Canadian left moving forward, both inside and outside the NDP?

The Canadian left cannot move forward through the NDP. It represents a component of the left that accepts the precepts of the current system, austerity, the transformation of the state and labor markets that go along with neoliberalism, and the mantra of competitiveness.

The left has to operate independently, working to build a socialist movement "which implies creating a working-

class base, developing orientations in and through struggles that challenge capital and its logic. Of course, we should work with social-democratic activists and politicians who advocate for progressive reforms, and challenge them when they subordinate them to the needs of the system.

Alberta is a space where we need to push forward some of the reforms promised by Notley, but in a way that deepens our collective capacity to challenge capital in this, its heartland.

Interestingly, there are new and growing attempts to build links between different socialist and

anticapitalist networks and projects across the country, and some interesting new experiments in Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Quebec, and elsewhere.

Working in and around unions, working peoples' struggles in communities, and large political campaigns (such as efforts to raise Canada Pension levels, defending the postal service, opposing authoritarian limitations on rights, defending migrant and precarious workers, and supporting indigenous sovereignty struggles) are where we need to grow, not in the NDP.

[Jacobin](#)

One hundred years after the Armenian genocide - negationist consensus and internationalist breaches

19 May 2015, by Uraz Aydin

An event that aptly summarizes the taboo character of this word, one hundred years after the massacres suffered by the Armenian people in the framework of the project of extermination orchestrated by the Union and Progress Party leading the Ottoman Empire.

On the left, an increasingly recognized genocide

Yet the claim of the recognition of the reality of the Armenian genocide by the Turkish state is affirmed with increasingly strength by various associations and groups on the left. In addition, commemorations with the participation of several hundred people have taken place for nearly five years, including on Taksim Square in the centre of Istanbul. Also for the

first time, a meeting in memory of twenty Armenian revolutionaries of the Hentchak party executed in June 1915 took place in 2013 during the revolt of Gezi. A symbolic but important fact, the name of one of them, Paramaz, was adopted as pseudonym by a young Turkish revolutionary (Suphi Nejat Agirnasli), a volunteer combatant in Kobane who fell during an attack by Daesh.

In addition, the patient work of Hrant Dink, an Armenian journalist and intellectual assassinated in 2007, in the framework of the magazine which he directed ("Agos"), as well as numerous publications of works concerning 1915 and the Armenian question (including those of Dadrian, Kevorkian, Ter Minassian and so on) have strongly contributed to engaging a debate on the claim for recognition of the genocide and making public the problems of Armenians in Turkey.

A negationist state

As for the Turkish state, the attitude concerning the denial of the genocide has not changed. The fact that last year, former Prime Minister Erdogan presented his condolences to the "small children" of Armenians who lost their lives in 1915 and says that it is a duty to commemorate their suffering is of course a first and represents an important act, but one which stops at the threshold of the use of the "word" and therefore of the recognition of the real character of the massacres.

But the behaviour and discourse of Erdogan as Turkish president and that of the government (to which he is completely subservient), in the face of the term "genocide" pronounced by Pope Francis and the resolution adopted by the European Parliament recognizing the genocidal nature of the murderous acts of 1915, reveals the fact that the condolences of 2014

had no other purpose than to attempt to seduce the European governments and the European Union on the eve of the centenary.

The new strategy of the AKP now resides in the redefinition of the historic significance of the year 2015, presented as the centenary of the battle of the Dardanelles where the Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire faced the invaders, thereby transforming a sequence of the First World War into a heroic anti-imperialist story, obscuring the alliance of the Ottoman State with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. And the fact that the date chosen for the official ceremony of commemoration of this battle coincides with that of the genocide (April 24) smacks of a mediocre ruse, even for the AKP cadres.

An internationalist battle to lead

Negationism is not the exclusive preserve of the AKP and is also the main inviolable red line of their main opponents, namely the extreme right (naturally) and the Kemalist-secular centre-left. The president of the Kemalist CHP, the main opposition party in Parliament, has even mentioned the possibility of drafting a text in common with the AKP concerning the resolution of the European Parliament, which would be inconceivable on any other subject. Only the Democratic People's Party (HDP, linked to the Kurdish movement) escapes this consensus and did not hesitate to use the word "genocide" in tabling proposals for laws requiring the state to apologize officially for the acts of 1915, or even

to recognize the role of the Kurds in the looting and massacres.

Even if a significant part of the revolutionary left still prefers to approach this thorny question carefully (or not to deal with it at all), it is indisputable that the recognition of the genocide is or should be a crucial issue for any internationalist current which is the bearer of a project of social emancipation. It is only by reconstructing history from the point of view of the vanquished of yesterday, remembering the image of these "slave ancestors" of which Walter Benjamin spoke, that it will be possible to build a future free of any relations of domination, where the field of the possible no longer includes barbarism.

First posted 23 April 2015 on the site of the [NPA](#).

The Orange card trumps the Green: Austerity wins the election

18 May 2015, by John McAnulty

It was an exercise in sectarian head counting, used effectively by the unionists through "unity" candidates to force the Alliance party out of East Belfast and Sinn Fein out of Fermanagh/South Tyrone. The end result was triumph for unionism, with the DUP holding 8 seats. The British result means that dreams of being king makers in a hung parliament are gone, but this hardly matters, given the level of support that Cameron has offered Unionism. The re-appointment of Theresa Villiers as secretary of state means a continuation of existing British policy - contempt for Sinn Fein, demands for a level of austerity that will plunge many below the poverty line and an insistence that the political settlement here depends on its acceptance by the DUP, who now have a veto on any form of political progress. The other element of the unionist vote is the recovery of the

Unionist Party with two seats, although they flatlined on votes. The result indicates that the DUP will never succeed in wiping out the unionists and that the unionist all-class alliance of the 1950s will never be re-established. Current stability rests on nationalist capitulation rather than unionist strength.

Catholic card

Sinn Fein played the Catholic card, with Gerry Kelly publishing statistics on the religious composition of North Belfast in an unsuccessful attempt to force unity behind himself [see box below]. Many liberals expressed shock, but this was not the first nor the only attempt to play the sectarian card - for some time Sinn Fein have been proposing Catholic unity candidates to the middle class SDLP.

Of course the whole Good Friday agreement which Sinn Fein signed up to, is based on sectarian division.

Sinn Fein has little choice but to play the Catholic card. The Stormont House agreement means that they are no longer able to claim that there will be a democratization of civil society or of the state and a gradual decline in sectarian conflict. Many of their supporters believe that they are fighting against the implementation of austerity, but they have already agreed 99% of the measures in Stormont. All that is left is to call for a vote to keep "the other side" out.

Orange card

But the Green card has nothing of the strength of the Orange. The dynamics of a sectarian society are such that it

is impossible to unite the underdog in a sectarian cabal. To support sectarianism is to underwrite your own second class status, so there is always a minority supporting a democratic solution and anxious to overcome the existing order.

In fact the main outcome of the election was that the institutionalisation of sectarianism has reached its limit. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the status quo, in part because of the unending demonstrations of sectarian supremacy. The Sinn Fein vote has fallen, dramatically so in the key seat of West Belfast. The SDLP have held 2 seats to Sinn Fein's 4 - a disaster for a party that aimed to have nationalist hegemony in the North as a springboard for a place in a coalition government in the South.

Their support will fall more sharply in the near future. The last vote had just been counted when Secretary of state Villiers called for the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement. [1] Peter Robinson agreed, saying that Sinn Fein had been given a free run at the elections and now had to get down to business. The hollowness of the election process was led bare. It was only a sideshow, clearing the way for a predetermined austerity. McGuinness's response to calls to sign off on the deal was an incoherent suggestion that he and Robinson unite to ask Cameron for more money! The current crisis is a search for cover for his party, but austerity will be imposed in any case.

Peak Sinn Fein

The election marks a watershed. We have had a peak in Sinn Fein support and a growing realization of the disaster the Stormont administration represent for workers. In the short term that means more reaction, but it is also true that the barricade that Sinn Fein presents to the advance of a working class movement must be removed.

The new round of austerity will hit harder in the North of Ireland than anywhere else. The Stormont parties have racked up extra charges and the measures will apply in a very short

timeframe to areas suffering multiple deprivation. 20,000 public sector jobs are to go with the insane idea that what passes locally for private industry will take up the slack.

The major loser was trade union credibility. The local trade unions called a truce while they waited for Labour to be elected. Local politicians (Sinn Fein) were to intercede for them. Now they are without a strategy.

It is an extremely dangerous situation. The new austerity measures, with the extra cuts in the Tory manifesto and the possibility of even further cuts if corporation tax is reduced, will hit like a lightning bolt. There will inevitably be social unrest. There will be desperation within Sinn Fein, seeing their entry into southern government slipping away. In the DUP there is vicious infighting, with Robinson forming a laager of loyal supporters and excluding conspirators further to the right.

However, in the absence of a coherent socialist current op-posed to all the aspects of Stormont House, the attack dog of sectarianism is at heel to divide the working class further and suppress the possibility of a united fightback.

Count the Catholics Kelly: Sinn Fein's sectarian ploy exposed

The angry response to their sectarian ploy in the Westminster election took Sinn Fein by surprise. In the North Belfast constituency they printed a bar graph based on the 2011 census in the area. It was labeled: "Protestant - 45.67%; Catholic - 46.96%. Make the change, Make history".

From the point of view of Sinn Fein, this was just another ploy from a party

of spindoctors and tallymen. It was part of the rough and tumble of just another electoral campaign. They are mistaken. This is the resolution of a long standing contradiction, a historic moment when the mask falls completely and Sinn Fein nua is exposed.

The contradiction stretches back to the beginning of the peace process. Republicanism had traditionally balanced between socialism and capitalism. Under the pressure of defeat it entered a "nationalist family" with Irish capital and embraced a settlement that enshrined British rule and a local administration based on sectarian rights.

This opened a new contradiction between their constant jockeying for confessional rights in the corridors of power and an historic base that believed in the broadly democratic and left-facing policies of the past.

The solution was simple. Push former IRA figures to the fore and use their credibility to reassure supporters. Constantly remember to always have two stories - one for the loyal follower, the other for your partners in government.

But everything changes with time. The credibility of the IRA figures declines. When there is no change in the nationalist areas, which experience levels of deprivation that have stayed the same over four decades, people move back from the party, which itself becomes insulated by a layer of paid functionaries. The majority of time is taken up by interacting with other capitalist politicians, businesspeople and governments. The middle class flood into Sinn Fein and are unaware that any left wing gobbledygook has to be dispensed.

However there are more immediate and material reasons for the collapse of this Janus-faced policy. This election has taken place in the shadow of the Stormont House Agreement. Sinn Fein have hesitated over one section and been savagely attacked by the Unionists, the British, Dublin and the US administration. The attacks have stopped during the election campaign, but Sinn Fein has been told that the British will close down the local

administration if they do not agree to the full package.

The battle is not centered on the Stormont House agreement. Rather it is about finding a way to preserve their claims to be an anti-austerity party. Sinn Fein unreservedly support 99% of the austerity budget and have signed up to the political aspects of Stormont House, which absolve the unionists from any requirement to row back on sectarian triumphalism or to implement outstanding elements of the Good Friday agreement.

The Westminster election will be followed by a political and economic offensive against the workers, with Sinn Fein lined up with the bosses. Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that they play the Catholic card and rely on sectarian rivalry to hold their vote.

The party hope to pass off this sectarian appeal as a one-off incident, part of the rough and ready tactics used in an electoral struggle. They are mistaken. In fact they have a great deal of form in this area. The initial shot in the election campaign was a unity offensive aimed at the SDLP to ensure a single Catholic candidate in

each electoral area. The SDLP refused, not out of any principle, but because they did not want to be swallowed up by the larger party and in the end held their own with 2 seats. The Sinn Fein election material in the West Belfast constituency carried a shy graphic of a Sinn Fein protest to "Save St. Mary's," referring to a campaign some months ago to prevent the amalgamation of the local catholic teacher training facility with Stranmillis college - a campaign based on asserting sectarian rights to a separate educational system.

The biggest fall in votes - mopped up by People Before Profit candidate Gerry Carroll - was in the West Belfast constituency. The Good Friday Agreement initially contained provision for shared sporting facilities. The unionists refused to implement the deal and Sinn Fein then agreed to the money being divided in a sectarian carve-up. It was earmarked for West Belfast's GAA facility at Casement Park. Sinn Fein and the GAA tried to ram through the development in the face of local opposition and tales are now emerging of massive corruption, the ripping up of planning regulations and dismissal of major health and safety concerns.

By playing the Green card the Shinners play to their middle class support. Their main concern is to get their share of privilege. The traditional working class supporters get nothing and see the slogan of the "unity of Catholic, Protestant and dissenter" central to the traditional republican programme, swept away.

However it is not only nationalist workers who are betrayed. In the name of "equality of the two traditions" Protestant workers are handed over to utterly reactionary loyalist gangs. Divisions in the working class are presented as not political but cultural. When Gerry Kelly called on North Belfast Catholics to vote for him, he was in effect inviting Protestants to vote for Nigel Dodds of the DUP.

Sinn Fein is a capitalist confessional party. They sell sectarian division to the workers because they have nothing else to sell. All the promises of democracy and prosperity claimed for the Northern settlement have come to nothing. The task before us is one of constructing an alternative based on democracy and socialism and built on the power of an independent and united working class.

The Saudi War on Democracy

18 May 2015, by Asa Winstanley

According to the United Nations, the bombing campaign has caused the deaths of more than [1,000 people](#), of whom an estimated 551 are civilians. At least 115 of these victims were children, UNICEF said.

Aside from the wanton killing of Yemeni civilians, the main Saudi achievement to date has been to empower the Yemeni branch of al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Its actions may have even allowed the "Islamic State" to [establish itself](#) in Yemen.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has now expanded its areas of control in

the country, with [several ports falling](#) to the group under the protection of the Saudi bombing campaign. Although ostensibly foes, the Saudis are now in a de facto alliance with al-Qaeda in Yemen, much as they are in Syria.

The main Saudi goal of dislodging the insurgent Houthi movement has failed as well. The Houthis remain more determined than ever to have their say in the future of the country.

The fundamental problem that the [Saudis](#) and their [reactionary Gulf allies](#) face is that, despite all the cant and rhetoric about supposed "Iranian

meddling" in Yemen, the Houthis are Yemenis. They are mostly Arabs, not Iranians, and are native to the country. They are not foreign invaders; the movement represents a historically marginalized community that wants a say in how their country is run.

The headlines about Yemen in the Western media, such as they are, constantly shriek about how the Houthis are an "Iranian-backed" group.

This is true in a very limited sense, but it obscures the more fundamental point that the minority Zaydi religious

community that the Houthi movement represents – and which has important differences with the version of Shiism observed by the Iranian government – is indigenous to the country and cannot be dislodged by any bombing campaign. [Recent reports](#) about the Saudis training tribal fighters to combat the Houthis on the ground suggest the Saudis realize this.

The Houthis simply cannot be reduced to an Iranian proxy. Last year, for example, the Iranians [discouraged](#) the Houthis from taking over Yemen's capital, Sana'a. They went ahead and claimed it anyway, giving them more leverage in the political negotiations that followed.

So if Iranian influence isn't the overriding factor, what is really behind the Saudi war on Yemen? The former United Nations envoy to

Yemen, who was responsible for negotiations in the country until recently, revealed that the warring factions were on the brink of a power-sharing deal just before the war began. The Saudi-led war on the country aborted those talks.

As Jamal Benomar told the [Wall Street Journal](#), "When this campaign started, one thing that was significant but went unnoticed is that the Yemenis were close to a deal that would institute power-sharing with all sides, including the Houthis."

The Houthis were even willing to allow [Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi](#) to stay on as part of a presidential council that would have replaced the role of the presidency as an interim measure. As the Zaydis are a minority religious community, the Houthi movement did not want to rule the country, but did want assurances they would have

representation in the power-sharing deal.

According to an anonymous diplomat speaking to the Wall Street Journal, "the Saudis also intervened to prevent a power-sharing deal that would include the Houthis and that would give 30% of the cabinet and parliament to women."

Hadi, on the other hand, came to power in an election in which he was the only candidate.

Something that looks like it may ultimately lead to anything resembling democracy in the region is considered a threat to the Saudi dictatorship, its Gulf allies, and the United States. They'll continue to block any attempt at a political solution to the crisis in Yemen, costing thousands of lives in the process.

[Jacobin](#)

Platform for Renewal emerges from Irish anti water charges movement

17 May 2015, by [Shane Fitzgerald](#)

On May 1 in Dublin, the five trade unions involved in the Right2Water campaign in the south of Ireland are hosting a May Day Conference to begin a process to establish a "Platform for Renewal" – an as-yet undefined intervention into the electoral sphere with a General Election due within the year. Guest speakers from SYRIZA, Podemos and the European movement against water privatisation are expected.

Right2Water is a trade union-led united front including the radical left, Sinn Féin, other centre-left politicians, and the extensive network of anti-water charges (anti-austerity) grassroots groups in towns and communities across the state. Its trade union component is an alliance of five of the smaller, but more radical unions, in Ireland, including Unite and

CWU. Together, 'R2W' has mobilised 4 separate historic days of massive protest in Ireland since the first on 1 October 2013, as part of a wider, dynamic anti-water charges movement which has rocked the establishment over the past year. It has arguably pulled the trade union movement to its feet and to the left away from Labour Party, from lobbying towards politics and struggle in the process.

The below is a contribution to the Platform for Renewal, a very welcome joint-statement between the two dominant but often destructively rivalrous pillars of the radical left in Ireland, with some other independent groups and activists, including this author. It proposes an orientation towards mass politics, participation and mobilisations on a clear and

principled leftwing basis for any political initiative that may emerge out of the Platform for Renewal process, which has its second day in Mid-June.

Conference convened by R2W Unions: Build an active, democratic, principled Left

The following statement has been agreed between the People Before Profit Alliance, the Anti-Austerity Alliance and some independent activists including Cllr Brendan Young.

The anti-water charges movement,

which has seen hundreds of thousands mobilise and become active in campaigning, has transformed politics in this country. It has forced climbdowns by the government and given people confidence and hope that the austerity agenda can be defeated. It has opened a potential to build a significant Left, working class political movement.

We welcome the initiative by the trade unions involved in Right2Water to host conferences in May and June to discuss a political initiative. The fact that a number of significant unions are discussing launching a political platform and considering support for a range of candidates is a very important development. It could create a political pole of attraction for many who are fighting austerity and oppression - and who are looking for a political formation that fights for genuine social equality.

For a democratic, bottom-up, participative approach

In order for this to have the best chance of achieving its potential, we think it is essential that the process of deciding on a political platform and an approach to the general election is participative, open and democratic. The mobilisation and democratic self-organisation of people in their communities is vital to the strength of the movement against the water charge. Their involvement is essential for the development of mass support and participation in any new political initiative which could have an impact similar to Syriza or Podemos.

We welcome the initiative of the unions to organise events in May and June. But it is vital that these events do not remain limited and invite-only. Instead, they should become conferences involving all sections of the anti-water charges movement, anti-austerity groups and those active in fighting for democratic rights who favour taking a political initiative on an explicit anti-austerity basis.

In advance of the 13 June event, we think there should be local open meetings or assemblies of everybody active in the anti-water charges movement or other active social movements, meeting to discuss the

issues and to decide on delegates to send to the event. The meeting on 13 June should therefore be a much larger meeting than 200 people: as well as including trade union representatives and political representatives, it should include representatives of campaign groups across the country, selected by those involved in campaigning on the ground. On foot of this, the June gathering should be able to decide for itself the political positions it adopts and how to proceed - not simply endorse previously determined statements.

Non-payment of water charges is key

We believe that this political initiative should complement the crucial struggle against water charges in the coming months - not become an alternative to it. In order to advance the actually existing struggle against austerity - the movement against the water charge - and to draw on its strengths and develop mass support, the political initiative should champion the demands of the movement, openly call for non-payment and use its forces to organise non-payment and active resistance to water metering on the ground. This should be part of a general approach, which is to use elected positions to encourage struggle from below, rather than focusing on elections and parliamentary positions.

Principled positions against austerity and for democratic rights

We think that the initiative should adopt a principled anti-austerity position. That means committing to oppose and organise to fight against any more austerity and for an immediate reversal of key austerity measures such as water charges, property tax, USC for those on average or low incomes, health, education and welfare cuts. It also means developing a strategy for repudiation of the bankers' debt; for a write-down of residential mortgages; for taxation of wealth and big business profits; and against privatisation of public services and natural resources.

Instead of putting money into bank debt, we think there should be public

investment in housing, healthcare, education, childcare, public transport, water services, renewable energy and environmental protection - as the start of re-orienting economic activity to meet social need and provide useful work for young people and the unemployed.

A new political initiative should stand for the separation of church and state; and commit to extending democratic rights to all oppressed groups: women, the young and the old, LGBT people, Travellers, migrants, asylum seekers and people with disabilities. As a first step, it should commit to campaigning for a Yes vote in the upcoming marriage equality referendum; and to campaign for repeal of the 8th Amendment and lift the ban on abortion in Ireland.

We also think a political initiative should champion the right of workers to defend their jobs and living standards. It should support solidarity action with the likes of the Dunnes workers and action to scrap the anti-union laws. Opposition to austerity should not stop at the border: we think austerity must be fought both in the North and the South. The implementation of Westminster cuts by Stormont is no more acceptable than the implementation of Troika cuts by the government in the South.

Reject coalition with Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Labour

This kind of real change requires a political alternative that will break the rules that impoverish working class people. We cannot do that if we accept the approach of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour - the proponents of austerity, inequality and oppression. So a new political initiative must publicly commit to reject any coalition or deals with Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Labour.

It should fight for a Left government committed to breaking the rules that impose austerity and that prioritise the restoration of the profits of banking and big business; for a government committed to restructuring the economy and society to meet the needs of people and to protect our environment - including unilateral repudiation, if necessary, of

bankers' debt.

The opportunity to build a substantial political challenge to the rule of the 1% in this country is massive. The initiative by the Right2Water unions can be an important step in building that if it is done on the basis of a bottom-up, participative and democratic approach. If it is based on struggle, non-payment of the water charges and a principled anti-austerity stance, we can have a major impact.

In summary, we think a new political initiative should:

be open, participative and democratic

in its organisation and functioning;
reject coalition with Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Labour;
openly call for non-payment of the water charge;
have a principled anti-austerity approach that repudiates the bankers' debt and supports public investment to meet the needs of ordinary people, environmental protection and provide proper jobs;
campaign against oppression and for democratic rights, including marriage equality and repeal of the 8th Amendment;
oppose racism and the scapegoating of minorities.

Signed:

Richard Boyd Barrett TD, Cllr. Brid Smyth, Cllr. John Lyons, Ailbhe Smyth and Brian O'Boyle on behalf of the People Before Profit Alliance; Paul Murphy TD, Ruth Coppinger TD, Joe Higgins TD, Eileen Gabbett and Joe Harrington on behalf of the Anti-Austerity Alliance; Cllr Brendan Young ; Eddie Conlon; Des Derwin; Shane Fitzgerald; Tomas O'Dulaing; Raymond Deane.

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The Frameup of Purvi Patel

15 May 2015, by **Against the Current**

She was convicted of "feticide and neglect of a dependent" under Indiana's barbaric anti-abortion law. Prosecutors charged that she had attempted to purchase abortion drugs online, but there was no evidence of drugs in her body.

"What this conviction means is that anti-abortion laws will be used to punish pregnant woman," stated Lynn Paltrow, Executive Director for National Advocates for Pregnant Women. According to Deepa Iyer, Activist-in-Residence at the University of Maryland's Asian American Studies Program and former director of South Asian Americans Leading Together, "Purvi Patel's conviction amounts to punishment for having a miscarriage

and then seeking medical care, something that no woman should worry would lead to jail time."

Chowdhury reports that "Patel is the first woman to be sentenced under Indiana's feticide laws but she isn't the first woman to be charged. In 2011, Bei Bei Shuai, a Chinese American-woman, was held in prison for a year before feticide charges against her were dropped as part of a plea deal. Shuai was reportedly suffering from depression and tried to commit suicide while pregnant. She survived, but the fetus did not."

As more and more states adopt vicious and punitive laws on the pretext of

"protecting the unborn child," cutting access to abortion down to almost nothing and forcing women to desperate and dangerous options, tragedies like the case of Purvi Patel will proliferate. (For a detailed analysis see Lynn Paltrow, <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2015/03/29/how-indiana-is-making-it-possible-to-jail-women-for-having-abortions/#>).

Indiana is the same state that suffered a devastating nationwide backlash against its blatant right-of-discrimination law based on "religious conviction." Isn't an equal if not greater response merited here?

May/June 2015, ATC 176

Nigeria: a will for political change

14 May 2015, by **Paul Martial**

Discredited

If the IMF and the World Bank have closed their eyes to the corruption and squandering of the country's resources by the ruling clan, they have on the other hand demanded the end of energy subsidies, which have mechanically increased the price of transport and essential products for the population. Unemployment is endemic and public services are dilapidated.

The fight against Boko Haram is a tragic example of the pernicious policies of the government. Initially, under the pretext of combating this Islamic sect, the Nigerian army spent the bulk of its time attacking the people and executing young people suspected of being members, which has only strengthened the social basis of the jihadist group. Then, considering that Boko Haram was a problem confined to the north of the country, the government became

progressively less interested in it. It was only three weeks after the abduction of the young girls of Chibok by Boko Haram that Goodluck deigned to make a statement, and his only action was to imprison the activists of the organization BringBackOurGirls.

Boko Haram has also highlighted the state of decay of the Nigerian army who nonetheless benefit from 40% of the national budget. These sums are diverted by the senior officers who leave rank and file soldiers without ammunition in the face of jihadists. Soldiers who have fled have been brought before the courts for mutiny and face the death penalty.

Buhari, a hope without foundation

In this most chaotic situation, Buhari is presented as the man of the hour, honest and capable of restoring order. The integrity of this former putschist,

who has conducted two coups, is most dubious. During his brief stay in power, he closed his eyes to the corruption of some dignitaries. With respect to order, his very special conception is combined with numerous violations of human rights: he has bloodily repressed Islamist revolts and imprisoned many human rights activists and trade unionists.

His economic project is tinged with nationalism, at least in discourse, but barely differs from that of his predecessor. His mentor in economics is Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the former director of the Nigerian branch of the multinational Mobil Oil and one of the richest men in the country.

The desire for political change which has manifested itself in the country can be an opportunity for the progressive forces who, despite their weakness, can rely on a powerful trade union movement to defend economic and social rights and ultimately build an alternative.

Rasmea Odeh's Sentence/Appeal

13 May 2015, by David Finkel

Odeh was convicted for not disclosing on immigration and citizenship applications her imprisonment in Israel in the 1970s for a fatal Jerusalem supermarket bombing in 1969. [2]

That makes it sound like a straightforward case of immigration fraud "just as it was presented to the jury in her federal trial last year" until you begin to peel back the layers. For example, Rasmea Odeh's account of 25 days of physical, psychological and sexual torture by Israeli interrogators to obtain her "confession" in the supermarket bombing was not allowed. Expert testimony that she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, affecting her memory and emotional balance at the time of her citizenship application, was also excluded by judge Gershwin Drain.

These rulings, which effectively denied her the possibility of mounting a defense, will be the subject of the appeal to be mounted in the coming months by Rasmea's legal team, headed by attorney Michael Deutsch. It is a difficult uphill struggle, especially in the intimidating U.S. political climate around anything to do with Palestine, the Middle East, Arabs or Muslims. But that climate is exactly why her presence is so precious for Arab immigrant women in Chicago, among whom her community work is concentrated as associate director of the Arab American Action Network.

In a partial victory, judge Drain continued Rasmea's bond on her appeal, so that she was able to return home with the supporters who flocked to Detroit for the hearing. The fact that prosecutor Jonathan Tukel "who asked for a five-to-seven-year

prison sentence" did not contest her appeal bond suggests to this observer some decision-making at a higher level in the Justice Department, reflecting the visibility that the defense campaign brought to this case. The judge agreed that "looking at Ms. Odeh's recent history, she's been involved in a lot of good works" and that he'd received numerous support letters from "people from all over the country."

Observing this trial and the sentencing, in an overflow courtroom filled with Rasmea Odeh's supporters, was an emotional experience that brought home the realities of selective and politically motivated prosecution. While a three-year U.S. investigation into her history appears to have been triggered by tips from an Israeli organization, her Israeli interrogators of course were never investigated, let

alone charged “or even identified” for torture and rape. Israeli doctors who, in the course of their annual military service, have routinely signed documents stating that Palestinian prisoners beaten to death had suffered a “heart attack,” can

quite truthfully state that they were never arrested or convicted of a crime.

As Hatem Abudayyeh of the defense campaign stated, “We know there is a lot of work still to do and we will continue to educate people about the case, and about Palestine support

work in the cause of liberation.”

Information on how to support and contribute to the defense campaign are online [here](#).

[Against the Current](#)

Lessons from the Nepal earthquake: Prepare and survive

12 May 2015, by **Praful Bidwai**

It is humanly impossible not to be moved by the magnitude and quality of the humanitarian disaster that has visited Nepal and the adjoining regions of India and Bangladesh as a result of the April 25 earthquake of magnitude 7.9. The death toll has already crossed 5,000. The entire world, and India in particular, must do all it can to help the earthquake’s victims with rescue and relief.

The disaster is a grim reminder of how vulnerable large parts of South Asia are to natural calamities like earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, flash floods and landslides. It also shows how unprepared the region’s societies are to cope with these, and how governments routinely fail to mitigate their effects on the plea that some of these events cannot be predicted.

The plea is specious. Nobody can forecast an earthquake to the year, but scientists know enough about region-specific seismic hazards to be able to say that an earthquake of high or medium magnitude is likely to take place in the course of a few decades. This furnishes an adequate basis to formulate policies and put in place measures of disaster preparedness, mitigation and management.

It’s precisely because governments fail to recognise risks and take preparedness measures that natural disasters become social catastrophes. Earthquakes are natural only in their causation. Their effects are socially

determined and transmitted through arrangements created by societies and governments. Consider the following.

* The United States and Western Europe are prone to earthquakes. Yet, quakes killing more than 10,000 people haven’t occurred there for a century. Such earthquakes have only occurred in Third World countries—the exception being developed, but highly vulnerable, Japan.

* In 2010, a magnitude-7 earthquake killed 300,000 people in Haiti, the highest recorded earthquake toll in history. That same year, a magnitude-8.8 earthquake occurred in Chile, which released 500 times greater energy, but killed 525 people. Thanks to better preparedness, only 0.1 percent of those “strongly shaken” died in Chile, compared to 11 percent in Haiti.

* Natural disasters kill 63 people in Japan on average. But in Peru the average toll is 2,900—46 times higher. When Hurricane Elena hit the US in 1985, only five people died. But when a cyclone slammed Bangladesh in 1991, half a million perished.

* Around the same time as the Latur (India) earthquake of 1993, California was hit by a quake that was 50 times more powerful. Three persons died in California; 8,000 people perished in Latur.

* Hurricanes and cyclones frequently

hit the US East Coast. But the toll they claim is usually hundreds of times less than that taken by similar storms in Bangladesh, India or the Philippines.

Such First World-Third World differences have nothing to do with the intrinsic nature of the calamity itself, but with social arrangements, including disaster preparedness. This is the first lesson about disasters. As has been wisely said, earthquakes don’t kill; falling buildings do.

A second lesson is that natural disasters are not class-neutral in their impact. Rather, they pick on the poor and the weak, who are far more vulnerable than the privileged, being forced to live in congested, overcrowded and unsafe conditions or in remote, poorly-connected areas. More than a third of people who live in Nepal’s hills are more than four hours away from a tarred road; the headquarters of 15 of Nepal’s 75 districts have no road connections at all.

Typically, the rescue and relief infrastructure in developing countries is hopelessly inadequate—for instance, in Nepal, hardly any earthmovers and cranes were available to clear roadblocks and rescue people. Emergency relief provision—especially of necessities such as shelter, food, water and medicines—is appallingly bad.

A third lesson is that governance has

great bearing on how a society copes with natural disasters. If there's transparency in official decision-making, the toll tends to be low. This is the case where governments are responsive to people, and where early warnings are sounded, and accurate and adequate information is disseminated about availability of rescue and relief services; and provisions, including medicines, are properly stocked.

This doesn't happen in most Third World societies. Many are extremely hierarchical; their rulers feel no obligation to disseminate information to underprivileged citizens. This situation is changing somewhat thanks to greater investment in cyclone-warning and communications, but not nearly enough. Human life continues to be wantonly lost. The poor suffer the most.

A fourth lesson is that many Third World societies are severely under-regulated for safety. Most have no laws on zoning of residential and commercial activities and environmentally sound building codes. Or, regulations are routinely violated. This is of course true of Kathmandu, which has evolved into "a densely built-up urban sprawl". Most buildings there don't comply with the 1994 National Building Code, which was meant to improve earthquake resistance.

However, this applies to other South Asian countries too. An estimated 80 percent of buildings in big Indian cities aren't earthquake-resistant, although it doesn't cost a fortune to build or retrofit them to be so. Most municipalities don't even insist on completion certificates for new constructions, based on approval by structural engineers and other experts.

These lapses are serious, indeed unforgivable, considering that much of South Asia lies in a seismically active area, including large "very severe intensity" and "severe intensity" zones. This is the result in no small part of plate tectonics, a geological phenomenon in which giant land masses crashed into each other more than 25 million years ago.

Since then, the Indian plate has been thrusting into Tibet and the Indian and Eurasian plates have been moving closer to each other by 20 millimetres a year along the 2,400 km Himalayan belt, generating enormous stresses that can only be periodically released through earthquakes.

Great earthquakes (of magnitude greater than 8) have occurred along the Himalayas every 80 years, e.g. 1803, 1833, 1897, 1905 (Kangra), 1934 (Nepal-Bihar), and 1950 (Assam-Tibet), producing utter devastation. The magnitude-7.6 Muzaffarabad (Pakistan) quake of 2005, while less severe, was part of the same phenomenon of stress release.

In addition to the Himalayan faults, which include parts of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet, etc, the region also includes major faults in Indo-Gangetic and Brahmaputra plains, the Rann of Kutch, peninsular India and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India alone has 66 listed faults. The regions most at risk include Uttarakhand, Himachal, Jammu and Kashmir, North Bihar and Kutch.

As a peer-reviewed paper in *Science* (2001) argued, "about 50 million people are at risk from great Himalayan earthquakes, many of them in towns and villages in the Ganges plain". The capitals of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan and many other cities with more than a million people are "vulnerable". Areas where stresses weren't released recently are especially vulnerable.

These governments should have their utmost in earthquake planning, including making construction seismicity-resistant, and launching disaster management, information and public education programmes, while strengthening seismic monitoring. But they seem to have learnt little from the recent experience with Uttarkashi (1991), Chamoli (1998), Bhuj (2001) and Muzaffarabad.

As if all this were not bad enough, the governments of India, China and Nepal have rushed headlong into hydroelectricity projects in the most vulnerable parts of the Himalayas. Worst of all, India went ahead with the

Tehri dam on the Bhagirathi (a tributary of the Ganga) in Uttarakhand, bang in the centre of the 600-km Central Himalayan Seismic Gap, where no major earthquake has occurred for at least 500 years, and where a Big One is due anytime.

Among those who publicly warned against the Tehri dam was Vinod Gaur, a distinguished geophysicist and a co-author (with Roger Bilham and Peter Molnar of the University of Colorado) of the *Science* paper mentioned above. The government completed the dam but under-designed it for the likely peak ground acceleration for a maximum credible earthquake.

In case the dam is ruptured by an earthquake, the consequences for the millions of people who live downstream of the Ganga will be catastrophic.

Equally irresponsibly, the government ignored an article by Gaur and Bilham in the journal *Current Science*, which argued that the Jaitapur nuclear power project in Maharashtra was declared seismically safe without refuting the possibility of potential seismic vulnerabilities. But India's West Coast is well-recognised as probably "laced with ancient faultlines buried under sediments and waiting to spring back like a piano accordion..."

Yet the absence of seismicity in Jaitapur in the past century was wrongly interpreted to infer that no seismicity would occur in the future—although the nearby Koyna and Latur regions experienced major earthquakes (magnitude 6+). The paper should have been scientifically debated, but Indian nuclear power lobbyists ridiculed it and prevented Bilham from entering India in 2012!

Such "shoot-the-messenger" attitudes towards dissenting scientists speak of an authoritarian mindset—and worse, contempt for public safety in the face of disasters.

8 May 2015

South Asia Citizens Web "[Lessons From The Nepal Earthquake: Prepare and survive](#)".

If you can marry an economic justice agenda with climate action, people will fight for that future”

11 May 2015, by Naomi Klein

Basta! : We seem to be heading straight toward climate disaster. We know what will happen if we do nothing about climate change, yet nothing really changes. Why is it so?

Naomi Klein : It's not that we're doing nothing - we're actually actively doing exactly the wrong things. We have an economic system that defines success and progress as infinite economic expansion. Any kind of expansion is deemed good. Our emissions are going up much faster than they were in the 1990s. In the past decade, we had very high oil prices, which has created huge economic incentives for fossil fuel companies to push into new, more expensive, higher-emitting forms of extraction, such as tar sands and fracking. We also have a system that allows multinationals to seek out the cheapest means of producing their products, with cheap labour and cheap energy - which has led to the deregulated burning of coal. All this is making the problem much worse.

You say that transnational corporations such as ExxonMobil, BP and Shell have declared war on the planet...

The business model of these companies is to find new fossil fuel reserves, which is the exact opposite of what we need to do in order to fight climate change. A research from the Carbon Tracker, three years ago, showed that the global fossil fuel industry has five times more carbon in their proven reserves than is compatible with keeping temperatures below two degrees warming... That's the target our governments agreed to in Copenhagen, and that's a target that is already a very dangerous one for many communities. But it provides

us with a global carbon budget. We know how much carbon can be burned while still giving ourselves a fifty-fifty chance or better of meeting that target, and these companies have five times more carbon in their reserves than that amount. That explains why fossil fuel companies so actively fight the very dissemination of honest, climate science, why they fund politicians and organisations that deny the science of climate change, and why they fight every serious attempt to respond to climate change, whether it is a carbon tax or whether it is support for renewable energy.

Why such impunity?

Fossil fuel companies, particularly oil companies, are the most powerful companies in the world. Wars have been waged by our governments to protect their interests. It's in the nature of fossil fuels that they're concentrated in specific geographical locations, very expensive to get out of the ground, to transport, and to process. And so it lends itself to concentration of wealth and power, with a fairly small number of huge players, both state-run and privately owned, and that kind of concentration of power also lends itself to political corruption, both of the legal kind and the illegal kind. Hence the impunity.

Does this mean the first step of climate action should be to dismantle the power of transnational corporations?

This can mean a lot of different things. One thing we definitely need to do is not increase their power. This is why, more and more, the climate movement is taking an active part in blocking new free-trade deals, like the free-trade deal between Europe and the

United States, like the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), like the deal between the EU and Canada, my own country. What these deals do is give new powers to multinational corporations to challenge governments through investors rights clauses, and in particular to challenge sensible climate policies. We already have more than enough evidence of this. For instance, the Swedish company Vattenfall is challenging the German phaseout of nuclear energy, claiming that it has lost 4.7 billion Euros, whereas we might want the German energy transition to be a model for other countries, because it is one of the boldest attempts to transition towards renewable energy. That is sort of ringing out like a warning to governments: 'If you do this, then you'll be prosecuted.' There are other examples of this in my country, where the province of Quebec banned fracking, which is another example of what we want more governments to do. But under the North American Free Trade Agreement, an American company is challenging this ban on fracking, saying it violates its rights to drill for gas.

So we also need to strip away powers that corporations already have through deals like this. But it depends where you live. In the United States, it's clear that there needs to be a challenge to corporate personhood, and to the idea that their campaign spending can be treated as free speech. There needs to be much stricter regulations on campaign financing or lobbying by corporations. This is certainly true in the European Union as well. We need this kind of approach, but we also need more of a grassroots strategy, such as we're seeing with the fossil fuel divestment

movement, which is about delegitimizing these companies. It isn't just about getting a university or a city like Paris to divest from fossil fuels. It's about making the argument that these are companies that have a business model that is profoundly immoral and that the profits that are gained from this business model are odious profits. And that governments have a right to lay claim to those profits, to pay for the transition away from fossil fuels. That's where we really need to get to, that will really weaken their power, because what makes them powerful is their massive surplus of profits.

What kind of conversation can we have with the employees of these polluting companies? Can there ever be an alliance with them?

We need a justice-based response to climate change. That's something that needs to be first codified in policy: we need to define what a just transition looks like and we need to fight for it. Concretely, that means that the workers who would lose their jobs in the fossil fuel sector should be retrained and get new jobs. There would be more jobs to get in renewable energy, because renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transit, etc. create 6 to 8 times more jobs than the extractive sector. In recent years there were big investments in the extractive sector, a big push for fracking for gas, for offshore drilling. And at the same time, there's been a huge contraction in the willingness of governments to invest in their energy transitions. All over Europe we've seen governments cut their support for renewable energy. If jobs in the extractive sector are the only jobs on the table, of course the trade union movement is going to fight for those jobs.

So it's the role of an alliance between the labour movement and the climate movement to fight for a vision of bold climate justice job creation. And that's starting to happen : for instance, a trade union alliance in the UK calling for the creation of a million climate jobs, and articulating what that will look like. We have to remember that it is not environmentalists that are stealing the jobs away from workers in the fossil fuel sector. Just in the past

few months, since the price of oil has dropped so dramatically, in the United States more than 100,000 jobs have been lost in the oil and gas sector. That's not because of climate activism or environmentalists, that's because it's extremely dangerous and volatile to pin your hopes on a commodity like oil and gas, whose price goes up and down. One of the nice things about wind and solar is that they're free, they're the same price all the time and they're not subject to these boom and bust cycles in the same way. This is actually a key moment to be building that type of alliance, because the deal between workers, trade unions and these multinational corporations has been severed by the companies.

You say that climate change can be seen as an opportunity, and that this transition can also be very exciting. How can we make climate action attractive for people who may think it is a very difficult process?

I don't think it should be nearly as hard as it seems. What we're dealing with is the legacy of climate policies of the past two decades, which were not justice-based, and which passed the bill for the transition onto consumers, onto working class people. So there came to be an association between doing something about climate change and increasing the cost of living. It meant paying extra for those green products or for renewable energy. For a little while, there seemed to be a willingness for people to accept that logic, but then the economic crisis hit. People realised that they were already paying to bail out the banks, and started wondering why they should also bail out big polluters, by paying more. At the same time they were seeing that these companies were not penalised, and kept on winning super profits. The injustice of it created a backlash.

We need a very clear and bold vision that explains what a justice-based transition means. It means not passing the bill on to the people who can least afford it, and insisting that the people most responsible for this crisis should pay the bulk of the bill. It doesn't mean that there won't be sacrifices across the board, but people are much more willing to make those changes if

they see that the costs are distributed justly.

You write in your book that past mobilisations have demonstrated that saying no is not enough, that we need a comprehensive understanding of what is expected to replace this system. Who will lay out this vision?

There needs to be a democratic process to build that vision. I don't think there's one vision that will work in France, or even in every part of France, and that the same vision will also work in Canada or India. What we need to do is disseminate examples that are working at every level, whether it's city level, the regional level or nationally, where groups are coming together to define what a just transition looks like for them.

As part of my work and travels I hear a lot of really good ideas. For instance, there is a big fight on the West Coast of the United States, near a place called Bellingham, Washington. It is a very green city, but there is a proposal to build a huge coal export terminal nearby. Initially, it's been a very ugly fight that has pitted environmentalists against workers. But then a coalition was convened by the city government and the movement against the coal mine, which was also very much led by a local indigenous people, the Lummi Nation. The unions came up with a plan to redevelop the waterfront in a different way. It will create jobs for the same workers that would get the jobs in the coal export port, but it would be green development and it would not be about exporting fossil fuels to Asia.

That's just one example and one project. The key thing is to really get these conversations going, because I'm continually amazed by the extent to which we fail to make connections between, for instance, a fight for affordable public transport and climate change. Or you'll have a strike of rail workers fighting privatisation, but they will never mention climate change. So there's this really basic failure to get in the same mode together, and use the power of these arguments to stand up to the pressure of austerity.

You talk about the "new

territory', Blockadia. What is Blockadia ?

Blockadia is sometimes called the fossil fuel resistance movement, and it comes from the movement in the United States against the Keystone XL pipeline. It is a huge pipeline that a company called TransCanada wants to build from the tar sands region in Alberta down to the Gulf of Mexico. Tar sands oil is one of the dirtiest, highest carbon oils on the planet. When they started to build the pipeline, there was a protest camp that was constructed, people chained themselves to fences and they moved into trees. They called their camp Blockadia. That word somehow took off and it started to be used wherever people were fighting these extractive projects, whether it was a mine, an export terminal, or fracking. Even though the word itself was born in the US, the tactics of Blockadia are much bolder and really come from the global South. Oil Watch International and EJOLT have done a really great job of mapping this transnational space. If we want to choose a somewhat arbitrary date for when Blockadia began, it would be the struggle of the Ogoni people against Shell in the 1990s: a successful struggle to kick Shell out of their territory in the Niger delta - Shell has never been able to return.

You seem to expect nothing from the international Climate Conference in Paris in December 2015. What can be expected from the process of international negotiation?

We have to be very realistic about the fact that it is not going to save the world, that it's not going to produce an agreement that's in line with what scientists are telling us we need to do. Scientists are telling us we need to cut our emissions by 8 to 10 percent a year, starting now. Our governments are talking about cutting emissions by 2 to 3 percent starting next decade. It's just not in the same ballpark.

It's a big mistake to reinforce this narrative that we just have to convince our leaders and suddenly they're going to become totally different people between now and eight months from now. That's a recipe for disappointment. That's what happened

with Copenhagen in 2009. A lot of people got deeply depressed afterwards. We need to see Paris as a stop along the road in a long process. The significance of Paris is that, particularly in Europe, there's been this huge avoidance of the climate issue since the economic crisis hit.

I started the book by saying that it is not only elites that can declare a crisis: regular people or social movements can declare a crisis as well. As we get closer and closer to the summit, there'll be more and more talk about climate change. So it's a chance to change the conversation, and to talk about what we should be talking about. We need to get away from this completely meaningless discourse around 'we're going to be cutting emissions by 20 percent of the 1990 levels by 2030', and saying, 'no, we need to be cutting emissions dramatically now'. And we need to start by closing off fossil fuel frontiers. I think there's huge momentum towards a 'keep it in the ground' message. And it might just be possible. A lot can happen in eight months.

Some of it depends on whether the price of oil stays down, because, for instance, in the Alberta tar sands, we've been fighting an uphill battle, because it was so incredibly profitable for companies to go into Alberta and dig up that oil. But right now investors are fleeing Alberta. So that context makes it more possible to win a structural victory. For instance, calling for a ban on Arctic drilling, or for a moratorium on tar sands extraction and a process of winding down that project, which is the largest industrial project on earth. I have no idea whether it's possible to get that on the agenda for Paris. It's not in the negotiation document right now, but I don't think we should give up on getting that on the agenda.

What would you say to people who want to do something 'in their daily lives' to make a difference?

We know the things we can be doing in our daily life to reduce our carbon footprint. A lot of us have already done those things. And we should do them, because it makes us saner and healthier and have less dissonance in

our lives. But I also think some of the discouragement people feel is a result of the fact that they have made individual changes and seen that it doesn't result in structural changes.

That's why I'm really encouraged by movements like the fossil fuel divestment movement where people are demanding that their universities, their pension funds or their cities divest from fossil fuels. Because it's important to get the argument out and delegitimize the profits of the sector, but it's also working at a scale that is more than the individual and less than everything; it's significant but not completely overwhelming. And it's part of realising that we are more powerful when we act together.

Would you say degrowth is a solution?

It's useful as a diagnostic : we do need to move away from an economic system that has growth as its sole measure of success and of progress. Overall, we need an economic system that does contract our use of resources, particularly fossil fuels. But adopting the banner of degrowth as the goal is a mistake: just because growth is the heart of the problem, it doesn't follow that degrowth is the solution. If the problem is measuring success through growth, then the solution, I think, is having another measure of success. Every context is different, but in a lot of contexts - particularly when people are experiencing relentless austerity - using the term degrowth is not a smart communication strategy.

Is there a way to deal with climate change by way of a technical solution, or is everything political?

It's a combination. Renewable energy is about technology. There have been brilliant advances in all kinds of technologies. Agro-ecological farming is not just a return to traditional farming methods. It's a combination of ancient knowledge and modern technology. But we can't get around the fact that there has to be a contraction in our consumption and our use of resources, so only focussing on technology gives a false impression that we don't have to change anything except for our source of energy. There

also needs to be a strategy to reduce demand, so that we actually use less energy. That's why just focussing on technology is dangerous. And it's worse for other technical fixes like geo-engineering, that are more sci-fi : this idea that there's going to be some magic bullet that will allow us to dim the sun so that we'll stop warming the planet... That's an expression of precisely the type of hubristic world view that actually created the problem in the first place.

So is there no way to fight climate change without fighting capitalism?

No, I don't think there is a way. We've been trying that for a long time. But there's still a really strong strain of the green movement that thinks that it's going to find a way to move forward that doesn't offend those in power. I frankly think it's just a bad strategy. If capitalism was working really well for the majority for people except for this problem of climate change, then we'd really need some kind of a strategy that protected that capitalist system, if such a strategy existed, which I don't think it does. The fact is, that's not where we are at.

We're at a point where there is a widespread popular understanding that this economic system is failing even on its own terms, more widespread than there ever has been in my lifetime. There is a huge debate about the neoliberal legacy of massive inequality. People understand that these policies that were supposed to create more efficiency actually created less. So the need for another economic model is urgent, and if the climate justice movement can show that responding to climate change is the best chance for a more just economic system, that creates more and better jobs, greater social equality, more and better social services, public transit, all these things that improve peoples daily lives, people will be ready to fight for those policies.

The problem is that we have enemies : fossil fuel companies, who fight like hell to protect their interests. They fight like they mean it, they fight with creativity, they fight dirty, they do whatever it takes to win. And opposite them you have this sort of mushy middle that doesn't really fight, because its not sure what the results

will be. But if you can marry an economic justice agenda with climate action, then you create a constituency of people that will fight for that future, because they will directly benefit from it.

Are you optimistic?

I don't see this as a question of optimism or pessimism. We all feel pessimistic. Anyone who tells you they're sure we'll win is either lying or crazy. But giving in to our despair is a morally reprehensible position right now. Too many lives are at stake. So if there's any chance that there is another way out, so then there's a moral responsibility to fight to increase those chances. I don't use the language of optimism to describe that position, I see it as a moral responsibility.

The urgency of the climate crisis, the fact that it tells us we have no more time to waste, we can't lose this battle, we are on a tight deadline, can be a catalyst to win battles that many of us have been fighting for many, many years.

[Basta!](#)

Left and Independent Political Action Conference: Unprecedented Cooperation

11 May 2015, by Dan La Botz

A number of the leading figures of independent politics in America participated. Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative, a member of the Seattle City Council, spoke to the group via video. Former Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein and former Green Party vice-presidential candidate Rosa Clemente spoke, as did 2014 New York gubernatorial candidate Howie Hawkins. Other speakers included Gayle McLaughlin of the Richmond Progressive Alliance and Richmond City Council member, Susan Sadlowski Garza, who recently was recently elected to the Chicago

City Council, and Angela Walker, who ran for sheriff in Milwaukee as an independent socialist.

Though not part of the formal agenda, the just-announced campaign of Bernie Sanders, an independent and self-identified socialist who will run for the Democratic Party presidential nomination—and who had sent greetings to the conference—became a topic of discussion in several sessions. While some said they would support a Sanders campaign because it would raise the important issues and contribute to activism, others felt—as

Bruce Dixon of Black Agenda Report and the Georgia Green Party put it—that Sanders was a sheep dog whose job was like that of Rev. Jesse Jackson and Congressman Dennis Kucinich in earlier elections, to round up folks who had strayed to the left in response to the Democratic Party's retrograde domestic and foreign policies and to bring them back to the Party.

Responding to the country's pervasive economic and social crisis, to widespread public support for movements such as Occupy, Black

Lives Matters, and Fight for \$15, and to recent successes in independent left campaigns, the conference expressed a sense of optimism about the possibilities for not only running left candidates and winning elections, but also for building a larger left political presence while both expressing and helping to organize and expand the social movements. While this was a conference about political action, the organizers made it clear through panels on the Black Lives Matter movement and the Fight for \$15 that politics must be about building and giving voice to such movements.

Robert Caldwell of Solidarity, one of the chief organizers of the event, and Debra Reiger, the chair of the California Peace and Freedom Party and also one of the organizers, told the gathering in a final report that the number of participants, the spirit of collaboration, and the richness of the discussion exceeded the organizers' expectations. During an evaluation period, many speakers rose to commend the spirit of mutual respect, cooperation, and solidarity that the conference had engendered. Speaking for the organizing committee—which includes representatives of most of the participating parties, together with the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Socialist Alternative, and Solidarity, as well as Black Agenda Report—Caldwell and Reiger announced that a continuations committee would take up the question of how to keep alive the network established by the conference. They also recognized the need for greater diversity, for greater involvement of African American and Latino activists, and for simply casting a wider net and drawing in others involved in such political campaigns.

Panels and Workshops

While this was a conference of the American independent left, there was also an international element. Søren Sørensen of the Danish Red-Green Alliance offered international greetings, while Sascha Nemseff Villagrán, a member of the Spanish Podemos Party, and Alan Akrivos of Socialist Alternative and the Greek Syriza, discussed the challenges facing these two parties which stand at the moment at the center of the fight between capital and labor over austerity in Europe.

Aware that we are building on political efforts of the past, there were various discussions of earlier movements and their experiences. Lance Selfa of the International Socialist Organization, and author of *The Democrats: A Critical History*, opened the conference by providing an overview of today's two-party system. Prof. Mark Lause, a longtime Green Party activist, discussed the history of the Socialist Party and the Progressive Party in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. New York Green Party leader Gloria Mattera discussed the history of the Labor Party of the United States that was founded in 1996, and of the Green Party. Unfortunately sudden illness and hospitalization kept Kali Akuno of the Malcolm X Grass Roots Movement (MXGM) and the Chokwe Lumumba campaign from talking about electoral politics and Black liberation. There were also talks by Bruce Dixon on the Black Panther Party, by Jesus "Chuy" Negrete on the La Raza Unida Party, and by Guy Miller on the Socialist Worker Party campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s.

Many of the participants brought

years of experience in organizing independent political campaigns, so naturally the nuts-and-bolts of organizing were also on the agenda, as were the challenges of actually holding office. Several speakers from various parties talked about ballot access and the fight for inclusion in debate, while others discussed fundraising, field operations, and voter registration. Marsha Rummel of Progressive Dane (County) and Madison City Councilperson and Gayle McLaughlin of the Richmond City Council discussed the difficulties of holding office while trying to fight for progressive change and simultaneously build the movements.

During the next year and a half, the question of how we relate to the Sanders campaign, which has the potential to reach and involve millions of progressives, will be challenging. Even those who opposed endorsing Sanders suggested that advocates of independent political action should maintain a friendly attitude to Sanders supporters. When the seemingly inevitable nomination of Hillary Clinton occurs, it may be possible to win over many of these people to an independent, left, third party perspective.

The Future of the Left/Independent Politics Conference represented an important step forward not only for independent politics but also for cooperation on the left. The challenge now will be to find ways for the organizations and individuals involved in this conference to keep alive the network we have founded, while continuing our work in local movements and independent political campaigns.

May 5, 2015

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The implications of the general election results

10 May 2015, by **Socialist Resistance**

The opinion polls were right about two things.

The first was the decimation of the Lib Dems which have been reduced to 8 seats with major figures “ the people who have been propping up the Tories for the past five years ” from Vince Cable to Danny Alexander now out of parliament. [3] They bear direct responsibility for all the attacks the Tories have mounted. Labour failed to gain from their collapse as significantly as it would have if it had put forward a consistent anti-austerity message.

The second was the staggering swing to the SNP in Scotland, with Labour reduced to just one seat. In some constituencies the swing from Labour to the SNP reached almost 40%. Only three seats were not won by SNP, one LibDem, one Tory and one Labour.

Labour’s life threatening wounds in Scotland were self-inflicted through their reactionary adherence to ossified unionism, the enthusiastic way they stood alongside the Tories to defend it in the referendum campaign and their failure to take up an anti-austerity and anti-Trident policy. This was massively punished by the Scottish electorate, who swung in an unprecedented way to the SNP and wiped out Labour for a generation. [4]

However, while the shock of this was massive, it’s a trend that’s been growing for a number of years culminating in a major swing among Labour voters towards independence and anti-austerity and a massive tactical vote for the SNP to wipe out Labour. SNP MPs are likely to be a diverse group, with some radicals likely to emerge within them.

This was the single most significant factor in the election; an earthquake in British politics, which is not going to go away.

But overall the UK is becoming more fragmented electorally, in reality there were actually four different elections going on - Scotland, Wales, England

and the North of Ireland. Labour won by around 10% in Wales, the Tories won by around 10% in England and hence scooped the majority of seats, the SNP were triumphant in Scotland and the North of Ireland has its own unique dynamics.

The relentless demonisation of the SNP by the Tories and the Lib Dems clearly had an impact on English voters that did not show up in the polls.

Plaid Cymru was the party with a strong woman leader that benefitted least from the anti-austerity sentiment “ with only a modest increase in its vote of 0.8%, while UKIP saw a dramatic increase in its vote in Wales of 11.2% (the swing across Britain as a whole is 9.5% ” kept lower than would otherwise be the case by its poor showing in Scotland).

The advance of Sinn Fein in the six counties was halted, not least because of the contradiction of its presentation of itself as an anti-austerity party which is deeply tainted with the implementation of austerity in the coalition government of the six counties with the reactionary DUP. [5] There was a significant anti-austerity alternative vote against SF in its base in West Belfast. [6]

The victory of the Tories (based on winning England) will open a further deeply reactionary phase of government with a Queen’s Speech [7] laden with massive cuts in welfare benefits, attacks on living standards, cuts in public expenditure, increases in university fees, more racist controls on immigration etc. A referendum on EU membership is now highly likely within a couple of years, with a deeply reactionary underlying racist anti-migrant agenda.

Labour lost the election rather than the Tories winning it. They failed over the past five years to refute the Tory claim to economic competence. The leadership capitulated to the Tory’s economic policies and failed to offer a much needed alternative or to project

an anti-austerity pro-working class agenda.

When they put forward a few good and popular policies such as taxing the wealthy, these were overshadowed by what was seen as its ambiguous attitude to austerity, promising further cuts and leading to abject confusion about its message. Voters deserted it in droves, though this was also partly offset by the collapse of the Liberal Democrats and some compensating gains.

Labour remains a significant force in English local government, winning practically every local government seat in the big cities of the North and Midlands. However it is under pressure from UKIP to its right and the Greens to its left while it fails to provide an anti-austerity alternative “ this is likely to provoke a severe crisis in its ranks and areas controlled by it as it meekly implements the cuts and austerity agenda of the new Tory government. Building local struggles against austerity by resistance to cuts will be essential if the left is to build a base for the future

The inquest into Labour’s general election defeat started even before Miliband resigned. [8] There is now a real danger that the conclusion (under pressure from the Blairites) that the campaign had been too left wing and the answer is to move further into the “centre ground’. Only Peter Hain mentioned the word neoliberalism and that it is not working. [9] Charles Clarke actually described the 1% as the “wealth creators” echoing right-wing ideology as though wealth could ever be created in the absence of human labour working to produce it. [10]

UKIP gained massively on the back of a right-wing campaign with many racist undertones, but failed to breakthrough electorally in parliament under the first past the post system. They got 4 million nationally and increased their penetration into Labour seats in the North. Farage has resigned but he is likely to be back

before the end of the year. [11]

Despite their deeply reactionary character, they now support electoral reform as both Carswell's acceptance speech [12] and Farage's resignation statement showed. But while this was a savvy media move they are not going to campaign around it.

They will win many local council election seats however and are capable of winning control of councils in the coming period – a major setback for progressive politics in Britain. [13] Much of the migrant population (mainly from the EU countries) is denied a vote in general elections but does have a vote in local elections. This community needs to be mobilised by the left in a massive anti-xenophobic campaign to combat the racism of UKIP and the Tories. However the tactics used against fascists will fail to achieve this and the left needs to rethink its tactics in order to pursue this approach seriously.

The Greens had their best general election results ever winning a total of over a million votes and Caroline Lucas substantially increased her majority in Brighton – one of the few bright spots in the English political landscape. [14]

They benefited from the LibDem collapse and a higher profile for anti-austerity and left policies particularly among younger voters. They won an increased number of votes and won a number of second and third places; but despite this they are not likely to make much progress electorally. They have massively increased their membership and presence and the left needs to relate to this, especially in the wider audience that now exists for a major campaign around climate change and ecological issues.

The Scottish Greens significantly underperformed due to massive tactical voting for the SNP to destroy Labour; there is every sign this could swing to the Greens in the list (PR) vote in the Scottish Parliament elections in 2016.

The National Health Action Party did moderately well. [15] They ran a good campaign and gained 20,210 votes

standing in only 12 seats – well targeted against high profile opponents. Former independent MP Richard Taylor won 14% in Wyre Forest while first time candidate Louise Irvine took 8% against Jeremy Hunt. [16]

The socialist (left of Labour) parties did badly, including Left Unity and TUSC, with most candidates down at less than 1%, with only a few exceptions. TUSC is not going anywhere and should be discontinued as should Respect which also failed to build on the by-election victory of Galloway.

The left wing organisations have failed to build a serious alternative to Labour and have been eclipsed by the SNP and Greens. We are worse off than we were 15 years ago when the Socialist Alliance existed and the gains of the Respect period have been willfully discarded by the major left organisations (SP and SWP). A major rethinking is necessary and a more consistent attitude towards the building of a long term united left wing alternative.

Despite generally poor electoral results Left Unity has clearly emerged as the only hope for such a development, not least because it exists on 8 May. [17] The potential can be seen in votes such as the 949 (1.8%) for Glyn Robbins in Bethnal Green and 542 (1.2%) for Stephen Hall in Leigh.

There are a number of key conclusions to be drawn from all this.

The near 5 million votes for the Greens and UKIP resulted in just 2 MPs compared to over 200 for Labour with less than double the vote shows there is a major crisis of democratic legitimacy of the parliament – the Tories have won a majority of seats on just 36% of the vote with deeply unpopular policies they will now try to implement. Far from being stable there are likely to be periodic crises over the coming period.

The voting system is outrageously undemocratic. For the smaller parties their share of seats is out of all proportion to their percentage share of the vote. The Greens are only

represented by a single MP despite getting a million votes. The DUP won 8 seats with just 180,000 votes. A key campaigning demand now should be proportional representation, so that future elections give parties a fair share of seats according to their real support.

Left Unity rightly made this point central to its post-election statement [18] – it will need to work over the next weeks to explore how to make this a campaigning priority – and how to work with others to address this massive democratic deficit.

The results also reinforce the need to build a broad left party as an alternative to Labour. They bring home in full force the price we are paying for the squandering of previous attempts to build broad parties in Britain over the past 25 years. None of the socialist left parties in this election has results that match the election results of Respect in its most healthy period or in the Socialist Alliance before it. We have been going backwards whilst the left in many other countries in Europe have been going forward.

The importance of LU is that it is attempting to address this by building a party that is democratic and inclusive and seeks to build ongoing branches – but we are starting from a long way back.

Such an alternative needs to combine presenting a radical political alternative at the ballot box with campaigning on the streets. Left Unity will rightly mobilise for the first major demonstration against the new government called by the People's Assembly on June 20 – and then further ahead for the COP21 demonstrations in Paris as well as much more locally and nationally. We also need a united campaign to defend the NHS – this will be increasingly privatized and cut back by the new government.

But if the SNP and the Greens were better placed to attract anti-austerity voters on 7 May it was not least because they had been appearing on the ballot papers over a long period of time. Left Unity needs to build that credibility not only in communities

and campaigns but also at the ballot box in a consistent manner.

A look at the state of the U.S. labor movement while, in protests, workers fight for \$15

9 May 2015, by **Dan La Botz**

While most people think of the minimum wage earners as fast-food workers or employees of the big box stores like Wal-Mart, they also include home-care workers, car washers, musicians and actors, and adjunct professors at colleges and universities. About 30 percent of all workers are considered low-wage, based on earning 150 percent of the federal government's poverty guidelines. More than half of all state and federal spending on poverty programs goes to working families whose breadwinners don't earn enough to support families. That is, because the bosses don't pay the workers a living wage, the taxpayers must subsidize the workers' income, with the federal and state governments paying 153 billion dollars per year to do so.

It was the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 that first brought the issue of income inequality into the public debate. While OWS and its offspring throughout the country organized many protests around these issues, by 2012 the movement had been crushed by the police and largely disappeared from public view. Yet the issue of income inequality and low wages became part of the public debate as it had not been for decades.

Employer groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other employers groups argue that raising the minimum wage won't affect many workers, since few workers earn the minimum; that while it would help those wages, it would not impact the income inequality people are now concerned about; that it would tend to deter employers from hiring more workers or even lead them to lay off

workers, or force them to go out of business. Republican politicians too oppose increasing the minimum wage, arguing like the employers' organizations, that it will result in fewer jobs for low-wage workers. Liberals and labor unions generally argue that raising wages will improve workers lives, lead to greater consumption, and therefore in the end be good for business. Few except those on the left argue that raising the minimum wage and wages generally is part of a struggle against the employers, for a redistribution of wealth toward, the workers, and part of a broader fight against the capitalist system. Only leftists see the "Fight for \$15" as the first step in building a militant and independent working class movement.

More recently with the sudden upsurge of the Black Lives Matter movement, there were attempts to connect police racism and repression with other social issues such as the lack of enough jobs at living wages, especially in the black and Latino communities. While there were some Black Lives Matter demonstrations linked to the Fight for \$15, that movement too proved to be short-lived, at least on a mass, national scale. Consequently, it has been the labor unions which have taken the lead in organizing low-wage workers.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), one of the largest unions in the United States, has been the principal force behind the recent campaign, though other unions, community groups, and socialist organizations have been involved as well. SEIU and other unions have

spent tens of millions of dollars on the campaign which began in New York in 2012, spread to 60 cities by the summer of 2013, and to 190 cities by winter 2014. While a small but growing number of workers have been participating in the protests, the movement has not yet really developed a strong base among these low-wage-earners. While there have been some low-wage worker strikes in fast-food restaurants and big box stores, they have so far mostly been symbolic, but workers participation in the protests is growing.

The unions and the left have seen the \$15 campaign as a way to rebuild the workers movement, other earlier and more traditional attempt to do so having failed. The U.S. labor movement over the last four decades has been ground down to a fragment of what it once was. Today in the United States only 11.1 percent of the workforce belongs to a union. While the public employee unionization rate is 35.7 percent, in the private sector it is only 6.6 percent. While unionization levels differ greatly from state to state—New York at 24.6 percent and North Carolina at 1.9 percent—everywhere unions are under attack. Republican governors and legislatures have been putting forward legislation which makes it more difficult to organize unions in both the public and the private sector.

Not only is union membership down, but there are also fewer strikes than at any time since 1947. In 2014 there were only 11 major strikes involving 1,000 or more workers. Only 34,000 workers were involved and only 200,000 workdays lost. Very few

American workers have ever participated in a strike and most remain reluctant to do so. There is not much fight in the American working class at the moment, and it is hoped that the minimum wage campaign will lay the basis for future struggles. But at the moment Republican governors' attacks on unions have the political initiative.

While political attacks on the unions are significant, at the root of the problem are changes in the economy and employer policies. The United States has suffered a dramatic decline of manufacturing jobs, a result both of greater automation and of the movement of plants to other countries, from nearby by Mexico to China. Those industrial, union jobs were among the best paying in the country. At the same time, employers adopted policies such as out-sourcing that turned formerly jobs over to non-union companies. The bosses have also hired many fewer permanent, full-time employees, preferring employees who are temporary and part-time workers and therefore do not acquire seniority, do not enjoy benefits and the regular terms of employment. That is, in America as everywhere else precarious employment has grown while stable employment has declined.

So, while the federal and state minimum wages are a problem, the greater problem is that "because of the loss of industrial jobs and the decline in union representation" for decades the great majority of U.S. workers' wages have remained stagnant, even though productivity has increased enormously. As a result, while in the 1970s wages made up about 50 percent of the gross domestic product, today they

represent only 40 percent of the GDP.

How have Americans survived if their wages have stagnated? Largely through increases in personal debt—household mortgages, automobile loans, and credit card debt—though the latter is down since the crisis of 2008. Total household debt is now 11.52 trillion dollars. Not surprisingly Americans have more debt than they have savings. Student debt has grown rapidly over the last decade and now averages \$30,000 per graduate. College tuition at state universities average \$9,139 per year while private schools average \$31,321 for 2014-15. The elite private universities may cost as much as 50 to 60 thousand dollars per years. Clearly students who once put themselves through school by working as waiters or flipping hamburgers can no longer do so, not at \$8.00 an hour. So many students have become supporters of the \$15 an hour minimum wage movement.

SEIU, other unions and the community groups involved in the \$15 an hour movement see it as a way to revitalize the labor movement, or to prepare the ground for future struggles by building organization, training activists, and identifying leader. They also see the fight for \$15 as building a broad base of support for workers among the general public. Opinion polls show that 75 percent of all Americans support raising the minimum wage to \$12.00 an hour. The unions' calculus seems to be correct so far, even though the number of workers involved in the movement still remains small, thousands of workers have now been touched by the movement, and the general public has begun to change its opinion.

The Fight for \$15 poses a real problem for the Democratic Party. The liberal wing of the party led by New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren has argued that something must be done to stop the widening income gap. But the liberals don't have a presidential candidate. Hillary Clinton, who will almost certainly be the Democratic Party nominee, needs to give lip service to the fight against income inequality and to the fight for higher wages. But, after the primary elections she will have to move back toward the center in order to win the votes of mainstream democrats and independents.

Clinton will use the income inequality and wage issues to win the support of African American, Latino, and low-wage white worker, and the AFL-CIO unions will provide the foot soldiers to get them to the polls. But her commitment to those issues may end as early the Democratic Party primary and will certainly end with the general election. Still, it is true, Clinton and the Democrats will fulfill Obama's promise to raise the minimum wage to \$12 by 2020, while the Republicans will do nothing to improve workers' lives. While the Fight for \$15 may be the beginning of an important workers' movement it is still not large enough and strong enough "and certainly not independent enough" to change this fundamental dynamic of American working class politics. That is, that in the end, the workers will be led by the unions to vote for one of the bosses' parties.

27 April 2015

Written for Viento Sur.

Ciudadanos, Podemos and the desired centrality

8 May 2015, by Josep María Antentas

Ciudadanos deprives Podemos of its novelty effect and, above all, its appearance as the only contender to the throne that bipartisanship has already semi-abandoned, around which a heterogeneous social majority could be built, attracted to Podemos by the real possibility that it was the vehicle for political change. It is a vicious circle, because as a victory for Podemos seems less possible, the less support it will receive. And, on the contrary, the more credible the victory of an alternative, the more instrumental support it will receive. Although both parties are vying for only a layer of votes and their major potential voters come from counterposed sites, Ciudadanos blocks the growth of Podemos in the less politicized and more conservative sectors and fires a torpedo at the waterline of its project of a transversal party which aspires to quickly accumulate a social majority that goes beyond the traditional confines of the "people of the left".

The rise of both parties has undoubted points in common, in particular as regards the media-television propulsion of the personal charismatic leadership of Rivera and Iglesias. But if the media projection of Podemos can be explained by a logic of index of audiences, that of Ciudadanos has been induced by business-political interests to consciously create the antidote to Podemos and an option of replacement or underpinning of bipartisanship. And, beyond the televisual parallels, there are two very different underlying realities. Through the Podemos phenomenon there has been a process of self-organization from below often in conflict with the development and structuring of the party itself, and real rank and file militancy, much of it from the recent experience of the 15M and the Mareas and the social sectors who had sympathized with them. None of this exists in Ciudadanos, devoid of activist base and social anchoring, despite the obvious pull of the actions and conferences of Rivera and his

followers.

The rise of Ciudadanos, as reflected in that of Podemos, shows once more the crucial importance of the media, and television in particular, in the current crisis of bipartisanship and in the formation of new political alternatives. And, with this, it also shows the volatility of the situation, the weaknesses of the process of politicization underway, and the fragility of any strategy of social transformation that undervalues the importance of social self-organization and is restricted only or primarily to the field of communications.

To fight Ciudadanos, Podemos must be faithful to what motivated its foundation and the hopes hatched after the European elections, and avoid any temptation to imitate its new and unexpected rival. The search for "centre" voters, if it is conceived as an adaptation to their preferences and not as a struggle for changing perceptions of reality, re-signifying debates and resetting priorities, means beginning a path toward an unattainable carrot that there is always more to the right. The recent historical development of social democracy is quite eloquent. Their results also. The temptation of respectability to contest the votes of the depoliticized "centre" would be a strategic error. If the goal is to sell a superficial change, a mere empty regeneration, Rivera will always win and not Iglesias. There is no point in playing in a field where the candidate with a tie is always better than the one with a ponytail.

The eruption of Podemos was able to change the coordinates of the political debate, introducing new topics on the agenda and forcing the rest of the parties to adapt to the new player. The meteoric success of the term "caste" was, without doubt, the clearest example of this. It would be a fundamental error if now it was forced to play in the field of another, that of Ciudadanos, that of bland promises.

On the contrary, today more than ever, we must insist on the need to unite democratic regeneration with a change in economic policies, together with criticism of the bipartisan system and corruption with the defence of a citizen anti-austerity rescue plan. This is precisely the Achilles heel of Ciudadanos. How do citizens stop the evictions? What about privatization? Rescuing the banks? This is the type of question on which the party of Rivera should be challenged, to clearly show in that its proposals are more of the same. Here it moves poorly. Here Podemos can move well. If there is any aspiring "caste" in Spanish politics it is represented by Albert Rivera, whose tranquil change consists of little more than putting himself and his disciples in the place where the PP and PSOE have been for decades.

The challenge is for Podemos to continue to set the political agenda by placing proposals and issues on the table to highlight its uniqueness and its credibility as an agent of democratic and social change. Wanting to "be like them" has a bad history for any emancipator movement. To show that being different can be more efficient, better, relevant and solvent is the challenge for those who seek to fundamentally change the world.

The battle for centrality is, seen in this way, the fight to move the centre of gravity around which alliances and the social and institutional relations revolve in a direction favourable to those at the bottom (impossible to conceive of hegemony in the Gramscian sense without understanding it as an articulation turning around class relations!). In short, the battle to control the lever around which the political-social gears pivot. Difficult, without a doubt, but this conquest of the desired centrality, when not confused with programmatic and discursive adaptations, opens unexplored doors that allow us to bring what is possible closer to what is necessary.

1975: In check! - Looking back on the US war in Indochina

7 May 2015, by **Pierre Rousset**

On April 30, 1975, the People's Liberation Army entered Saigon unopposed as a result of a lightning offensive. The Saigon regime, supported to the end by Washington, collapsed like a house of cards. The US had to make an emergency evacuation, helicopters coming to retrieve their nationals from the roof of the U.S. embassy - in the full view of television cameras from around the world! A terrible humiliation for the imperialist superpower then deemed invincible.

It was a good twenty years since the US began fighting the liberation movement in Vietnam; indeed they had begun to intervene before the French defeat of 1954 and prepared to take on the relay of a colonial regime in full decline. It was not for Washington about defending special interests (access to markets, investment and so on). The issue at stake was always geostrategic: to deliver a definitive blow to any revolutionary dynamic in Asia.

Turning back the Asian revolutions

Asia very soon became the main focus of anti-imperialist struggle. It was in Europe that the consequences of the First World War and the Russian Revolution first made themselves felt. But after the ultimate defeat of the German revolution (1923), attention shifted to the Orient. Muslim Central Asia was at boiling point. Revolution and counter-revolution confronted each other in China from 1925. During the decades following the Second World War armed movements of liberation developed from Latin America to Africa or the Middle East with the lodestone countries being Cuba, Algeria, Palestine, Angola and

Mozambique. Imperialism imposed its order through particularly bloody military coups (Chile, Argentina and so on) and with the aid of states such as Israel. All of the Third World was involved, but it was in the Far East, with the victory of the Chinese revolution (1949), that the struggle took on a special dimension. China is the most populous country in the world, followed by India, which, although capitalist, was backed by Moscow to win a certain independence. France was proving unable to break the battle of the Vietnamese. The revolutionary foci in the region were increasing. Washington wanted to "contain and push back" the wave of Asian liberation without skimping on the means.

China was not blockaded like Cuba. At the political, economic and military a huge cordon sanitaire was built which extended like the arc of circle from the Korean peninsula to the Indochinese peninsula. Washington locked up the east with the Korean War (1950-1953) which has left up to today a divided country. It locked in the south, making Taiwan a fortress - where the Chinese counter-revolutionaries fled to the great disgruntlement of the local populations; the Kuomintang regime then represented China on the UN Security Council. To stabilize its South Korean and Taiwanese allies, the US favoured the implementation of agrarian reforms and left much more of freedom than in other countries of the South to large wealthy families controlling dictatorial and dirigiste states. That is the origin of the unusual development of a relatively autonomous Korean or Taiwanese capital.

The United States helped Japan to rebuild (as in Western Europe with the Marshall plan), while maintaining it

under its strategic tutelage. Huge US military bases US were built (in Okinawa), as well as in South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand. The 7th fleet and its aircraft carriers occupied the China Sea. Washington locked down again, in the islands of south-east Asia this time, with the Suharto coup in Indonesia (1965). The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), considered as the biggest CP of the capitalist world, was eradicated at the price of perhaps two million deaths and a state of general repression that endured for more than thirty years.

To complete the encirclement of China, there remained continental south-east Asia. Maoist guerrillas were active in Malaysia and Thailand. Above all the struggle resumed in Vietnam. The division of the country decided during the Geneva agreements was intended to be only temporary, pending the holding of elections that the Vietminh and Ho Chi Minh were sure to win. No question therefore, for Washington, which had not signed the agreements, of these elections taking place; on the contrary, the Saigon regime and the US advisors undertook the systematic murder of revolutionary cadres living in the South. At the turn of the 1960, the Vietnamese CP therefore decided to re-launch the battle, knowing that this time, it would be directly facing the United States and not France.

Bringing the "Soviet bloc" to its knees

Turning back the Asian revolutions was not the sole objective of the US intervention in Vietnam. Behind Beijing, Moscow was also targeted. Washington wanted to end the

configuration of "Blocs" which had dominated the international scene since the Second World War. The issue at stake was sizeable: allowing imperialist capital to re-enter the vast territories of the "Eastern Bloc".

Although centred on Indochina, the Vietnam conflict was not a local or even regional war. Its scope was truly global. All the contradictions of the international situation were refracted there, pervading the givens of the liberation struggle: the state of the workers' and progressive movement in Europe and the United States, of solidarity; the opening (or not) of new revolutionary fronts in the third world; the ambivalence of Moscow or Peking's diplomacy - because ambivalence, there was.

There was no simple equivalence between the "revolutionary camp" and the "Soviet camp". Inasmuch as the "East-West" confrontation was real, inasmuch as imperialism could play on the specific interests of the Soviet bureaucracy (and later of the Chinese bureaucracy) to pressure the liberation movements at decisive moments. The Asian Communist Parties learned this to their cost very early. At the end of the Second World War, with the agreements of Yalta and Potsdam, Moscow agreed that China and Vietnam should remain within the sphere of Western domination. Neither the CCP nor the VCP respected this division of the world secretly negotiated behind their back between the Allied powers.

In 1954, Moscow and Beijing acted together to force the VCP to accept, at the Geneva negotiations, an agreement which was very far from reflecting the reality of the relationship of forces on the ground and which carried the germ of a new war - the American war, the most terrible of all. The Vietnamese drew the lessons of this bitter experience: fifteen years later, they refused the participation of the Sino-Soviet "big brothers" in the Paris negotiations, reduced to a head-to-head with Washington from which the agreements of 1973 emerged - agreements which this time led to victory.

The geopolitical world became even

more complex with the emergence of the Sino-Soviet conflict in the mid-1960s, Beijing not accepting that Moscow had negotiated, behind its back, a nuclear agreement with Washington. The schism that broke out inside the "Eastern Bloc" represented a real problem for the VCP - who needed the help of the two rival capitals of the misnamed "socialist camp". On the other hand, it was a windfall for the United States, who would play on this new contradiction. This asset did not allow them to avoid the debacle of 1975, but it proved decisive in the following years with the formation of a USA-China-Khmer alliance seeking to rein in Vietnam.

All this should, of course, not allow us to forget that the assistance provided by Moscow and Beijing to Hanoi during the war against the US was very important on both an economic and a military level. The USSR and China knew very well that they were targeted by the US intervention in Vietnam. Victorious, the US would have been in a position to push its advantage. Sino-Soviet aid was therefore one of the factors of Vietnamese resistance. While considerable, it remained nonetheless politically measured in order not to endanger the possibilities of dialogue with Washington: missiles capable of protecting the skies of North Vietnam from the B52 bombers were not provided, the offer of a (rotten) compromise was maintained - but the VCP simply did not accept it.

The Vietnamese factor

World geopolitics after 1949 (victory of the Chinese revolution) and 1954 (defeat of the French) made Vietnam the "focal point" of the international situation, the "advance trench" of the revolutionary struggle in the words of a long slogan chanted during demonstrations of solidarity: "greetings to you, Vietnamese brothers, soldiers of every front line". Yet this liberation movement had to face a heavy burden; to be in the "front line" against the United States.

The anti-colonial struggles in Vietnam

did not initially take on the spectacular scale of what happened in the 1920s in China. Yet, the national movement, and particularly the VCP, were contemporaries of the CCP. The initial leading nucleus of these two parties was formed in the wake of the Russian revolution, before the Stalinization of the USSR. Both nevertheless identified the "socialist camp", although maintaining an autonomy of decision making contrasting with the direct subordination of other CPs. Both also accumulated a varied experience of struggle before engaging in prolonged people's war - at the turn of the 1930s in China, a decade later in Vietnam.

Before the American war, the Vietminh acquired a deep national legitimacy with the proclamation of independence in August 1945, and then with the conduct of a "people's war" which dealt the French expeditionary corps the defeat of Dien Bien Phu - a feat already unprecedented against a colonial metropolis. The US was then attacking a seasoned and rooted adversary, even if they did not doubt victory.

In its duration, the liberation struggle in Vietnam embodies a whole period, opened by the Russian revolution. The victory of 1975, in a sense, was the culmination, in the form of victory in a frontal conflict with US imperialism. It also announced, although it was not immediately obvious, the end of this period, given the violence of the inter-bureaucratic conflicts and crises which ate into the Soviet regimes and Chinese.

A total war

The United States intervention in Indochina was first of all a military escalation without equivalent outside of the world wars. The immense resources deployed in the region contributed, from the bases of Okinawa to those of a Thailand transformed into a "terrestrial aircraft carrier". The 7th Fleet shelled the Vietnamese coasts while its planes could intervene in very short period of time. The giant B52 bombers operated from very high altitude, with devastating effect. For the first time, helicopters were engaged very heavily

in the fighting (France had already used them in Algeria). Napalm, defoliants (Agent Orange which still poisons the country), cluster bombs and so on. Apart from atomic weapons and the destruction of the main dykes which would have flooded a part of North Vietnam (two measures whose international consequences were unpredictable), everything was implemented. The US expeditionary corps reached 550,000 men. Two times more tons of bombs were discharged on the small Indochinese territory than by all the Allies on all fronts of the conflict in 1939-45. In all, almost nine million U.S. soldiers participated in the conflict.

The war was being conducted in multiple areas. An assassination plan targeted the cadres of the National Liberation Front in the South - Operation Phoenix which claimed several tens of thousands of victims. An agrarian reform was implemented to counter that inherited from the Vietminh and to try to build a social base for the Saigon regime (of capitalist farmers). The rural populations were grouped into strategic hamlets and a system of police control, home by home, was introduced into the cities to better identify any unknown persons. To reduce the number of human losses in the expeditionary corps, the "Vietnamization" of the counter-revolutionaries armed forces - it was about "changing the skin colour of the corpses".

In the United States, the economy contributed to the war effort as well as the scientific corps who were asked by the government request to broaden the palette of the machines of death, with penetrating bombs to destroy the tunnels, heat detectors to locate human presence, anti-personnel mines based in the natural environment and so on. The scientists, in their great majority, did as they were asked, until the time when the antiwar movement took off with the increase of US losses (60,000 GIs died - for some three million Vietnamese killed, five million injured and ten million displaced).

Despite considerable losses, which would have serious consequences after the victory (the militant infrastructure in revolutionary cadre

originating from the South was much weakened), the Vietnamese resistance held good. The economic cost to the United States became exorbitant. The antiwar movement became a factor of internal political instability. 1968 shook the West, and Washington was forced to negotiate. Two years after the signing of the Paris agreements, the Saigon regime collapsed.

Check but not mate

In 1975, in the wake of the Vietnamese victory, Mozambique proclaimed its independence (in June), as well as Angola (in November) - both would be however be invaded by South Africa, but in the latter country, the apartheid regime met its end in 1994.

The United States failed in Vietnam, but the King was not mated for all that. The Paris agreements did not lead to a compromise like what happened with the Evian agreements between French imperialism and the new Algerian regime, quite the contrary. Washington had a policy of revenge and the conflict continued in other forms. In 1972, in a dramatic gesture, Richard Nixon visited Beijing as fighting was raging in the Indochinese peninsula. An alliance of circumstance was emerging which led, after 1975, to an anti-Vietnam front between American imperialism, China (where Deng Xiaoping returned to power) and the Khmer Rouge (behind the official veil of Sihanouk).

The war was not over. Washington maintained diplomatic pressure on the country and imposed an embargo (which lasted until February 1994 and locked out international investment). The Khmer Rouge multiplied its border attacks and claimed the Mekong delta. In December 1978, the Vietnamese army intervened massively and the Pol Pot regime collapsed, the deported populations returning home. In February-March 1979, some 120,000 men from the Chinese army attacked the northern border at several points where they fought with local militias and regional troops, the regular Vietnamese forces being engaged on the Cambodian

theatre of operations. The CCP was indicating to Hanoi that the archipelagos of the Spratleys and the Paracels were Chinese; a pre-figuration of current maritime territorial conflicts.

The war after the war precipitated a crisis in Vietnam. As in Russia, China or Cuba, imperialism imposed a high price for its defeat, while Vietnamese society emerged exhausted from 30 years of conflict. The regime hardened again - it had already in the past effectively sidelined Ho Chi Minh (who died in 1969), while Giap was out of favour on more than one occasion and a secret purge was conducted within the leadership of the supposed "pro Soviets" being placed for many years under house arrest. It feared that the Chinese community in the south of the country would become a fifth column and also attacked the large capitalist merchants who were often Chinese. Beijing breathed on the embers, which contributed to the mass exodus of the "boat people".

The defeat of the US in 1975 has had lasting consequences. US imperialism experienced a relative decline, of which Europe was able to take advantage. For years, it was politically impossible to directly engage in a new war. A favourable window for struggles could have opened - if the consequences of the Sino Soviet conflict had not immediately closed it. The defeat in victory did not come from the external enemy, but the enemy within of any social revolution: the bureaucracy.

We should not forget the weakness of international solidarity - a question which was always very present. Some very beautiful internationalist pages were written during 1965-1975, notably, although not entirely, through the radicalization of youth in many countries. However, it was very late. The Vietnamese people would have been able to win its independence in 1936-37 at the time of the Popular Front in France; or in 1945, if Paris had not been able to send an expeditionary force to re-conquer its former colony; or in 1954 if Beijing and Moscow had not made a deal with Paris; or again in 1968, as a result of the TÁt offensive. It was necessary to wait until 1975, after decades of

destruction and ordeals which could have been avoided for the forces of liberation and the entire population.

Amnesia and the Armenian Genocide

6 May 2015, by Jean Batou

April 24 marked one hundred years since the beginning of the [Armenian Genocide](#). A century after the methodically planned, organized, and executed destruction of the Anatolian Armenians, it is instructive to revisit the causes of this genocide and recognize its importance for understanding the present.

Two decades after the genocide, on August 22, 1939, Adolph Hitler told his military chiefs of his plans to massacre the civilian population of Poland, remarking, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" And indeed, after the prosecution of the men most responsible for Turkey's extermination policies – trials were held from 1919 to 1922 under pressure from the victorious powers – the Armenian Genocide was quickly forgotten.

Ankara's official line has not changed since the foundation of Kemalist Turkey in 1923: it claims that the Armenians fell victim to the hardships of life in wartime, deadly epidemics, and isolated cases of violence, and the Ottoman state thus bore no blame for the mass fatalities.

The Mechanisms of Genocide

As early as summer 1914 – even before Turkey entered the war, in September of that year – the Anatolian Armenians were being threatened with annihilation at the hands of the "Young Turk" Committee of Unity and Progress (CUP) government, which had come to power in 1908.

Full war mobilization marked the beginning of a generalized surveillance of the Armenians, who

were suspected of harboring sympathies for the Russian Empire. Their villages were subjected to increasingly brutal oppression – arbitrary taxation, raids, property confiscation, and the seizure of weapons. In the Russian borderlands, the CUP established special units to terrorize – through Armenians accused of collaborating with the enemy. They carried out massacres and deportations.

When the Tsar's forces defeated the Ottomans defeat in Sarikamis (northeast Anatolia in late 1914 and early 1915, there was a a rapid and extreme radicalization of these policies. The CUP now considered Armenians a major obstacle to the Turkish-origin Muslim populations' resistance against Russian expansion. It was in this context that the CUP decided, in March 1915, to deport and destroy the entire Anatolian Armenian population.

Systematic deportations began in May and June in the eastern provinces – followed by the center and west of the country – after the Interior Ministry sent an encrypted message to local governors demanding the deportation of civilians. The party leadership also met face-to-face with local officials, ordering them to summarily execute men who had not enrolled in the army. Enlisted Armenian soldiers were disarmed and murdered, along with the youngest and oldest men in the labor battalions (porters, navvies, etc.).

It is impossible to definitively count the total number of victims – killed after being compelled to dig their own graves or forced onto boats set adrift into the Black Sea, where they drowned by the thousands.

Hundreds of thousands of Armenians

who survived the village massacres were forced to make a long march south. Those who were not slaughtered along the way by military police or hostile local populations (who had been encouraged to pillage the Armenians' meager possessions), or who had not died of exhaustion or hunger, were placed in concentration camps before being forced into the desert to die.

The total number of Armenians killed is estimated to be between 0.5 million and 1.5 million, out of a total population of 2.1 million.

From the Ottoman state's point of view, the Armenian Genocide was intended to save "Turkish" political entity by any means necessary, in the face of Russian and Western powers' increasingly overt plans to divide up the Ottoman Empire. After the national independence of Greece (1830); Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania (1878); and Albania (1912) the Arab territories were on the verge of secession. Anatolia itself became the site for a scramble for territory and influence.

The CUP feared that the empire would quickly be reduced to a Turkish rump state in northern and central Anatolia, and saw expansion toward the east – a pan-Turkic/pan-Muslim strategy encompassing Caucasus, Azerbaijan, northern Iran, and Iraq – as a viable solution. Indeed, it was this hope that guided the Empire's entry into World War I in the first place.

But the Ottoman army's defeats left CUP officials searching for a new solution. By driving the Armenian Christian population off its land in favor of Muslim settlers and big landowners, Istanbul hoped to rebuild its waning empire.

Ottoman Amnesia

By 1918, the Ottoman Empire had lost 85 percent of the population and 75 percent of the territory it had held in 1878. The new Ottoman government, now dominated by elements hostile to the CUP, tried to avoid the partition of its remaining territories by agreeing to prosecute and sentence those who were responsible for the Armenian Genocide.

After France, Britain, and Italy occupied Istanbul in 1919, and the Greeks took control of Izmir, [Mustafa Kemal Atatürk](#) rallied the central-Anatolian nationalist forces, and established a second government in Ankara. For a brief period both the Istanbul and Ankara governments accepted that the CUP leaders should be prosecuted (especially since only those directly involved in planning and executing the massacres were put on trial, leaving the large majority of CUP members unaffected).

The two governments also agreed that the leaders should be tried in Turkish courts, and that Anatolia's territorial integrity ought not be placed in question. Atatürk even accepted Istanbul's official figure of eight hundred thousand murdered Armenians (though he attributed the responsibility for this mass extermination to very limited ruling circles).

But recognition would prove short-lived. Following August 1920's [Treaty of Sèvres](#) "which entailed the partition of the Ottoman Empire, the war against the Greeks, and Ankara's resistance" officials hurried to lay down the fundamentals of a Turkish

nationalism that had previously been only incipient in form. While making some reference to wider attachments, from Islam to Ottomanism and pan-Turkism, this nationalism was principally characterized by its connection to Anatolia as a territory, which would now become the new Turkey.

The final victory of troops in autumn 1922 paved the way for what would become the new state's [enduring attitude](#), denying that there had been any attempt to exterminate the Anatolian Armenians.

Indeed, the republic now defined itself as religiously, socially, and nationally homogeneous. The state expressed a single Turkish nation (in fact it was only majority Turkish "the Kurds were presented as "mountain Turks") represented by a single party. Its residents belonged to one common Muslim religion, even if the new authorities strictly codified the social expressions of this faith.

Finally there was no recognition of any class divisions among its citizens, providing the pretext for the new state bourgeoisie (backed by the army) to ban the formation of independent trade unions and workers parties.

The Fight for Democracy Today

As the political scientist Benedict Anderson has shown, nations are always "[imagined communities](#)." The Anatolian Turkish nation was imagined in a time of war, in the context of the collapse of a multinational empire under threat of colonial partition (justified in part as

"reparations" for the Armenian Genocide).

Since the 1990s, with the implosion of the Soviet Union, and more recently with the collapse of neighboring Syria and Iraq, Turkey has faced a serious identity crisis. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and also of the national rights of the Kurdish people, are central to resolving this identity crisis, and developing a democratic order in Turkey based on people's ability to exercise their rights, and express their interests "particularly of [workers' class interests](#) and aspirations.

For the international left, the demand for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is inseparable from the defense of [democratic freedoms](#) in Turkey "and the Kurdish people's national rights. Such demands must also go hand-in-hand with denunciations of the imperialist plans of the victors of the First World War, who bear indirect responsibility for sparking the Armenian Genocide.

It is impossible to imagine any socialist resolution of the "Eastern question" (as the Western foreign offices of the nineteenth century referred to their colonial rivalry) without the victory of the democratic and social aspirations of the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire, from Syria to Palestine, from Bahrain to Yemen, from Egypt to Tunisia.

For that to happen, we must avoid reading these conflicts as confrontations between states and instead be aware of the fundamental social contradictions that feed these clashes "as well as the popular forces whose fight against oppression makes emancipation possible.

Beyond mere "be-nice" appeals: South African Xenophobia requires root-cause critique and strategic resistance

5 May 2015, by **Patrick Bond**

In mid-March at the University of Cape Town (UCT), undergraduate politics student Chimani Maxwele threw a bucket of excrement onto the statue of colonial mastermind Cecil John Rhodes, catalyzing a revolt against white-dominated power structures there and beyond. Less than three weeks later, a revolt by the poorest urban South Africans in the country's two other major cities - Durban and Johannesburg - was aimed at a layer just as poor and oppressed: immigrants, mostly from elsewhere in Africa.

At least ten thousand people were displaced within days. With South Africa hosting an estimated five million foreign nationals living within its 53 million residents, terror has struck those with darker skins and the misfortune to live in the lowest-income areas: urban-peripheral shack settlements or near inner-city migrant labor hostels.

Rhodes falls but his borders keep rising

The #RhodesMustFall campaign caught fire at UCT, the main site of South Africa's bourgeois class reproduction, with protesters demanding curriculum changes, racial equity in the professoriat and the resignation of university leadership. They were quickly victorious against at least one telling symbol: a huge statue of Africa's most notorious English looter. The bronze Rhodes was removed from a central campus base within a month, carted off by university authorities to what will eventually be a lower-profile setting.

The campaign set the emergent 1 percent elites of UCT against the old 1 percent power structure. Historical recollections of Rhodes' diamond monopoly-making fortune surfaced, leaving bourgeois commentators and news organs like Business Day rattled.

Rhodes, after all, helped establish many early systems of exploitation - including migrant labor (and women's role in cheap labor provision), illogical African borders, dependency upon minerals extraction, land grabs, environmental destruction and the ultra-underdeveloped rural Bantustans - that persist today. Indeed they are now often found in even more profitable and amplified forms (casualized labor, mining house prerogatives), fully endorsed by South Africa's current political and economic rulers no matter their skin hue.

However, the 99 percent versus the 99 percent in the shack settlements also frightened South Africa's top 1 percent, mainly because of the hard-hitting impact on the national 'brand', a source of repeat elite panic. World public opinion is frowning on Pretoria, and, encouragingly, the rest of the continent has taken this long-overdue opportunity to channel myriad grievances against the regional hegemony.

Across Africa, broadcast and print media remind audiences of how the Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini had set off the pogroms when on March 20 at a 'moral regeneration' rally, he referred to immigrants as 'lice' and 'ants': "you find their unsightly goods hanging all over our shops, they dirty our streets. We cannot even recognize which shop is which, there are foreigners everywhere... We ask foreign nationals to pack their belongings and go back to their countries."

Within ten days, that call had been taken up by Zulu loyalists in Durban, including the president's son, Edward Zuma (born in Swaziland), who claimed immigrants "are the reason why there are so many drugs in the country" (he was prosecuted for illegal tobacco importation and tax fraud last year). Backed by most politicians, Zwelithini went into denial, first, complaining of media misinterpretation, and claimed he meant no harm against legal

immigrants.

Yet the mass meeting of 10,000 mainly male Zulu traditionalists he assembled at the main Durban stadium on April 20 reverberated with xenophobic chants and booing of ambassadors from Africa. Zwelithini told the gathering he wanted an end to violence. But to achieve that required much more: Zuma finally deployed the army in Durban and Johannesburg hotspots the next night, as the police were proving incompetent.

Backlash

The fakery behind the image of a 'Rainbow Nation' was unveiled, as happened in 2008 and 2010 when xenophobia also reached critical mass. But for many years prior, the rest of the continent already knew South African predators. Grievances include exploitation by Johannesburg mining houses, retail chains, cellphone businesses and breweries, and the difficulty of getting a visa to even visit South Africa, especially from Kenya and Nigeria, the two main Anglophone competing powers on the continent (diplomatic-level tit-for-tat is one reason.)

Popular disgust across Africa at how little the South African state was doing to protect immigrants reverberated especially strongly where the refugees mainly hailed from: Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In many capital cities across Africa, the 99 percent lined up in marches, protests and boycotts against Africa's sub-imperialist 1 percent.

On more than a dozen occasions, the targets were South African High Commissions and the branch plants and shops which transfer profits back to Johannesburg corporations. In some cases, like the South African shops that Walmart uses to penetrate Africa, the profits go further away still. In Mozambique's natural gas fields, more than 300 South African workers

employed by the oil company Sasol had to flee home as local residents complained the firm didn't give jobs to locals.

Back in Durban and Johannesburg, immigrant resistance to lumpen-proletariat proto-fascism is uneven. In Durban, the city centre's Congolese, Nigerian and Zimbabwe immigrants attempted a non-violent march against xenophobia, which was viciously broken up by municipal police on April 8.

As a result, hundreds of immigrants armed themselves and briefly skirmished with police and xenophobic mobs in Durban's Point zone a few days later, just a few blocks from the city's world-class aquarium and water park. Some even threatened urban guerrilla war. In Johannesburg's Hillbrow inner-city zone, the immigrants' geographic density was too intimidating for mobs from nearby (Zulu-dominated) migrant labor hostels to penetrate.

But in less concentrated sites in shack settlements, mainly in the Durban residential periphery, xenophobic attacks occurred repeatedly. Even now, nearly a month later, it appears unsafe for most immigrants to return to homes and businesses. As a result of ongoing danger, more than 1000 have been voluntarily repatriated to neighboring countries. There is nothing more tragic than witnessing the long-distance buses load up from refugee camps, choc-full of traumatised people who have lost everything.

South Africa's 1% doesn't get it

Yet South Africa's state leaders repeatedly demonstrated they hadn't really internalised the crisis. On April 24, President Jacob Zuma claimed to immigrant groups, South Africa's moral high ground still remains intact. The same day, the secretary-general of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), Gwede Mantashe, repeated a controversial suggestion: "Refugee reception camps must be used to make sure that everyone who comes to South Africa is registered,

they should be screened and get vetted," though he admitted, "I know that the idea has been attacked viciously."

Also that day, Deputy Police Minister Maggie Sotyu revealed how stressed South Africa's elites had become, when she pleaded, "There are worse things happening in other countries but you will never see them in the media. The media is part of the community, so please, it must be biased when it comes to South Africa."

These remarks reflected the widespread public shaming of Zuma's government and its defensiveness. Indeed Zuma initially did very little to resolve or even properly band-aid the situation. State-supported anti-xenophobia media adverts, marches, speeches and campaigning generally missed the point: the impoverished young men doing the attacking had little patience for sanctimonious preaching.

On the one hand, a few middle-class NGOs and religious faith leaders provided vital emergency charity aid to refugee camps; in combination with some labor leaders, their anti-xenophobia marches during April briefly reclaimed central city spaces. On the other hand, the petit-bourgeois moralistic politicians and public commentators had no obvious way to get messages through to the lumpen-proletariat. One reason: an inability to analyze, much less address, the underlying conditions.

Jobs, housing and retail competition

Immigrants from the rest of Africa and from Asia (especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and China) in search of work are typically young males with networks that give them entry to residential areas, sometimes to informal employment, and sometimes even to shop-keeping opportunities. Because wives and children typically stay behind, the male migrants can at least temporarily accept much lower wages than local residents who usually must support larger families.

They also can save money by quadrupling up in small inner-city apartments or township shacks - often sleeping in shifts - which puts upward pressure on rental rates. Unscrupulous employers or landlords increase their own power by threatening to tell authorities about the illegal immigrants, as a weapon of super-exploitation often used especially on farms to avoid wage payments.

Another structural cause of xenophobia is excessive township retail competition: "overtrading." This results from immigrants - especially from Somalia, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Bangladesh - using home-country syndicates to gain collective credit and bulk purchasing power from wholesalers. They then easily undercut the spaza shops run by local residents, and their operations have efficiently spread to nearly every corner of South Africa.

Interneccine battles between petty capitalists soon move from price wars to physical intimidation, mostly against the immigrant shops. Scores of "service delivery protests" by communities against their municipal governments have turned into xenophobic looting sprees against immigrants.

These root causes can be solved only by redirecting state resources towards meeting needs (like housing) and creating jobs. Corporate taxes could be raised and vast budgets shifted away from white elephant infrastructure projects: a US\$30 billion coal export railroad, a new (unnecessary) US\$25 billion Durban port, US\$100 billion for nuclear reactors and the like. Without a massive attack on inequality, the daily degradation of life for the 54 percent of South Africans who are below the poverty line will continue.

Zuma's ANC government is at fault not only for neoliberal, pro-corporate, job-killing policies, but for tightening immigration regulations the last few years, which compels refugees to live under illegal informality. Zuma has continued his predecessors' sub-imperial policies in the region in order to secure contracts for favored corporations, including his nephew's

US\$10 billion oil deal in the eastern DRC, not far from where 1600 SA army troops are deployed against rebel competitors.

Zuma also gives continual fraternal support to repressive regimes in the region such as Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, the Swazi tyrant monarch Mswati and the corrupt Congolese regime of Joseph Kabila. More refugees result.

What pressure can reverse the root causes?

Mere 'be-nice' appeals and marches

are not making any dent in the root causes of xenophobia or in state policies. What would be needed to change the Zuma government's approach? What power can activists leverage?

The most obvious factor in recent weeks was the reputational damage (including to tourism) that the government and big business are feeling. Apparently only such damage can compel Zuma to act.

As Bandile Mdlalose from the Community Justice Movement wrote in Pambazuka, the continent's main ezine, "We in Durban civil society should consider a boycott campaign." With Durban the only candidate for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, she argued that one target should be a

"Commonwealth decision, expected on September 2, to give the 2022 Games to our undeserving city." Durban authorities say they will also bid for the 2024 Olympic Games.

Protesters in many other countries are tackling South Africa at this level, so as to force the Pretoria regime to adopt more humane policies. The question is whether, pitted against ANC politicians, local corporations and fast-rising Zulu ethnicism, a still-stunned layer of South African progressives can join the debate how best to shift from mere moralizing towards standing up alongside African protesters.

27 April 2015
[TeleSur](#)

Final declaration of the 6th Congress of CLOC Via Campesina

4 May 2015

"Each person shines with his or her own light. No two flames are alike. There are big flames and little flames, flames of every color. Some people's flames are so still they don't even flicker in the wind, while others have wild flames that fill the air with sparks. Some foolish flames neither burn nor shed light, but others blaze with life so fiercely that you can't look at them without blinking, and if you approach you shine in the fire".

Eduardo Galeano

In Argentina, the homeland of Che Guevara, Evita, Mercedes Sosa, 200 years after the Congress of Free Peoples called by Artigas which prompted the first Agrarian Reform in Latin America, 10 years after the defeat of the FTAA in Mar del Plata, we are holding the 6th Latin American Congress of Countryside Organizations.

We are the CLOC-VC, an organized

expression of peasant men and women, native peoples, afro-descendants and rural workers.

CLOC is the flame, the light and the actions of Via Campesina in Latin America. We emerged from the heart itself of the 500-year process of indigenous, peasant, black and popular resistance, which gathered the historical peasant movement and the new movements emerging as a response to the dismantling processes imposed by neoliberal policies.

We gather strength, experience and struggles and we build proposals according to the new political moments, highlighting that the agrarian issues are relevant for the society as a whole, and as such, we need to face it with an alternative and popular power strategy.

Our Congress has taken place in a time where contradictions and the class struggle are reflected in the

attacks of capital that promotes new wars, oppression and conspiracy against the peoples, for instance the direct attack against Venezuela by declaring it a risk for US security, but also with the different destabilizing coup strategies implemented by an alliance of large communication, business and financial groups that aim to undermine the sovereignty of our peoples and prevent progressive governments of the region from taking action.

Recognizing the advance of regional and continental processes of integration such as UNASUR, ALBA, MERCOSUR and CELAC, the 6th Congress welcomes the solidarity and unity of Latin American and Caribbean countries and organizations that supported Cuba's position and denunciation of the US blockade and the campaigns against their people, an attitude that encourages us to continue building the Motherland of Bolivar, San Martin, Marti, Sandino

and Chavez.

We reject patriarchy, racism, sexism and homophobia. We struggle for democratic and participatory societies, free from exploitation, discrimination, oppression, and exclusion of women and young people. We condemn all forms of domestic, social, work and institutional violence towards women.

We raise the flags of our women colleagues: peasant and popular feminism is part of our strategic horizon for a socialist transformation.

The work to strengthen our organizations, especially at grassroots level, will continue being at the center of our priorities. We are committed to strengthen the participation and integration of young people in all organizational processes.

We reclaim Integral and Popular Agrarian Reform, peasant and indigenous agroecological farming as essential elements of our path towards food sovereignty and cooling down the planet, ensuring access to land and water for women, young people, landless workers and ensuring the recovery of territories by native and afrodescendant peoples. We also struggle for the recognition of the social function of land and water, and the prohibition of all forms of speculation and land grabbing

affecting them.

We are committed to continue defending and keeping alive our peasant and indigenous seeds, to recover them in the hands of communities so as to reproduce and multiply them based on our peasant systems. We will not hesitate in the struggle against all forms of privatization and appropriation of seeds and life forms.

We need to defeat the agricultural model imposed by agribusiness corporations that is supported by international financial capitals and is based on GM monocultures, the massive use of agrotoxics and the displacement of peasants from the countryside. In addition, this model is responsible for the food, climate, energy and urbanization crises.

We call people to continue struggling for a world free from GMOs and agrotoxics that pollute, make ill and kill our peoples and Mother Earth. We will resist together with the people and communities against extractivism, megamining and all megaprojects threatening our territories.

We celebrate la Via Campesina's achievement of putting the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants in the agenda of the United Nations Human Rights Council and demand governments to ratify our positions.

We call our organizations to turn the declaration into an instrument for the struggle of rural peoples and the society as a whole.

The future becomes a fertile place when hundreds of children gathered at the 1st Children's Congress delivered their message in favour of peace and protection of our Mother Earth.

Our children are the future, and the present shines with the strength of young people. Our main tools are capacity building, education, communication and mass mobilization, unity and alliances among peasants, native peoples, afrodescendants, rural and urban workers, students and popular sectors organized to conform a force that is capable of achieving the changes we are fighting for. We are living in unprecedented and complex times, determined by a new correlation of forces among capital, the government and popular forces. The imperialistic capital is now under financial and transnational control, so we need to identify ourselves with SOCIALISM as the only system capable of reaching the sovereignty or our countries, highlighting the values of solidarity, internationalism and cooperation among our peoples.

Against capitalism and in favor of the sovereignty of our peoples: the Americas united continue struggling!

The real reasons for hurt sentiments

3 May 2015, by Romila Thapar

The right to freedom of expression is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this right is incorporated in the Indian Constitution. Yet, week after week it is being violated by what are euphemistically called "fringe groups." This allows those who govern to remain unconcerned. It is, therefore, a matter that concerns civil society now. We have to react irrespective of promises from the government. It is incumbent on us to

protect our rights. This right has to be discussed openly and fully because it sustains the autonomy of the individual in society. We are, after all, human beings and not robots.

This is especially so since the claim is always made that what is objected to hurts the religious sentiments of the community stating the objection. But this raises important questions that are neither asked nor answered. Does the objection reflect the sentiments of

the entire community or only a small fraction of it? Who constitutes this community and represents it? It is time now that we all start asserting that we too represent a community in society, and that our sentiments are deeply hurt when freedom of expression is denied to us. We do not stamp out other people's rights, but we do have to defend our right to express ourselves.

Objection to the novel

We also have to question what may be the real reason for the “hurt sentiment.” Is it really caused by a slur on religion or is religion being used as a mask for other reasons more closely related to our social values? What is Perumal Murugan addressing in *Madhorubhagan*? It is a human predicament “a childless couple desiring a child” depicted with admirable sensitivity, anguish and gentleness. So, are there other themes implicit in the story? Is the objection really concerned with the revival of a past Hindu religious tradition that is no longer legitimate from the perspective of the laws of the land, or is there an objection to the novel because it casts a slur on a religious tradition?

What is implicit in the narrative is the juxtaposition of the individual to society. The main characters are happy as a couple but are taunted for being childless by the family and the community. As always it is the woman who is blamed more than the man, and has to find a solution. She is advised to resort to what was regarded as a legitimate solution in traditional terms. It was not regarded as immoral. Was this perhaps a kinder way of resolving childlessness in the days gone by? Consensual sex with a stranger for purposes of conception on a particular religious occasion would not have been considered adultery but accepted as a sanctioned religious custom. People today do not recognise the fact that in past times, customary law that was outside the social code of brahmanical law was regarded as quite legitimate, as long as it had the sanction of the community, and this sanction is made explicit in the novel.

Is the objection to this action because it is a custom that was once permitted but is now contrary to the law, and therefore should not be legitimised in a novel? But the objection is to depicting it as sanctioned by Hindu religion. But to write about an activity that was current in the past is not an endorsement of what is today, contrary to contemporary law. Nor is it in any way a slur on religion, since it

is an activity that is regarded as legitimate by the community, as the novel makes clear.

Is there some other reason? The solution suggested could be a slur on the husband, for if the wife conceives with a stranger, then it reflects on the impotency of the husband. This is unacceptable in a male chauvinist society where the woman is always at fault. In a highly patriarchal society such as our present-day society, such a slur would be unacceptable. Ultimately the woman takes an independent decision in this action, as the husband’s consent remains somewhat ambiguous until the very end. Is all this seen as contrary to patriarchy? And is that the underlying reason for the objection? Is the objection then to the novel evoking a religious ritual that is degrading to the Hindu religion, or just a mask for the real objection, which is the right of a woman to take a decision in a matter that is of importance to the husband, his family and the community? Is it an out-of-date custom associated in past times with the communities of the region? If the purpose of the objection is to deny independence of action to women, and condemn what is depicted as a normal and affectionate marital relationship, then why drag religion into it and speak of it as maligning Hinduism “only because that will bring in more publicity in current times?

Silencing people

The action taken is to effectively silence the writer. There are many ways of silencing people. The resort to physical violence is immoral and unethical in any situation of confrontation. The alternative is emotional and intellectual silencing: silence the author by accusing him of having degraded a religion. Murugan’s sensitivity has showed in the way he has silenced himself. The demand that a book be pulped, banned or burnt is becoming a regular agenda in this country. In the name of hurt religious sentiments, the real attempt is to prevent the emergence of a society that can think for itself, that can openly discuss the issues that confront it, that can effectively understand the massive process of historical change

that it is undergoing. This is a process that will force us to face more changes and more confrontations. Therefore, we need to understand the process and not give in to those wishing to take it in their own direction.

So what can we do? Do we condone Murugan’s self-censorship? Or do we stand by him, as I think we should, and as many of us do, and invite him to retract his decision to write no more? We need to assure him that he must go on writing and assert this right to freedom of expression. His shift to Chennai is a form of exile. We don’t want him to exile himself.

There is perhaps no absolute freedom of speech. But it is necessary for us to assert that such a freedom should be determined by responsible people who share the author’s profession. At least that would ensure a sensible debate on the subject. This is not to deny any organisation the right to object to what anyone is writing, but to insist that no body of people can silence an author. But if self-censorship is to be the answer then where does one draw the line even in that? It should be in the hands of those who are professionally involved, and not in the hands of the “fringe elements” of political parties “the kinds of organisations that threaten individuals with violence and demand they be silenced, irrespective of how this is done. Authors and publishers have been threatened and acted against. Are we to become a silent society?

Defending a right

Can we think of a more effective way of handling such threats? It would help if there were to be an organisation committed to defending the right of free expression, especially of authors. It could be constituted of lawyers, publishers and some authors, set up to challenge those who threaten and abuse authors. This would involve naming organisations that threaten in this manner, and their individual members, so that they are also known as being among those that threaten authors. If court action is required, that could also be considered. A statement coming from such an organisation would also give courage to many others who tend to fear

General election result could trigger a governmental crisis

2 May 2015, by Alan Thornett

According to a TNS poll published on Monday (April 27th), Scottish Labour has slumped to just 22% of the vote (from 42% in 2010) and could be left with just one MP on May 8th (Glasgow North East) with the SNP taking 57 seats. The only other non-SNP seats left in Scotland would be the Lib Dems in Orkney and Shetland.

The poll has the SNP on 54% the Tories on 13%, the Lib Dems on 6%, and the Greens and UKIP both on 2%. This means that Scottish Labour leader Jim Murphy would lose his own seat as would Douglas Alexander, the shadow foreign secretary and so would former Lib Dem cabinet minister Danny Alexander.

It might not be quite as dramatic. Other polls point to outcomes slightly less catastrophic for Labour. What is clear, however, is that the SNP is on course for a thumping victory and Labour a thumping defeat, and in their traditional political heartlands – the cradle of the party.

It is clear from this that the profound political change (and politicisation) that took place in Scotland during the referendum campaign is not only alive and well but it is still developing both in terms of anti-austerity politics and Scottish independence.

Meanwhile in many parts of the England there are local elections (at the same time as the general election) with the prospect of some remarkable and reactionary results. According to local government election experts there could be significant ‘cross-voting’ with UKIP gaining up to 400 council seats and even control of several councils – Thurrock, Basildon, Great Yarmouth and Boston

are mentioned as possibilities. This would be deeply problematic situation and a big setback for the left.

The Greens are also likely to grow in local government, yet be denied their fair representation in parliament.

UK-wide the election is still too close to call. Labour and the Tories remain locked in the polls at around 33-35% each. The UKIP vote is holding up (just about) at around 13% and the SNP is surging to new heights in Scotland. The Lib Dems remain in trouble and likely to lose at least half their seats. The Greens in England and Wales are holding their vote at around 5 or 6 percent and probably hope for better given their high media profile for a change. They have, however, been instrumental in bringing the environment and climate change into an election campaign where its profile has otherwise been dire.

The fact is that neither major party has a big enough level of support any longer to ensure a majority unless they can reach beyond that base. The two-party system, that has dominated British politics since 1945, is breaking up. In the 1950s, Labour and the Tories between them could command over 90% of the vote, and could boast a combined membership of 3 million. Today they are down to around 65% of the vote and a combined membership of 350,000.

The Tory campaign has stalled and as it has done so they have thrown everything at Labour that they can lay their hands on to retrieve a few votes. They have dredged completely new levels of craven hypocrisy. First they accused Ed Miliband of stabbing his

brother in the back by standing in an election against him and when that backfired they began spraying uncosted bribes around as if there was no tomorrow, and this after years of berating Labour over uncosted promises!

They pledged to raise the inheritance tax threshold to a million pounds, to sell off housing association houses to tenants at cut-rate prices and to find new uncosted billions for the NHS that didn't previously exist.

When this failed they set about demonising the SNP and raising the spectre of a minority Labour government kept in office by a left-wing SNP determined to break up the country in the shortest possible time. If the Tories had wanted to promote the cause of independence in Scotland they could hardly have played their cards better. This no doubt helped to push the SNP further up the polls.

Just to show their total contempt for Scottish voters they went on to question the constitutional legitimacy of a minority Labour government kept in office by SNP MPs. Having won the referendum in Scotland by a narrow majority, and kept Scotland within the union, they now claim that Scottish MPs are second class MPs in Westminster with no right to influence the government.

The Tories followed this up by increasingly focusing on English nationalism in a competition with UKIP and even produced a proposed ‘English constitution’. Their latest wheeze is a pledge that if they get a majority they will bring in a law to stop themselves from putting up taxes!

Despite all this the election is still Labour's to lose. They face a Tory Party that has failed in all its targets including its much-vaunted objective to abolish the deficit 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.

We have a debt-fuelled so-called 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.

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 have some good policies like ending the bedroom tax, repealing the Health and Social Care Act, and ending non dom tax status, but at the end of the day they have a cuts' agenda of their own and they are fully committed to it.

Labour has conducted a cautious and sanitised campaign in which they have not been prepared to make the radical proposals that would be required to cut through the deadlock and win them support beyond their core vote. This would mean 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. Such a programme would stand a good chance of producing an overall Labour majority.

Miliband's main concern, however, has been to weather the Tory onslaught and not make any big mistakes that can be exploited by a hostile media the bulk of which is campaigning for the Tories. He broke from this a bit with his interview by Russell Brand but then goes back to ultra caution.

If no party wins an overall majority, which seems to be the case at the moment, Labour would no doubt be very happy to do a deal with a much-diminished Lib Dem group in Parliament fresh from keeping the Tories in office for 5 years—but it is looking highly unlikely that the Lib Dems will have enough MPs to make this a viable option.

At the same time Labour is digging itself into a deep hole by ruling out any kind of deal with the SNP—which is likely to be the third biggest party by far. Labour's long and deep commitment to unionism, however, and their visceral hostility to Scottish independence, makes this a very difficult thing to do even if it was the only way to form a government.

Such a refusal could create a crisis for the Labour Party after the result is announced, or even an on-going governmental crisis. The reality is that in the event of neither Labour or the Tories winning an overall majority the key question will not be which of them is the biggest party in Parliament but which one can command the most votes along with their potential allies: i.e. Labour with the SNP, the Greens, Plaid, and the SDLP; or the Tories with UKIP and the DUP.

If Labour along with the SNP MPs are in a position to command a majority in parliament for a Queen's speech, what is Labour going to do? Refuse to accept the votes of the SNP and demand that the Tories form a minority government with UKIP and the DUP? As Nicola Sturgeon said yesterday, if that happens Labour will have to 'smell the coffee'.

Another aspect of the demise of the old two-party system has been the role of the smaller parties—who have had, because it was unavoidable, more exposure in this election than at any previous election.

On the left this has allowed the emergence of the anti-austerity alliance between the SNP, Plaid Cymru, and the Greens that has been a breath of fresh air in the campaign. It helped that they were three women but it would have been a factor irrespective of the gender of the leaders. Dominant in this was Nicola

Sturgeon who not only made a big impact in England and Wales but strengthened her own base in Scotland in the process.

This anti-austerity position at least partly reflects some of the elements of the rise of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain which has raised the banner of anti-austerity at the European level. The lasting image from the campaign of this alliance is the embrace of the three women leaders at the end of the opposition party leaders' debate.

On the right we have seen the emergence of UKIP which has made this the most racist election campaign for a long time and ensured that the race to the bottom on immigration between UKIP and the two main parties has continued. UKIP may not get many seats but every one they get is dangerous, particularly when seen in the context of the likely gains they could make in local government—as mentioned above.

At the same time the breakup of the two-party system is opening up the situation and creating new opportunities for socialist (left of the Greens) candidates. The Left Unity election campaigns are preparing for this situation. By standing candidates, Left Unity is putting down a political marker for the future and using the campaigns for developing the party for the long term and at the same time looking for new opportunities for uniting the left in future elections.

Left Unity candidates have had some modest successes in getting across their message. In Exeter, 22 year-old Ed Potts gained 83 votes to former Labour Minister Ben Bradshaw's 37 in a straw poll after a local hustling organised by the local newspaper the Exeter Express and Echo. In Ellesmere Port and Neston, Left Unity's principal speaker Felicity Dowling has made the fight to save Liverpool Women's hospital central to her election campaign, while in Vauxhall, supporters of Simon Hardy's candidacy have been deeply involved in fighting against library closures and part of the Reclaim: Brixton movement against gentrification.

It is difficult for such grass roots activism to get space in the national media, though Left Unity's manifesto

launch with Ken Loach didn't do badly - but local media coverage has been better. And Left Unity will be there on May 8 and afterwards continuing to organise around these issues up and down Britain.

One thing that has been raised to a completely new level by the breakup of the two-party system has been the problem of Britain's ultra-undemocratic first-part-the-post electoral system. The practical upshot in this election is that we now have effectively at least a six-party system, but the new parties, unless they make a spectacular break-through like the SNP in Scotland, will not end up with anything like a corresponding representation in Parliament.

This is the same for both right and left, particularly for parties standing across the bulk of the UK. UKIP is likely to get around 12 or 13% of the vote and only one or possibly two MPs. The Greens in England and Wales are likely to get around 5 or 6% and again one or possibly two MPs. Both of these parties would have substantial groups of MPs in Parliament if the votes they received was reflected in the number

MPs. Even when they slumped to a few points in polls during the 1940s and 1950s, the then third party, the Liberals, were able to win upwards of ten seats.

The last thing the left wants of course is a large group of UKIP MPs in Parliament but they have to be challenged and defeated politically and not by an undemocratic electoral system.

The whole of the left needs to take up this issue seriously after the election - which will mean a serious rethink by those sections of the left that are not in favour of a proportional system. We have effectively a constitutional crisis - at least one of democratic legitimacy - in which the votes for multiple parties are not remotely reflected in the proportion of seats in parliament. The left should fight for democratic rights and a proportional parliament so that this travesty is not repeated.

The current system has in any case long been an impediment to a united left challenge in general UK wide elections - although of course this is far from the only problem of such a challenge.

As things stand there might not be a stable government emerging from this election. Based on current opinion poll evidence, most combinations of coalition parties seem unlikely to produce a stable government majority. The Fixed Term Parliament Act, passed in 2011 with the support of all the major parties, requires several votes of no confidence at least two weeks apart before parliament can be dissolved in advance of the end of its five-year term of office.

This means that any minority government would face an uncertain future, unable to get its legislation through and unable to call another general election. If no majority coalition can be formed, there is likely to be a significant governmental crisis. There could even have to be another election to resolve that crisis before the end of the year. The task of the left is to prepare for these eventualities and take every opportunity to fight back against any continuation of austerity while campaigning hard for a democratic voting system and for a more democratic constitutional settlement.

All Night, All Day, We Will Fight for Freddie Gray! In Solidarity with Baltimore

1 May 2015, by Solidarity Steering Committee

The response of Baltimore's and Maryland's ruling class to this movement for justice has been violent repression. Police stoked tension with fabrications, uncritically reproduced in the media, about a gang plot to kill officers, and acted deliberately to provoke a riot, forcing young people out into the streets and incessantly harassing them. The resulting expressions of rage and hopelessness have been used as a pretext for physical and political war against entire communities. Even more than usual, the police are acting as an occupying army, with reinforcements

from state police and the National Guard called in and a citywide 10:00 p.m. curfew declared. Hundreds have been arrested. In spite of this onslaught, protests and organizing continue to grow. Medical, legal, and community support is being self-organized, demonstrations continue with massive ones planned for this weekend, and new coalitions are forming.

Racist violence by police is integral to the US power structure, as is the social violence of joblessness, water shutoffs, and displacement

perpetrated daily against black communities. Defeating this violence is central to the victory of all struggles for justice. Politicians and media exploit the riots to criticize the entire movement and call for "peaceful protest" that does not threaten the status quo, but militant struggle is needed to overcome racism and the power structures it supports. Baltimore's uprising, like Ferguson's before it, points the way forward. We stand with Baltimore's movement for justice and condemn the violence of police and the National Guard. Solidarity with the

The Political Economy of Food in South Africa

1 May 2015, by Jacklyn Cock

In both global and national terms, the neoliberal food regime is a catastrophe benefitting only the corporations who dominate it. Intense market concentration means that some forty transnational corporations effectively control the global food regime, and they are making spectacular profits. Just three transnational corporations – Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta – control over half the world's seed market. The world's top ten food processing companies control 28% of the global market, with Nestle far and away the largest single company followed by PepsiCo and Kraft Foods,' says John Hilary.

South Africa's globalised accumulation model demonstrates the same pattern in the corporate-dominated food system's tightly controlled supply chains. A small number of corporations determine the availability, price, quality and nutritional value of all the food consumed.

Dominance of large corporations: the case of bread

IN SOUTH AFRICA, THIS DOMINANCE IS illustrated by the way wheat-to-bread commodity chain has been globalised and marked by a concentration of ownership and control all along the chain from wheat production, storage, milling, baking and retail, since the deregulation of agriculture. The deregulation included the scrapping of the Wheat Board in 1996 and the rescinding of the bread

subsidy in 1992. Deregulation has resulted in wheat becoming far more responsive to global trends. The local market is affected as never before by fluctuations in the rand/dollar rate, international commodity prices for wheat, as well as commodity speculation. State support to farmers and tariffs on agricultural commodities were dismantled with deregulation, leaving farmers at the mercy of state-subsidised competition from the EU and the USA, as well as currency variations. With increasing urbanisation, maize consumption is decreasing relative to wheat, and bread is becoming a staple food, particularly in informal settlements where people lack access to sources of energy.

The price of bread has increased 80% in the last three years, which is devastating for the working class. This increase is partly a result of the fact that South Africa is now a net importer of wheat, which it gets largely from Argentina and Germany. The price of wheat is fixed on the Chicago commodities exchange, and is subject to speculation and currency fluctuations. But the price rise is also a result of price fixing among four corporations that dominate milling and baking in South Africa, and the market power of three companies that dominate food retail.

Farm ownership has become increasingly concentrated as well, and the total area of land planted to wheat has decreased by 50% over the last twenty years. South Africa now has between 5 000 and 6 000 wheat farmers, located mainly in the Western Cape, Free State and Northern Cape. Farm workers are among the lowest

paid workers, and their number has declined, with a strong trend towards replacing permanent, full time employees with casual and seasonal workers. Farm ownership highly concentrated and dominated by large corporations, and just three grain storage companies dominate the field. Only two seed companies supply wheat seed to commercial farmers. About 80% of South Africa's milling industry is controlled by four companies: Pioneer Foods (which produces Sasko, which in turn produces Blue Bird, Uncle Salie and Natural Harvest), Tiger Brands (which produces Albany), Premier Foods Genfoods (which produces Blue Ribbon and BB), and Foodcorp (which produces Sunbake). These four companies – Pioneer Foods, Tiger Brands, Premier Foods and Foodcorp – own their own bakeries and produce most of the bread consumed by South Africans.

The formal retail sector is also highly concentrated, with effective domination by three supermarket chains, Shoprite, Pick n Pay, and Spar. The trade union Solidarity has criticised these three retailers for making huge profits despite falling input costs and decreasing food inflation. Inequality is deeply embedded in at every node in the wheat-to-bread chain. This is glaring in the case of Shoprite, South Africa's largest retailer by market value. In 2010, its chief executive, Whitey Basson, earned R627 million in salary and perks including R594 million for cashing in his share options; meanwhile, the average wage for fulltime Shoprite workers was R3 600 a month. In the first six months of 2014, Basson was paid R49.9 million,

almost as much as he earned (R50 million) for all of 2013. This makes his pay 725 times that of his average employee. Profiled on the cover of *Financial Mail* in 2008 as a 'genius for profit', Basson was described in the magazine as 'an incredible disciplinarian, very bright, massively hard-working and probably the most underestimated CEO in South Africa.'

'The politics of bread demonstrates the wrongs of the food system,' said a participant at the 2014 Feminist Table workshop in Johannesburg. These 'wrongs' include the fact that modern corporations show a total disregard for the moral consequences of their pursuit of profit - as illustrated by the collusion and price-fixing at almost every point in the wheat-to-bread chain. In 2007, for example, Tiger Brands was fined R98.9 million after admitting that it had colluded with rivals (Premier Foods, Pioneer Foods and Foodcorp) to raise the price of bread by 30 to 35 cents a loaf. Four senior executives of Tiger Brands cashed in R44 million worth of share options just as the Competition Commission was beginning its investigation into bread price-fixing. The Competition Tribunal upheld the finding of collusion but, according to Anne Crotty, 'The fine was easily absorbed by Tiger Brands' attributable earnings of R2.2 billion that year.' Shortly afterwards, Tiger Brands increased prices by 40c more per loaf for Albany bread (citing higher wheat prices, not the fine) and was followed by the other three food giants. The Competition Commission criticised this increase, saying: 'The blatant profiteering is an insult to the nation, particularly the poor.' Later, in an agreement with the Competition Commission, Pioneer Foods committed to pay R250 million as an administrative penalty to the National Revenue Fund to create an Agroprocessing Competitiveness Fund that would be administered by the Industrial Development Corporation. The aim of this fund is to promote competitiveness, employment and growth in food value chains. The Fund will provide finance on favourable terms to small and medium enterprises. It is unclear whether this money has been spent. Other examples of collusion and price fixing abound. In 2009, Sasol was fined R250

million by the Competition Commission for collusive behaviour on fertiliser prices. The Competition Tribunal has heard allegations of anticompetitive behaviour by grain traders against the largest trader, Senwes. The Competition Commission has also investigated the dairy industry, accusing some of the largest dairies in South Africa - Clover, Parmalat, Ladysmith Cheese, Woodlands Dairy, Lancewood, Nestle SA and Milkwood - of anti-competitive behaviour, including price fixing. The result of this corporate dominance is that the food regime in South Africa is deeply unjust, ecologically unsustainable and unsafe.

Injustice: the 'slow violence' of food insecurity

THE INJUSTICE IS MOST EVIDENT IN THE coexistence of waste and the 'slow violence' of food insecurity. Violence is usually understood as an event or action that is immediate in time, and explosive in space. However, 'slow violence' can also inflict significant damage that extends over time. Slow violence is, as Rob Nixon says, 'insidious, instrumental, undramatic, accretive and relatively invisible'.

Food insecurity involves a form of slow violence because its damaging effects on the human body are relatively invisible, and because its erosion of human capacities and potentials occurs gradually over time. This is now evident in the number of children showing signs of stunted growth (both physical and intellectual) due to chronic malnutrition. Based on a sample of 10 000 households, the South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that almost half of all South Africans are either presently experiencing hunger or at risk of going hungry. The survey found that 45.6% of the population is 'food insecure'; 26% experiences hunger; a further 28.3% is at risk of experiencing hunger; and one quarter of children under the age of three show signs of moderate to severe stunted growth due to malnutrition. A child fed on the basic

calories available from bread or maize porridge can be active, but, according to Leonie Joubert, 'the absence of key elements like vitamin A, vitamin B, zinc or iron means the system is perilously corroded on the inside. The motor keeps running, but it is performing way below optimum.' There is broad consensus in the medical community that irreversible physical and cognitive harm occur if a child does not receive the required nutrition in the critical formative months between conception and the age of two.

'Perhaps a start in addressing hunger is to call it by its name and describe what it means for real people, and not disguise or distance it behind technical terms such as "food security",' says Oxfam. The children of poor black families are the most obvious casualties of this slow violence. At the same time, estimates are that 31% of annual food production in South Africa 'that is, 10 million tonnes of food' is lost to waste in some form or other across the supply chain, from an estimated 31 million tonnes of food available. This waste occurs at five points in the food supply chain: agricultural production, post-harvesting handling and storage, processing and packaging, distribution and retail, and consumer behaviour. Food waste is highest for fruit and vegetables, where over 50% of produce is wasted along the supply chain.

The market has become the main source of food for the majority of households in South Africa, so the key issue in terms of access to food in these households is affordability. In South Africa (as is the case globally), food prices have soared in recent years. For example, the cost of maize meal recently rose by 30%, white maize by 73% and white and brown bread by nearly 13%. Food inflation rose by 9.9% between September 2013 and September 2014, according to Stats SA. With increasing unemployment, outsourcing and casualisation, household incomes are falling. Food insecurity/ hunger is therefore at the centre of two realities: low incomes and high food prices. Low incomes mean that here, as for many people throughout the world, good nutritious food is

unaffordable. The urban poor often spend 70-80% of their resources on food, and are highly vulnerable when food prices increase.

Food prices are expected to continue to rise further in South Africa, mainly due to seven factors:

â€¢ Rising costs of the inputs of industrial agriculture such as water and electricity. Electricity prices have risen by over 200% since 2010. Fluctuating oil prices. Increases in the price of oil raise the cost of oil-based fertilisers, pesticides and long-distance transport.

â€¢ Climate change. Prices of staple foods will double by 2030 due to climate change (according to a 2011 Oxfam report). The more extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, particular in Sub-Saharan Africa, are especially damaging to crops.

â€¢ The use of arable land for biofuels and for mining. In South Africa, agricultural land is being diverted to soya and sorghum intended for biofuels production. Almost half (46.4%) of South Africa's high-potential arable land is in Mpumalanga, which has already lost 26% of its high-potential arable soils due to current mining activity; some 42 new coal mines are planned for that province. The Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy Report of 2012 estimates that the loss of maize production from mining activities could lead to a 14% increase in maize prices.

â€¢ Price fixing and collusion by corporations organised into powerful cartels (as described above).

â€¢ Commodity speculation. Several analysts have concluded that the main reasons for the 2008 increase in global food prices were commodity speculation and the push for biofuels. This crisis pushed millions of people into poverty. As Susan George points out, the food crisis was not bad news for everyone: 'In the last three months of 2007 one of the three major transnational cereals corporations, Cargill, increased profits by 86%.'

â€¢ Liberalisation of agricultural trade

over the past three decades. International negotiations promoting agricultural trade liberalisation benefit rich countries, which gain markets in both the global North and South. Small farmers in developing countries are at a disadvantage. In South Africa, deregulation and liberalisation of the agricultural sector mean that farmers are exposed to international competition, commodity speculation, increased retail power and the withdrawal of many forms of state support (such as marketing boards, guaranteed prices and markets).

Ecological unsustainability

IN ADDITION TO THIS pattern of injustice, in which corporate pursuit of profit means unaffordable food prices for the poor, the current food regime is ecologically unsustainable. Industrial agriculture is responsible for 11% of South Africa's carbon emissions; the figure is higher if the cost of transporting food ('food miles') is included. Industrial agriculture is heavily dependent on the availability of two factors of production: non-renewable fossil fuels and water. Water shortages will increase with climate change and so will the costs of energy. Both will increase the cost of producing and transporting food, especially given the reliance on oil-based fertilisers and pesticides. Food insecurity at the household level will increase as food prices rise and food production falls due to climate change.

Declining food safety

THE FOOD REGIME IS ALSO characterised by declining food safety. There are rising levels of toxic chemicals in food produced by agro-industry, especially in highly processed foods, and serious nutritional deficiencies in diets composed of 'junk foods' and 'fast foods'. Globally, epidemics are increasingly caused by fast-mutating viruses and antibiotic-resistant bacteria, resulting especially from

factory farming. Because many livestock farmers routinely dose their animals with antibiotics, pathogens such as salmonella are becoming more resistant to antibiotics and thus harder to kill. According to Michael Pollan, 'The more a food is processed, the more profitable it gets to the large corporations that dominate agro-industry.'

As regards Genetically Modified (GM) foods, the long-term health risks are unknown. GM technology is profit-driven and it gives big corporations unprecedented control over the food chain. 'The capitalist motivation in promoting GM crops is clear, because farmers incorporated into GM agriculture are dependent on corporate sales for the seeds and accompanying agrochemicals,' argues John Hilary. The African Centre for BioSafety has exposed the high levels of Monsanto's GM soya in South Africa's popular white bread brands. As a spokesperson of the research organisation said: 'GM soya plantations are sprayed with liberal amounts of the herbicide glyphosate and residues of this make their way into the bread. Most brands of white bread have between 21% and 91% levels of GM soya; glyphosate has been linked to numerous health risks, including increased risk of chronic kidney disease, birth defects in humans and animals and spontaneous abortions.' GM wheat is currently being developed.

The neoliberal food system: the poisoned root

HUNGER IS AN ASPECT OF POVERTY AND powerlessness. It is a problem of a lack of access to income, and to productive resources such as water and land. It is the outcome of unscrupulous employers and traders operating in a neoliberal food system that is increasingly unjust, unsafe and ecologically unsustainable, dominated by large corporations that are driven by profit rather than social needs. The power of these corporations is grounded in the process of neoliberal, global restructuring that has involved the incorporation of South Africa in a

financialised capitalist system. This system threatens all our survival, but it has particularly devastating impacts on the working class.

The wide-ranging nature of the food crisis provides many different entry points into fighting for an alternative eco-socialist development path. Such a

path would be based on “food sovereignty, meaning the right to healthy, sustainably produced food that is democratically controlled, and an approach to agroecology that involves working with rather than against nature. We have to do this. “We cannot afford to sit in a burning house while the flames lick

the rafters and singe our brows, and question whether a new house is possible,” Bertolt Brecht said. “We must abandon the old structure and seek to build a new one.”

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