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No to the diktats of the Troika, solidarity with the Greek people

29 June 2015, by **Fourth International**

The announcement by Alexis Tsipras of the referendum on 5 July, in which the voters will be asked to reject the draft agreement of the Troika, is good news for the Greek people and for all those in Europe who are fighting the policies of austerity. We hope there will be a massive “no” vote to the European diktats emerging from the ballot boxes on Sunday evening.

The leaders of the European Union have thus demonstrated once again their willingness to trample on the fundamental rights of the Greek people by attempting to impose a shameful agreement. In addition, they dare to say that the Greek government has crossed a red line for having announced a democratic consultation of the population in a referendum. The challenge for the coming days in Greece and in the whole of Europe is crucial. All the forces of the labour

movement must stand in solidarity in the face of the frontal attack against the Greek people. To save their reactionary institutions and banks, the European leaders of the right and of social democracy will make every effort to combat the choice of no by the Greek voters and try to coerce the Tsipras government into capitulation or resignation.

For six months, the objectives of the EU and the IMF were simple: they could not accept that the Greek government did not bend to their demands, that it did not capitulate by applying to the Greek people new social cuts, a pension reform and an increase in VAT imposed on goods of daily consumption and energy. It is out of the question for the European leaders that a country should escape from the policy pursued by the capitalists, the banks and the

governments that impose on the peoples an austerity without limit. Therefore, it was important for Merkel, Holland, Lagarde and Junker to show to the other peoples of Europe that there is no alternative policy, to show also that, regardless of their electoral choices in their respective countries, democratic rights stop where the all-powerful capitalist system starts. Therefore, it was necessary also to impress upon the Greek people that the choice by the majority of a party rejecting austerity could only end in failure or capitulation and that Tsipras should either resign or accept a shameful agreement, break up his party and ally himself with social democracy and the right.

In voting on 25 January for Syriza, the Greek voters clearly expressed their rejection of the rise in poverty and

unemployment that have hit them since 2010.

A third of the population and two-thirds of pensioners live below the poverty line, 28% of workers, 60% of young people, are unemployed. This is the result of the policies imposed by the memoranda of the Troika; it is to this unbearable life that the Greek people wanted to put an end by rejecting the parties who had led them to this disaster.

For six months, Tsipras has pursued an impossible goal: obtaining an agreement with the EU, the ECB and the IMF that would not mean new suffering for the Greek people; paying all debt commitments on time without stepping up austerity policies; respecting the commitments made by Syriza to the electors and those made by previous Greek governments to the Troika. On 20 February, the leaders of the Eurogroup believed they had won the game, when Tsipras accepted an agreement of new austerity measures, after he had said that he would honour all the deadlines for payment of the debt to the ECB and to the IMF. Since then, the Greek government has manoeuvred through conflicting decisions: the commitments to return to the minimum wage of 750 Euros and the restoration of collective bargaining agreements have been postponed, the privatization of the port of Piraeus continues, but the government has reopened ERT, the Greek public television, whose closure under the Samaras government had symbolized the humiliation imposed by the European banks and the EU. And in March, the Parliament passed a law against the humanitarian crisis and another on the arrears of tax payments. But, in the face of the increasing arrogance of the European leaders, and taking into account popular pressure and the resistance of the deputies and members of Syriza, Tsipras has not accepted the demands of the Troika, notably a cut in pensions and increases in VAT.

Finally, no agreement has been signed between the Greek government and its "creditors". After several abortive negotiations, on 5 June, for the first time, the government refused to honour the payment due of 300 million Euros to the IMF, also threatening to

not pay the full amount of the June commitments (1.6 billion). The end of June was fixed as the deadline for both the payment to the IMF and settlement of the last instalment of the "rescue" plan with the payment of 7.2 billion Euros blocked for nine months by the ECB.

Tsipras was finally unable to accept the complete capitulation that Lagarde, Holland, Merkel and Junker wanted to impose on him.

The announcement of the referendum is a slap in the face to the governments and institutions of the European Union. In November 2011, Sarkozy, Merkel and Barroso had vetoed the attempt by George Papandreou, then the Greek prime minister, to organize a referendum to try to obtain political support for his capitulation to the demands of the EU. Today, the European leaders have no way of preventing a democratic consultation which must conclude with a rejection of the new dictates of the Troika.

Now a second act opens

In Greece and in Europe, the political forces of the neoliberal left and right will combine their forces to ensure that this referendum does not open a new political course in Greece. The Greek government was ready for new compromises to avoid defaulting on payment and rupture. Above all, the Troika wanted that the agreement should have the political meaning of a capitulation of Greece before its creditors. The dynamics of the coming days may open another road, a break with the requirements of the Troika, a stop to payment of the debt, radical commitment to an alternative policy, an application of the programme through which Syriza has been a majority. But this will require a broad unitive mobilization of forces of the Greek workers' movement to quickly block the attempts at sabotage that have already begun. The pressure on the government and the Greek banking system will accentuate on the eve of the referendum. Already, in the last few days, the Director of the Central Bank of Greece, a former

minister under Samaras, has released an alarmist report with the sole purpose of increasing capital flight from Greek banks, although between November 2014 and March 2015, more than 30 billion Euros had already been withdrawn and the amount of private investment of big Greek fortunes abroad is now estimated at more than 400 billion. Although it still does not speak of nationalization of the banking system, the government has just instituted capital controls.

The Truth Committee on the Public Debt, mandated by Parliament, reported on 18 June, proving the illegitimate and odious nature of this impossible debt, showing that less than 10% of the "rescue" loans went to current expenditure and that most of it helped the German and French banks to disengage from their credits contracted in previous years. [1] As a result of this report, 49 members of Syriza voted for a parliamentary debate in order to obtain the repudiation of the greater share of this odious and illegitimate debt. [2]

The challenge for the coming days is crucial for the Greek people, and for all those who in Europe who suffer austerity.

We must build a Europe-wide solidarity front with the Greek people. All our blows should be aimed against the leaders of the European Union and its governments who, with an acute sense of the interests of the capitalists, fear that the Greek people will on 5 July express a rejection of their policies of contempt and austerity that will be an example to the working class throughout the European Union. They also fear that this context will result in renewed popular mobilization in Greece, making it even more difficult for manoeuvres resulting in either a throttling of the Tsipras government or its overthrow. Just like the recent success of Podemos in the Spanish state with the election of anti-austerity mayors in several of the major cities of the country, the Greek situation shows that social frustration in Europe can find a different political response to the despicable xenophobic and fascistic solutions of the extreme right.

Popular unity for No! and a complete break

27 June 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

This turn has taken shape around a simple and obvious word, which has the clearness of a chopper: no to the ultimatum of the Troika, the decision lies with the people.

It is now possible to leave the deadly trap that the European rulers had patiently built to kill in the bud the hope which was born on 25 January, with the victory of Syriza.

This evening [26 June], Alexis Tsipras spoke the language of truth: he finally explained why these “negotiations” were only a joke, a constant exercise of blackmail, aimed at humiliating the Greek people and its government and at trampling underfoot the popular mandate resulting from the elections of 25 January.

It is not the moment to settle accounts. But it is impossible not to mention that the decision of this evening agrees with all those which for months have said that there was no space for a so-called “compromise” but only the choice between capitulation or rupture. [3]

The battle of the referendum is now in front of us. It has to be a mass battle, a deeply unitive mobilization, which will restore confidence to the popular forces and impel a new wave of radicalization in Greek society.

This battle can make it possible in the heat of the action to create the conditions to correct the course after five months of stagnation and to redefine the relationship between the

government, Syriza and the social movements.

Lastly, it is obvious that this battle will not only take place in Greece. The reaction of the Troika and European rulers will be frightening. The Greek people will be able to come together and fight. But they have a vital need of international support. It is their only weapon against the strength and the violence of the ruling classes, which, we know it, are capable of anything to get their way.

Long live the fight of the Greek people!

Long live international solidarity!

We will overcome!

A defeat for austerity policies but no left wing victory

25 June 2015, by **Michael Voss**

The recent parliamentary elections in Denmark can be interpreted in different ways. Certainly, the outcome was not straightforward.

The background to the elections was the 2011 elections that brought a centre-left governmental coalition to power, headed by Social Democracy. It won the elections based on deeply-felt anger in the working class in marginalised groups, and among humanistic progressives against the politics of the rightwing government that had ruled for 10 years. Trade-union activists actively campaigned for a new government implementing equality and building welfare, not breaking it down.

From the moment that the new government announced its program, it began disappointing its electorate – basically and openly admitting that they were sticking to the economic politics of the EU Commission and the previous government

This created a wide-spread resignation. Every opinion poll from day one after the 2011 election date showed a majority in support of the rightwing opposition. Not even the growth of Enhedslisten/The Red-Green Alliance could counter this trend. Only two weeks before the 2015 elections, polls began to indicate a close run.

The two blocs

Confronting each other in this election campaign were the media-dubbed “blue bloc” and “red bloc”.

Blue bloc consists of five right wing parties: the historic Conservative Party, the historic liberal party “Venstre”, the nationalist and xenophobic Danish Peoples Party, the pretty young ultra-liberalist party Liberal Alliance and the Christian Democrats (no seats either before or after elections). Long before the election campaign these parties all declared their support for Liberal Party leader, Lars Løkke Rasmussen,

to head negotiations for a new government and to be prime minister.

Red bloc was the parties that supported Social Democracy leader and outgoing prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt to head a government: Social Democracy, the social-liberal party "Radikale" (not so social anymore, also part of the outgoing government), Socialist People's Party (part of the government until a year ago), The Red-Green Alliance and the completely new party The Alternative (to be defined below). In Danish parliamentary tradition there is no explicit political support implied in supporting a party leader for prime minister.

Defeat of outgoing government

With a narrow majority the blue bloc won the elections. Counted together, the three parties that took part in the governmental coalition, suffered a defeat, losing 12 seats in a parliament of 179. They were punished for neo-liberal austerity politics.

The loss of the coalition was carried by the two junior partners, Socialist People's Party and the social-liberal party. Both were reduced to less than half their previous votes. Social Democracy improved a bit, 3 seats, primarily because Helle Thorning-Schmidt led a far more professional campaign and had more personal credibility than her direct opponent Lars L  kke Rasmussen, who has been involved in several scandals over the last four years in relation to his personal finances.

The loser takes it all

In these days and hours Lars L  kke Rasmussen is negotiating with the other parties of the bloc, but the task is not easy. One reason for this is that his party is the big loser of the elections. The liberal party went down from 26.7 % of the votes to 17.1 %.

Secondly his allies are pulling in different directions. Pretty close to the

liberal party is the Conservatives, but they have been in constant declines for 25 years, and they are now close to extinction with only 3.4 % of the votes.

Between right wing nationalism and social democracy

Big winner of the elections is the Danish Peoples Party. They increased from 12.3 % to 20.1 %. This has come as a tremendous shock not only to the left wing and other progressives but to the whole political establishment.

The DPP built itself on nationalist, anti-migrant and anti-refugee policies. They had a big influence on this issue on the right wing government from 2001 to 2011 without being part of the coalition.

Over the years they have succeeded in defining the political agenda, and have influenced both the other rightwing parties and Social Democracy and the Socialist People's Party in a way that for example that turned the recent election campaign into a competition between Venstre, the Conservatives, Social Democracy and DPP on who is most "tough on refugees".

But xenophobia is not enough to understand the growth of the DPP. Over the years they have profiled themselves more and more as a party that supports welfare and the public sector. This year the DPP campaigned for growth of the public sector, while Venstre campaigned for zero growth. Zero growth actually means deep cuts, because there is an automatic rise in costs for certain parts of public welfare. For example there are more and more elderly people to take care of.

Likewise the DPP promised to improve unemployment benefits that they themselves helped cut in 2010. On this issue they actually took a position to the left of Social Democracy. This is fundamental in understanding the success of DPP. They have taken up positions that Social Democracy has left. Lots of research documents that the DPP won huge numbers of former

SD-voters.

Some even characterise the DPP as the new Social Democracy.

Several governmental options

Realising this "social profile" of DPP, it will come as no surprise that the ultra-liberalists of the Liberal Alliance pull the prime minister-in-waiting in the direct opposite direction. The most likely at this moment is that he will end up establishing a minority government of only his own party.

From this starting point he may use different majorities for different political initiatives, and he will have no problem in including Social Democracy in a number of political deals. In this election campaign Helle Thorning-Schmidt made great efforts to place her party as a centre party. She resigned as party leader on election night, but the new chairman, Mette Frederiksen, will make no fundamental break with this perspective.

New advances for the RGA

The Red-Green Alliance increased its votes from 6.7 % to 7.8 %. This is a tremendously good result coming after the 2011 elections where the party tripled its votes. The non-reformist left has never been so strong parliamentarily, except for an exceptional CP-result in the first elections after the end of the Second World War.

In this way the RGA was not pulled down along with the governmental party for being partly identified with the government.

The growth in RGA-votes at these elections happened notably outside Copenhagen and other bigger cities. It is important that we now have a real national presence.

An especially interesting feature of the RGA-result is some indications that we

had a big increases in areas with social housing estates, where a lot of migrants and Danes on unemployment benefit live. These areas were a priority for candidates and other campaigning, and in some of them organising activities took place even before election time. Increases from 20 to 26 percent happened in several of these areas.

Lost opportunities

The growth does not only call for celebration. A debate is needed why the RGA did not attract more of the voters that left the governmental parties in disappointment. Back in 2013 opinion polls showed a support for the RGA of more than 13 %. Why were we not able to hold on to the support of these people?

One part of the explanation is that the party has almost completely focused on campaigning for immediate demands that supposedly could be implemented without breaking the framework of capitalism. The “story” of the party has been to defend what Social Democracy defended some decades ago – or rather what people expected of Social Democracy. The stated aim of “pulling the government” to the left – which had no success – has left an impression that the RGA was to a certain extent a part of the government project. Anyway, the brand of the party has not been anti-system and alternative enough.

The hippie Alternative

This need for a more anti-system RGA was indicated by the success of a completely new party, the Alternative. The party got 4.8 % of the votes. It was established a year ago by a former government minister from the social-liberal party, Radikale, who resigned from his party.

Its policies are not formulated in traditional political terms, but more as post-hippie visions of another way of living. It is a weird mixture of green, humanitarian and anti-technocratic politics, combined with – on the one hand – the demand for 30 hour work

week and – on the other hand – support for independent, innovative small scale businesses.

The party has a strong appeal to what some call the creative classes, but also reaches out to public employees and not the least young first-time voters. Its non-belligerent way of campaigning and discussing has appealed to a lot of people who are tired of the aggressive in-fighting between politicians, who do not disagree anything essential but only fight for power and positions.

Establishment is losing control of voters

This leads me to maybe the most important feature of these elections. The traditional Danish political parties with a history of more than 25 years declined. Dramatically, except for Social Democracy that grew a tiny bit, but only recovered back to the 2001 level, not to the historical standards of the party. All together the old parties only got 58 % of the votes.

What it is even more important, is the fact that they are exactly the parties that are directly identified with the neo-liberal austerity policies implemented by both preceding governmental coalitions.

On the other side we have the parties that have never taken part in government. As described above they are extremely different from each other, from neoliberal to nationalism to social liberal naivety to anti-capitalism. What they have in common, are their – differently argued – opposition to the policies that have been implemented. They are seen by the electorate as parties with another perspective, even though this could have been more explicit in the case of the RGA.

These four parties were all rewarded with significant increases in votes. The alternative parties, the protest parties received all in all 42 % of the votes. This is a sign that in spite of the low tide of class struggle and the apparent right wing trend in voting behaviour,

there is dissatisfaction below surface, and there is a longing for real changes.

Hard times and backlash

When a new government is established, and the new majority begins to implement its policies, working people in Denmark will experience hard times. This will hit especially migrants, refugees and people on benefits, but also broader layers of people will feel the results of cuts in public welfare. In addition we will see a backlash in legal policies and climate and environmental policies.

But such policies will shake the old party structure even more. Supporters of the new parties of the right wing will turn away from them.

Not the least important, the basic dissatisfaction will make it possible to build resistance, and it will call for a leftwing alternative to both the blue bloc and to Social Democracy.

SAP statement on Danish National election 2015

The Election was a defeat for the politics of necessity

The national election was a defeat for the politics of necessity. The politics distant from reality dictated by the big calculator of the Ministry of Finance has lost support. The Red Green Alliance (RGA) has gained strength and has resisted the danger of being drawn down by the unpopularity of the government. This opens possibilities to strengthen the struggle against the

right-wing anti-social reform policies. But it implies a reconstruction of the left project. The RGA is the force that can take on that challenge.

The national election was first of all a defeat for the politics of necessity. The parties of Social Democracy (SD), Liberals, Conservatives, Socialist People's Party (SPP) and Social Liberals (SL) who at least in the eyes of the people are seen as the proponents of reform policies, has lost massively in comparison with the 2011 election. From 75 % of the vote (132 seats) the electoral support for these parties has dropped to 58% (102 seats); a loss of 17 percentage points (30 seats). On the flip side of this the parties seen as alternatives to the politics of necessity gained votes, i.e. Danish Peoples Party (DPP), Liberal Alliance (LA), the Alternative (Alt) and RGA.

The Social Democrats did though win votes, but it was at the cost of the government partners. Social Democracy cannibalized SPP and SL, but lost out in the battle for power to DPP. It was the policies of the Social Democrats with cuts on welfare and hands out to corporations that paved the road for DPP.

Though a large share of votes went to DPP, it is important to understand the social contents of this. For many workers, who chose DPP, this is as much an expression of concern for welfare as a wish for worse treatment of refugees and immigrants. The task of the RGA is to keep DPP responsible on their promises of improved welfare, whether it regards the unemployment benefits or growth of the public sector.

The Alternative became the big surprise. With 4,8% of the votes the party got a massive breakthrough carried forward in the bigger cities - specially in Copenhagen. The party insisted on a new way of doing politics: non-conflictive and opening space for visionary thinking. This attracted many of those who want far-reaching changes of society.

Liberal Alliance appeared with its ultra-liberalist plan for changing public sector and the taxation system as the challenge to the politics of necessity in the blue camp. The party almost won the same electoral size as the RGA with 7,5% and 13 seats.

The electoral support for the RGA grew from 6,7% to 7,8% which is positive. The party has not only consolidated the good result from 2011 but also been able to obtain increased support. It is strongly positive that the party has not been drawn down by unpopularity of the SD-SL-SPP-government, but has maintained the critique of and distanced itself from the government. The RGA has grown significantly in the provinces and hence consolidated the progress from its municipal breakthrough in 2013.

Unfortunately, the RGA lost votes in Copenhagen. The party lost votes to the Alternative. The latter was able to attract part of the critique of the politics of necessity and express the desire for more visions. In spite of highflying dreams the Alternative was able to give these currents a voice, where the accusations of "economic irresponsibility" became rather to the benefit of the party. It will be a task for the RGA to make it visible if the Alternative gives up on the visions when the conflicts of interest manifest themselves.

The RGA appeared too much as the other parties - a party that does politics in the same way as the others with serious, concrete and "fully financed" political proposals within the consensus on what can be made into reality. This approach has helped the RGA to address groups within the working class, but during the election campaign, the lack of more far-reaching demand such as a 30 hour work week, implied that the party did not fully appeal to those that wish for something different and more. This also indicates that the RGA was not able to use the election to present own

visions and politics.

The RGA needs to take responsibility to rebuild the left

Seen in a general perspective nevertheless the situation of the RGA is not bad at all. There is a need to reorganize the left. Social Democracy proclaimed during the electoral campaign that it is to consider as a party of the centre. That implies that the RGA is the biggest left party.

The party has to take on the role as the uniting force that will take the lead in rebuilding the left. The party must be the driving force to mobilize for protests against the attacks of the coming right-wing government on marginalized and unemployed. This demands that the RGA casts its resources into the building from below. The RGA must use its forces to do base organizing in the trade-unions and among students. There should be a specific effort to organize in the neighbourhoods with a high level of social marginalisation, where the RGA has gained increased support.

Simultaneously with this process the RGA has to develop on the political level. The main focus must be a strategic reorientation, where the party formulates its own political visions that can show a credible way out of the crisis and towards socialism. The RGA can be the party that build on the dissatisfaction and give the coming struggles against the right-wing government austerity policies a perspective that reach beyond capitalism.

This is no easy task, it presupposes that the party develops a systematic approach to the work in the movements and dedicate resources to do the tasks as a collective. This process should be initiated at the coming conference.

*Adopted by SAP national leadership
21st of June 2015.*

After 2011, social struggles and constituent process

25 June 2015, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

Where is the Chilean student movement at today?

Franck Gaudichaud: Historically, the movement of students in tertiary and secondary education has always been a very significant social actor in Chile, including under the dictatorship. Under “neo-liberal” democracy, there has been a recomposition of student struggles, culminating in 2011 with a mass mobilization around the demands for free and high quality public education. Today, the movement is again in a very active struggle, with occupations of high schools and universities, after having for a while encountered a little difficulty in facing the new political scenario with the election of President Bachelet, who conceded in part some of the major demands, for example on educational reform, but by integrating a social-liberal perspective which does not break with the neo-liberal democracy constructed in the 1990s. After the struggles of 2011-2012, which were huge and radical, and shook the whole political system, the last year has been a period of adjustment, since the CONFECH (Confederation of Student Unions) has had to face a scenario in which the government proposed reforms “from above”. The leadership of the student movement in part fell into the trap of the “dialogue” offered by the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, some leaders of the 2011 student movement, like Camila Vallejo (CP) for example, are in parliament and/or in the coalition government. This year, we see that the student unions have resumed a dynamic of struggle with clearer orientations, and since May there have been massive demonstrations of more than one hundred thousand people.

Another interesting element is that since some of leaders in 2011 have

been integrated in the parliament and/or the executive, it is the political forces to the left of the Communist Party which dominate the CONFECH, thus they are independent of the coalition government. Among them, the Autonomous Left (Izquierda autonoma), the Front of Libertarian Students (FEL), the Student National Union (UNE) or even small revolutionary organizations. It is therefore the left of the left which has weight within the CONFECH, which could mean a year of more direct clashes with Bachelet and her reforms. That said, there are limits to this apparent “radicalism”: in political terms first, but also in terms of representativeness since the rate of abstention at student elections is very high, around 60%.

Sergio Grez: The Chilean student movement for free high quality public education for all has, like all social movements, known advances and setbacks. After 2011, it went through a certain reflux, due to the results of the mobilizations of that year. It had the sensation of having obtained nothing as a concrete result. However, the movement continued forcefully enough in 2012. The year 2013 was calm, in good part because it was an election year, which is generally not conducive to social movements. Then in 2014, Bachelet came to power for the second time with, it must be emphasized, only 25% of potential votes, since the rate of abstention reached 60%. The new coalition in power, the former “Concertación” renamed as “New majority” (“Nueva Mayoría”) which the Communist Party (CP) is part of, took up, somewhat dishonestly, some of the slogans of the student movement, which nourished hopes within the social movement, especially since the integration of the CP.

Although Bachelet’s election, and Eyzaguirre’s appointment to education undoubtedly gave new breath to the student movement, it was caught in the trap of a dialogue of the deaf. This does not mean that there were no mobilisations, but they were few and relatively weak. The student movement won almost nothing in 2014, apart from derogation to a decree which made the organization of students more difficult. 2015 looks better: several large demonstrations have already taken place since of April, demonstrations which were joined by other citizens, taking advantage of this situation to demonstrate their fundamental disagreement with the policy of the government. On 21 May, 2015 Bachelet made a presidential speech before Congress in Valparaíso, while a massive mobilization was taking place in the streets, which was violently suppressed. A young girl was seriously injured, while another protester is today still in a coma. This is reminiscent of the police repression of the right wing government of Piñera, but also that of the first Bachelet government against the movement of “penguins” in 2011 (a movement of secondary school students). So the student movement is beginning to awake, several faculties are on strike and mobilisations are unfolding. I think that the student movement is going to set the tone this year, inasmuch as it rejects the educational reform proposed by the government. It rejects the government view that free education is obtained through scholarships. It demands free education as a social right guaranteed as universal by the state and enshrined in the Constitution. The mobilization of students is therefore intrinsically linked to the demand for a change of Constitution.

Today, the demands of the student

movement are broader than those relating to education.

FG: There is not really a break between 2011 and today: the students continue to demand a free high quality public education, which also amounts to questioning the Bachelet reform which does not challenge the educational market, but only introduces free education for students (initially for 70% of them) by subsidizing it still more.

The current demands also deepen what had been tried in 2011: linking their specific demands to the whole of society, by defending for example the nationalization of natural resources and of copper, or for a redistributive tax reform, far from the one advocated by Bachelet, which spares most of the big bosses. It is for this reason that they call for a unification of social and popular struggles. There is an as yet timid attempt in this direction within the Platform for Education ("Mesa por la educación"), in order to try to obtain the support of the workers or of the "pobladores" (the movement of the urban poor). It is important to see also the presence of lecturers and their demands in the demonstrations. This is an interesting process, even if we see that it is still difficult to set up. It must be remembered that we are in a context where the CUT, the main trade union federation, is dominated by the Christian Democracy (DC) and the CP, like the leadership of the College of Teachers, who have no interest in creating difficulties for "their" government. The weaknesses or the dispersion of the trade union movement are reflected also in the possibilities of creating a broader, "class-based" arc of forces. Nevertheless, there are in the trade union movement "class struggle" sectors which are developing, including recently in the port unions, which clearly call for a dynamising of labour-capital conflicts, while supporting a change in the model of education, calls for the nationalization of natural resources, the end of pensions dominated by pension funds, the right to self-determination of the Mapuche people and so on. The demand which could partly federate all of these sectors is the demand for a constituent assembly, popular and democratic, but the road is still long.

SG: Since 2011, the student movement has managed to highlight the theme of education, which is already a great step forward. Until the beginning of 2011, nobody in Chile dared treat education as a key political topic. Thanks to the mobilization, in a few months, this situation changed dramatically. Today, the whole world, from far left to far right, agrees that it is a fundamental theme. At the same time, the student movement has managed to bring to the fore other questions about the issue of financing education. They have advanced very concrete proposals developed in a responsible manner, in particular the draft tax reform and the nationalization of copper. Some sectors are now demanding a constituent assembly. That said, from a practical point of view, it must be recognized that since 2011 there has been no notable advances in the construction of links between social movements. There have been attempts by the student movement to go to other social movements, for example the Mapuches, the movement of teachers, of course, and sometimes some struggles of workers, for example in the ports. But in my opinion, these relations are still weak, there are no stable, organic and permanent bonds between these social movements: it is something which must be further developed.

What are the other social movements?

SG: Among the most significant movements currently, there is first the Mapuche, which is not strictly social since it contains a national political demand, for autonomy and the reconquest of certain rights which have been denied, in particular the right to land and political rights. There is also a fairly strong movement against the centralism of the state. The movement of workers in the ports is very interesting. In Chile, the sea has been privatized; it belongs to seven major economic groups, while only small portions of the coastline have been left to artisanal fishers. The movement has organized for a few years around the port unions, which do not have legal status but involve unions who do. They conducted very significant strikes and mobilisations in

2014. It is a remarkable movement, because from a political point of view, it is able to threaten the interests of the large exporters (fruit, wood). But also because it was able to mobilize the workers all along the coast, in solidarity with workers in the port of Mejillones, who asked to have an hour for their lunch instead of the current 30 minutes. Almost all the workers in the ports mobilized to support them. It is a movement that has revived the traditions of solidarity among workers, broken by the dictatorship, and in general by the neo-liberal model of current democracy.

What is the current state of the forces of the radical left?

FG: First of all, it must be said that the current state - as yet fragile - of class struggles is a first limit to the recovery of the political forces of the anti-capitalist left, which remain very scattered and divided. In this context, it is difficult to envisage a "cold" unification of the radical or revolutionary lefts, whose contours remain to be defined. For example, if we talk about the student movement, there have been attempts, like the "Bloc de conducción" which brought together the Autonomous Left ("Izquierda Autonoma"), the Student National Union (UNE) and the Front of Libertarian Students (FEL). Together, they had a relative hegemony on the leadership of the student movement. But this front - you might call it "broad anti neo-liberal" - broke up a few months ago, lacking internal coherence. More generally, unification is also difficult between many small groups or revolutionary collectives, from various political cultures which have an often limited influence on this or that sector. These forces are still very much in the minority, but some have grown since 2011, boosted by the renewal of the social struggles.

The question is how to develop, today in Chile, an anti-capitalist and pro-self management left, not dogmatic or sectarian or electioneering or opportunistic, able to debate a political program of clear rupture, of transition, but also helping in the short term to develop the unitary action, on the social and political front, which is useful for

strengthening popular movements. Crucial strategic issues are controversial: how to face up to the new political cycle marked by the "transformism" of the Bachelet government, in an anti-capitalist perspective? But also, who are the "subjects" of the social transformation for which we are fighting in Chile currently? What place for the party form? The radical or revolutionary Chilean lefts have sometimes found it hard to integrate topics such as ecology or eco-socialism, feminism, or to carry out a concrete internationalist work, which hampers its strategic development. If you want to summarize in broad brush strokes, the landscape of these left political forces is still very fragmented, there are organizations which come from what may be called the "new mirismo" [4] and which stretch from anti-neoliberals to Guevarist forces; a very broad libertarian current, ranging from "pure" anarchists to libertarian activists advocating a "democratic rupture" including electoral work; there are also all the forces that come from various splits within the Communist movement and "Rodriguismo" [5]; and finally a Trotskyist current, derived more or less from "Morenismo" with some presence.

SG: There is, in my opinion, excessive fragmentation. In Chile, we have a left which is more social than political. Of course, behind the social left, there are more or less broad political formations, but they are very scattered and do not have the ability to agree, even where there are convergences of substance on a good number of issues. The elections of 2013 are a good example of this: there were four "left" or progressive presidential nominations out of a total of nine, all defended the Constituent Assembly, but they were not able to unite. Each group pushed forward its own interests. The radical left is not capable of looking at things with a little more height, foresight and generosity.

What analysis can be made of the Bachelet government?

FG: The government of President Bachelet is a social liberal coalition government which goes from the

centre-right (with the Christian Democrats) to the CP and which is part of the framework of the neo-liberal semi-authoritarian capitalist model installed at the end of the dictatorship. I have spoken in this respect of a "social liberal transformism". In a way, the executive responds to the struggles and to 2011 by attempting to stabilize this model by partial reforms. This is a point of direct controversy with the analyses of the CP. Today, the government must face a legitimacy crisis unprecedented since 1990, with repeated huge cases of corruption which have affected the entire political world in the last few months. This has revealed the level of integration between the big companies, capital and the whole of the political elite. They have all received money from the major groups like Penta, Soquimich, privatized enterprises or created during the dictatorship. However, the response of Bachelet has essentially consisted of a change of cabinet, giving it an even more conservative tilt than before: we have witnessed the return of the old cadres of the Concertación [6] to key positions of government power. Many sociologists have considered the government of Bachelet as a sign of an opening, a certain renewal. If a new political cycle has been generated - from below - by the social struggles, there is continuity at the top. Moreover, the employers and the "Mercurio" [the main daily newspaper, rightist and a former supporter of Pinochet] are not fooled; they incessantly praise the Prime Minister, as well as the Minister for the Economy and the Minister of the Interior.

This explains why Bachelet made almost no announcement in her presidential speech on 21 May last. Everyone has noted that she did not mention a constituent assembly, which confirms what we already knew, namely that there will indeed be a "new Constitution" which will still be the one introduced by Pinochet in 1981, but without a Constituent Assembly. There will probably be "citizen consultations", but the bulk of the work will be done in the closed cabinet of the parliament, before being eventually subjected to a plebiscite. For the rest, the worst points are confirmed, on labour

reform for example, which has been denounced, including now partly by the CUT. In the field of education, the goal is to reach 60% of free education by 2018, but still in the context of the market. Therefore, it is the state which will subsidize this private service which, initially, will exclude students from private universities, which is problematic since that is where paradoxically we find the most students, and often the poorest.

SG: This is a reformist government which is intended to correct certain aspects of the neoliberal system to give it a broader and more stable social and political base. If we analyze each of the reforms, whether in education, taxation, employment, the pension system or health, they are about small changes which do not seek to break fundamentally with the current model. Of course, there has been an increase in social spending since the end of the dictatorship, but this expenditure often finally benefits the capitalists. In the case of education, for example, the government proposes to increase scholarships, with which the students can then make their choice on the education market. This is to subsidise demand. Today, the state provides only 10-15% of their needs to public universities, whereas under Allende, the public share amounted to 80%! It is the same thing for health: as the public hospitals cannot meet all needs, we give subsidies to patients to seek treatment in private clinics. Finally, it increases the profits of the private institutions and weakens the public sector. That is the neo-liberal model, and in that sense, the government of Bachelet does not differ from the right. Concerning the pension system inherited from the dictatorship, this is not a social security system, but private insurance based on individual capitalization. There is no solidarity-based redistribution. However, what Bachelet proposes is that the state frames this system in order to guarantee better services!

But it will change nothing on the ground. On the contrary, we should give the money to the workers, and create a pension system by distribution, just and inclusive. The right has also understood that it has not much to fear from the Bachelet

government. Its representatives were opposed to certain things, but in the background, they support the policy it pursues. In reality, the classic right is undergoing a deep crisis, not only because of repeated corruption scandals, but also and especially because the "Nueva Mayoría-cambio" is stealing its role of representation of the ruling classes.

Frank, what is the position of the Communist Party, integrated into the government, but still having a strong presence in social movements?

FG: Its position is fairly complex. It is the most disciplined party in the government coalition, which applies the decisions and supports Bachelet whatever happens, more clearly than the DC or the Socialist Party (PS), who have publicly expressed their criticism. Moreover, the CP has been rewarded for that in the new cabinet, because it got two ministries. Yet, there is no organized dissent - which the party does not tolerate - but muted criticism at the rank and file level, including the communal frameworks, of the neo-liberal orientation of the coalition. For example, on the labour reform, considered very problematic, or on the constituent assembly, whose convening is postponed to the distant future, and so on. Figures like Camila Vallejo, who had a certain degree of autonomy in speech, approved the presidential speech without batting an eyelash, except the regret that there is no constituent assembly. The CP's gamble is to continue this return to the government, with the idea that the ongoing reforms are a first step. Hence the substantive debate: is this a first step toward an initial democratization of neo-liberalism, as the CP maintains, or on the contrary an attempt to stabilize the system inherited from Pinochet threatened by the recomposition of the social struggles, as the radical left sees it? Finally, the bureaucratic integration of the CP is very important, since it holds numerous senior management positions in the state apparatus, but also the vice-presidency of the National Assembly.

In addition, it benefits, including financially, from its participation in power, which has consolidated it as an

institutional party. Therefore, any rupture would be all the more difficult. On the other hand, the CP is still an actor in the social movement, with a real capacity for organization in some popular sectors. The Communist Youth have a strong presence in the student and secondary school student movement; a part of the trade union movement is under the influence of Communist leaders (the copper mining sector for example), the party holds the presidency of the CUT and the College of Teachers. In fact, they say that the CP is the main social force of the government, the only one capable of attempting to channel the popular movement. That does not prevent it from calling mobilisations, but they are in favour of the government and its reforms.

The repression of mobilisations, particularly of students, appears to be accentuating lately. Two young people in particular were brutally attacked by the security forces during a demonstration.

FG: The climate is getting tenser, repressive practices are proliferating. This did not begin with Bachelet of course; this is a recurring historical problem and a state practice. But with regard to the recent violence against students, with one young activist still between life and death, there is a direct responsibility of the government, the police and the Minister of the interior. This is also the case in the south of the country against the Mapuches. In this regard, recently an undercover police officer was recognized before a court as having carried out arson, in the framework of activities dictated by the secret services. A young Mapuche, wrongly accused, has spent 11 months in prison, and that is only the tip of the iceberg: the practices of police infiltration, provocation and violent repression are almost daily in the entire space of the social struggles and constitute again a heavy authoritarian legacy renewed by the civilian government.

SG: The government, whatever it may be, that of Piñera or Bachelet, plays the game of the carrot and the stick. On one side it punishes, and on the other, it launches appeals for dialogue. The present government is a

specialist in "platforms for dialogue" on many subjects. Its strategy is to talk at length, without actually leading to concrete things. And sometimes it gives small concessions, especially now, with the student movement, where it has in any case a fifth column formed by Communist activists. This did not exist at the time of Piñera, when the CP was clearly part of the opposition. Camila Vallejo, former leader of the student movement, today Communist deputy, has clearly said: "we will have one foot in the street, the other in the government". However, we see some of the contradictions today: you cannot at the same time be on the side of the students and the government which represses them. Who is the Minister of the Interior that Bachelet has just appointed in her new cabinet? It is Burgos, a Christian Democrat, who was one of the heads of the "Oficina" in 1990. This was the secret service created by the Concertación to dismantle the left opposition which had taken up arms during the dictatorship, and which had refused to give them up at the time of the transition, not trusting the new democracy. These groups were infiltrated by their former comrades, notably under the orders of Burgos.

What more can be said on the reform of the Constitution?

SG: Chile has already initiated a constituent process, but the stakes are currently focused on how to conduct this reform. There are two ways to do so: to elaborate a constitution through a commission appointed by the government, to have it approved by parliament, and finally to vote, en bloc, in a popular plebiscite. The other way is to elect a constituent assembly. It would be a free and sovereign body, whose work would be limited in time, and which would represent the people much more democratically. According to recent surveys of opinion, 60% of Chileans would be favourable to such a process. The problem is that today there is no legal institutional framework which would make it possible to establish a constituent assembly. So a subterfuge is needed, and that can only be done with strong social and political pressure from below. Since 2011, the slogan in favour of a Constituent Assembly has

met with a growing support in the population. Currently, we are organizing a “school of constituents”, which is designed to train cadres to explain this idea to people, to show that it is the place where their interests could be defended. We are also thinking about the means to

conduct such a process. The idea would be for example to introduce a quorum of two-thirds to vote through a constitutional change, and if this quorum is not reached, to proceed to votes on specific subjects, instead of taking a decision only on a final package. This would ensure a genuine democratic participation that is as

broad as possible, according to the old slogan of the time of Popular Unity: “crear poder popular” (“create popular power”).

*Translated by **International Viewpoint**, published by permission in Viewpoint magazine.*

Why Europe Needs A Debt Conference

24 June 2015, by **Özlem Onaran**

According to the current proposals of the Greek government, even if there are elements of a left austerity with redistributive concerns, the primary budget surpluses imposed on them are too high to secure economic and social recovery; further privatizations are expected; the demands regarding minimum wages and collective bargaining are postponed, and the type of cuts in the pension system continues to be the sticking point.

But even if a deal is reached, there are other inconvenient facts about the increase in the public debt in Greece since 2010. The Truth Committee on Public Debt – an independent committee of experts from 11 countries set up by the President of the Hellenic Parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou – published its [preliminary report](#) on 18 June 2015. The report provides evidence that the Greek debt is largely illegal, illegitimate, and odious.

The programmes were based on clearly wrong assumptions; however this was not a mistake, their unsustainability was predictable and the main goal was the rescue of banks and private creditors. Particularly revealing is the testimony of [Panagiotis Roumeliotis](#), the former representative of Greece at the IMF, on 15 June 2015 at a public hearing answering the questions of the Truth Committee. The IMF knew that the Greek debt was unsustainable and according to its own rules should not have agreed to a loan agreement

without a debt restructuring in 2010, but the European governments and banks influenced the decision. Papandreou’s government helped to present the elements of a banking crisis as a sovereign debt crisis in 2009. In 2013 the [IMF](#) admits that “a delayed debt restructuring also provided a window for private creditors to reduce exposures and shift debt into official hands”.

Since the first Memorandum in 2010, private creditors managed to offload their risky bonds issued by the Greek state. In 2015, 80% of Greece’s public debt is held by public creditors: fourteen Member States of the Eurozone, the EFSF, the IMF, and the ECB. Only less than 10% of the funds have been destined to the government’s current expenditure. The conditionalities imposed further neoliberal reforms, which was not only an aim in itself, but also helped to create the illusion that they were designed to secure the future debt repayment.

However, the wage and pension cuts and fiscal consolidation led to lower GDP, tax losses, and higher public debt. [Our estimates](#) show that the fall in the wage share alone has led to a loss in GDP by 4.5%, and a 7.80% point increase in the public debt/GDP ratio. The fall in wages alone explains more than a quarter (27%) of the rise in the public debt/GDP ratio in this period. The conditionalities of the memoranda have not only been counterproductive in terms of its aims

regarding debt sustainability, but also engineered a humanitarian crisis.

Philippe Legrain, advisor to the President of the European Commission Barroso in 2010, who spoke at a [public hearing](#) at the Greek Parliament on 11 June 2015, [writes](#)

Why would Eurozone authorities be so cruel and foolish? Because they don't really care about the welfare of ordinary Greeks. They aren't even that bothered about whether the Greek government pays back the money that they forced European taxpayers to lend to it, ostensibly out of solidarity, but actually to bail out French and German banks and investors. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other Eurozone policymakers just don't want to admit that they made a terrible mistake in 2010 and have lied about it since.

The report of the Truth Committee demonstrates that the debt claimed today from Greece can be considered illegitimate, in the sense that it has not benefited the population but a small minority of private creditors, especially the large Greek, German and French banks. This debt is unsustainable not only from an economic, but also a human rights perspective, as Greece is currently unable to service its debt without seriously impairing its capacity to fulfill its basic human rights obligations regarding the right to work, a life with dignity, social security, health, education, and housing. Loans have been contracted

in violation of the Greek Constitution and the EU law, and can therefore be classified as illegal. The debt may also be classified as odious, since lenders knew that the conditionalities attached to their loans violated fundamental human rights.

The report also confronts the myth of excessive public spending before the crisis. The increase in debt since the 1980s was not due to excessive public spending, which in fact remained lower than the public spending of other Eurozone countries, apart from excessive and unjustified military spending, marked by widespread fraud with contracts benefiting the armament industry of the creditor countries. The other reasons of the rise in public debt were the extremely high interest rates, loss of tax revenues due to tax evasion and illicit capital outflows, and finally the recapitalization of private banks.

On 21 June **49 SYRIZA MPs** requested a plenary of the Parliament to discuss the report of the Truth Committee on Public Debt. Whether there is a deal or not, there will be people in Greece who will not forget these inconvenient facts and seek justice. Who owes whom after years of destruction? This concerns not just the people of Greece but also Europe. Europe needs a debt conference. In 1953, as a result of the London Debt Agreement, half of German debt was written-off. The winners of the financial crisis do not have interest in a debt conference, but

the people of Europe have the right to learn that their taxes were used to bail out banks. The people in Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Latvia need to see the truth that their governments imposed on them the similarly wrong austerity measures.

The bill must eventually be sent to the private banks. Until then the people of Greece have the right to refuse to pay the debt. It is time that the Greek people have a clear discussion about what the debt means, and what are the options outside this straightjacket. Greece needs policies to achieve decent jobs with decent wages for both women and men, structural change, sustainable development and a caring society for both the young and the elderly. Solutions to these problems are incompatible with payment of the debt and austerity policies likely to be attached to further agreements.

A unilateral debt default surely requires capital controls, but despite the scaremongering, the Greek people need to be reminded that most countries had capital controls until the late 1970s and 1980s. To counterbalance the blackmail of the ECB, the Greek government can introduce IOUs for internal payments. Will this lead to an exit from the Eurozone? Staying in or exiting the Euro cannot be a taboo, and exit is a possible outcome of confrontation, but

it is not the only outcome.

After default, the ECB would cut the supply of liquidity, since the government bonds held by the Greek banks would cease to serve as collateral, but according to Willem Buiter of Citi [7], European authorities could recapitalize the Greek banks, and the ECB could continue funding the banks until a political decision is reached to avoid being the institution to pull the plug. But this approach sees the transition period from the perspective of the bankers; from the perspective of the Greek government, the more important issue is to take control of their banks rather than leaving it to the ECB.

The degree of financial contagion to the rest of Europe after a Greek default is yet to be seen, as the calm in the government bond markets seem to be more fragile than the ECB and the European governments hope for. But the political contagion of a Greek default, as people choose dignity over blackmail, is what the people of Europe can hope and prepare for. The political and financial contagion will mutually reinforce each other in the medium run as more questions are asked by the people of Europe about the legitimacy of the so called bail out programmes.

24 June 2015

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Hillary Clinton's Family Values

21 June 2015, by **Leroy Pelton**

Hillary Clinton is well-versed in child welfare issues, having devoted much of her career to them, and her views, at first glance, seem progressive. Her popular 1996 book, *It Takes a Village*, starts from the premise that "children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough to provide for them." She emphasizes the need to give parents

"the physical, financial, and emotional support they need to raise children well," and argued that government "cannot retreat from its historic obligations to the poor and vulnerable."

But these words are difficult to reconcile with Clinton's actions in her long political career. Most troublesome is her support for the

1996 "welfare reform" act, which replaced the longstanding Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

In a chapter she wrote for a 1979 book on children's rights, she urges the development of "a family policy in this country that provides stigma-free assistance to families in trouble." Yet

TANF is one of the most stigmatizing programs we have.

Under TANF, many states maintain a “family cap” rule, which denies benefits to any additional children born to a mother receiving assistance from the program. For “approved” children, arbitrary time limits are placed on the receipt of benefits, regardless of whether their needs outlast the time limits. And if mothers fail to comply with job-training, job search, and work requirements, it is their children who see their benefits reduced or get kicked off the program.

These reforms are all aimed at controlling mothers’ behaviors. In her 2003 memoir, *Living History*, Clinton explains her support for TANF: “I didn’t think it was fair that one single mother improvised to find child care and got up early every day to get to work while another stayed home and relied on welfare.”

Never mind that the welfare such a mother relied on was a pittance. She was not deserving of it. The TANF program would fix the recalcitrant mother by placing conditions on her “and her child’s” receipt of even the most minimal assistance.

In addition to backing TANF, Clinton proudly claims to have been the driving force behind the [Adoption and Safe Families Act \(ASFA\)](#) of 1997. She writes in *Living History* that she “convened adoption experts in a series of White House meetings” and “outlined a blueprint” that led to the legislation’s passage.

ASFA has provided states with

financial incentives to adopt more children out of foster care each year than they did previously, and sets an arbitrary time limit (fifteen months) on the termination of parental rights for children in foster care.

The national foster care population has always consisted predominantly of children from indigent families. Many believe that only children who have been severely abused or neglected by their parents, poor or not, are removed by the government and placed in foster care. This is far from the case. It is not unusual for children to be put in foster care due to a family’s inadequate housing or outright homelessness, lack of resources, or inability to obtain day care.

As a result of ASFA, adoptions of children out of foster care leaped to 50,000 children per year in 2000, and have not dipped below that number since. Based on 2011 federal data, on any given day almost [one million children](#) “are residing in adoptive homes or foster care, placed there by the public child welfare system. These figures represent the greatest government-sponsored mass transfer of poor children from their own homes in our country’s history.

ASFA rests on the fantasy that by removing impoverished children from their houses, we can avoid “rewarding” their “undeserving” parents without harming the children themselves, and that we can promote “permanence” of children’s living arrangements (through adoption)

while undermining it in their own homes.

Government has always supported poor children more generously in other people’s homes than in their own. Clinton’s version of children’s rights does not appear to include the right to be sustained within their own families.

In contrast to this view of government as judge of deservedness and distributor of rewards, penalties, and incentives is the recognition of the existence of a communal wealth that belongs to all of us. Indeed, both physical and social infrastructures, some built long before any of us were even born, have produced a common wealth beyond what any of us can be said to have earned on our own.

Children have not done anything to deserve a share of this bounty, nor has anyone else. But they are entitled to it as members of the community, as are unemployed adults and adults who have never been employed. Rather than continuing to remove poor children from their own homes, we should provide both parents and children their fair piece of the community pie, and cast aside the delusion that we can or should assist children without assisting their parents.

Clinton doesn’t seem to understand this. While her campaign fundraising letters claim she has spent her entire life “fighting for children and families,” her record suggests otherwise.

[Jacobin](#)

Teduray: Lumad struggle for identity, territory is consistent, even without arms

20 June 2015, by [LILAK](#)

Cornelio said that the indigenous peoples have been eased out of the peace talks, “because we are not

armed.” This, however, does not mean the Lumads or the indigenous peoples in Mindanao do not have legitimate

concerns. “Our territory is part of what is being proposed as Bangsamoro Territory. Our distinct

identity as Teduray, Dulangan Manobo and Lambangian is being subsumed as Bangsamoro people. We cannot allow this."

Cornelio was speaking as part of the panel in "Tapatan sa Aristocrat", a media forum held on June 8. The other members of the panel were Mohagher Iqbal, Chair of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Atty. Christian Monsod, as part of the Peace Council.

"The indigenous peoples have representatives in the drafting of the Bangsamoro basic law (BBL)," according to Iqbal, referring to Teduray members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) - Ms. Froilyn Mendoza, appointed by the Philippine government, and Melanio Ulama, appointed by the MILF. Monsod also stated that the OPAPP (Office of the Presidential Affairs on Peace Process) held 32 consultations with indigenous peoples.

"But what was done by the OPAPP were IEC (Information, Education, campaign) and not consultations with the indigenous communities,"

countered Cornelio. She acknowledged, however, that there were indeed two Teduray representatives in the BTC. But only one actually held consultations with the indigenous people communities. "Comm. Mendoza held several community consultations, and we participated in those." Cornelio said that it was through these consultations that they were able to discuss and propose indigenous peoples' provisions in the draft BBL.

"We originally had 145 proposed provisions." However, Cornelio narrated, after Comm. Mendoza brought these to the BTC, it was reduced to 69, then later, 13 provisions. "Now, none of our substantive proposals - not on indigenous peoples identity, on our ancestral domain and the articulation of Rep. Act 8371 or Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) are there; but what can she do, Comm. Mendoza was the only one in the BTC fighting for our rights."

Comm. Ulama, who appeared towards the end of the media forum,

intervened and said that IPRA has not been implemented in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) since the indigenous peoples' law has been enacted, 17 years ago. According to him, the indigenous peoples do not need IPRA anymore, and BBL as it is, is enough. Ulama further questioned the representation of Cornelio, and said that he did not know her, and where she was from.

Cornelio then said, "You would not know me, as I am just an ordinary Teduray woman from the community of Brgy. Looy, South Upi, Maguindanao. I'm active in the assertion of women's rights. You however, we know very well, as the Teduray representative appointed by the MILF."

Cornelio is currently in Manila as part of the Lumad delegation, representing the indigenous peoples from the core territory, as they push for the full inclusion of indigenous people rights in the proposed BBL.

9 June 2015

[LILAK \(Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights\)](#)

The forgotten massacre

19 June 2015, by [Alex de Jong](#)

Hundreds of thousands of real and suspected communists were massacred, and a new, military-dominated regime under Suharto was installed. Western powers like the US, Britain, and the Netherlands condoned and often actively supported the massacres.

Indonesia's military junta took control of the media on October 2, using it to spread its own version of the events. In the junta's version, the killing of the generals was the spark that ignited popular anger against a party that was hated for its violence, its disregard for religion and its lack of patriotism. Supposedly, PKI plans for a violent revolution and elimination of anyone who opposed it were stopped by a

wave of spontaneous popular anger against the treacherous communists.

For decades, this version of the mass killings of 1965-66 has been reinforced by state propaganda and parroted by Western experts who saw the "spontaneous" eruption in murderous violence as confirmation of pre-existing racist ideas about fanatical and irrational "orientals."

Historical research [has demolished](#) this version of events. The failed coup was not an initiative of the PKI as a whole, but of a small number of PKI leaders working with sympathetic army officers who wanted to remove several right-wing army leaders "not take state power. The massacre

that followed was systematic, organized by right-wing nationalist politicians and militia, religious organizations, and, most of all, the Indonesian army. This coalition for murder received political and material support from Western powers.

Within days of the coup, US and British officials began making plans to exploit the political situation. The coup offered them the chance to crush the PKI, a party that Western officials feared was getting dangerously close to state power.

In the years leading up to the coup, the PKI tried to establish itself as the fiercest anti-imperialist party in the country, mobilizing against the

influence of foreign capital, especially of the Dutch and British variety. It supported Indonesian President Sukarno in his demand that the Dutch hand over Irian Jaya (West Papua) to Indonesia and in his campaign against Malaysia, which it denounced as an instrument of British imperialism.

For a time this strategy was successful. In the parliamentary elections of 1955 – the last before Sukarno adopted his authoritarian system of “guided democracy” – the PKI emerged as the country’s fourth largest party with 16.4 percent of the vote. Party membership had grown from less than twenty thousand in 1954 to over 1.5 million. Millions were organized in PKI-allied trade unions and mass organizations of peasants, women, students, and other groups.

It was not just the growth of the PKI that set off alarm bells in the West. In the late 1950s, the US backed right-wing rebellions against Sukarno, but this backfired when the rebels were defeated. American support for his opponents drove Sukarno further away from the Western bloc and damaged US relations with the most powerful force on the Indonesian right: the army.

Meanwhile, the communists’ contribution to the fight against the rebels won them popular sympathy and growing favor from Sukarno. By the early sixties, the PKI was the world largest Communist party outside the Soviet bloc, and Indonesia was the largest non-bloc recipient of Soviet economic and military aid.

After the failure of the regional rebellions, the US adopted a different strategy. With the help of philanthropic foundations like Ford and Rockefeller and institutions like the World Bank, the US restored its relationship with the Indonesian army and the country’s right by providing material assistance and training to Army officers and pro-Western intellectuals.

But the US government’s ability to influence Indonesian state policy ultimately depended on President Sukarno. Sukarno, the historical leader of the Indonesian independence movement, was very popular and

essentially ruled by decree. He was not a communist, but he was a fervent anticolonialist who dreamed of a powerful, fully independent Indonesia that would play an important role on the world stage.

Sukarno increasingly clashed with Western powers – especially the UK and US, whom he denounced as neocolonialist. In early 1965, Indonesia withdrew from the United Nations and expelled the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

As a result, Western officials were pessimistic about their ability to manipulate the political landscape in Indonesia. In early 1965, the Dutch ambassador to Indonesia, E. L. C. Schiff, said in a wire to the minister of foreign affairs that the consensus among his colleagues was that Sukarno would remain the country’s leader until his death and that “it is no longer possible to keep Indonesia from slipping into the left.”

The US had also decided by then that Sukarno could not be pressured to abandon the PKI, and in August 1964 decided to overthrow Sukarno. This decision was in accord with the covert plans of British officials to foment civil war or the collapse of Sukarno’s government.

The UK established a “director of political warfare against Indonesia,” based in Singapore, and the CIA proposed expanding its own operations in Indonesia to include “covert liaison with and support for existing anti-Communist groups, black letter operations, media operations, including the possibility of black radio (propaganda radio stations) and political action within existing Indonesian institutions and organizations.”

The expectation was that if Sukarno was removed, a power struggle between the PKI and the army would follow. The (now pro-US) Army leadership was confident about the outcome of this struggle: in a confidential meeting with the Dutch ambassador, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ahmad Yani (one of the generals killed on September 30) said the army was “reliable” and already making preparations for confrontation should

the ailing president die.

But as long as Sukarno was protecting the PKI, crushing the communists was impossible. British Assistant Secretary of State Edward Peck suggested “there might be much to be said for encouraging a premature PKI coup during Sukarno’s lifetime.” The failed coup gave Peck what he wanted.

The killing of the generals was a boon for the army’s propaganda campaign against the PKI and, indirectly, against Sukarno. Sukarno’s refusal to condemn or ban the PKI, as the Right demanded following the failed coup, was exploited by the army to discredit him. In the following months, Sukarno was forced to hand more and more power to the army.

The theory that the violence was a sudden eruption of popular anger is belied by its gradual escalation. After the failed coup, the army supported anti-PKI demonstrations with transport and protection, and roughly a week after the death of the generals, mobs ransacked PKI offices as security forces looked on. Houses of PKI members followed.

The killings of (suspected) PKI members and supporters didn’t start until weeks after the September 30 coup attempt: massacres took place in Central Java in late October, then East Java in November, followed by Bali in December. In each instance the arrival of the Special Forces, commanded by Major Gen. Sarwo Edhie, preceded the killings.

Many victims were first arrested by militia groups supported by Edhie’s Special Forces. Prisoners were put into makeshift prison camps in remote locations and were often slain in groups, often by getting shot, stabbed, or having their skulls crushed with rocks and clubs. Much of the killing was done by young militia members of groups like Ansor, the youth wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, the country’s largest Muslim organization.

Ernst Utrecht, a left-wing supporter of Sukarno and former parliamentarian, estimates up to fifty thousand Indonesians participated in the massacre. After decades of propaganda and cover up, the number

of victims cannot be precisely determined. Most historians assume the number of dead to be somewhere between five hundred thousand and 1 million, though Edhie himself claimed the number was 3 million.

Western powers supported the army in its campaign against the PKI. On October 17, the CIA worried the army might not go "all the way," [settling instead](#) "for action against those directly involved in the murder of the generals and permit[ting] Sukarno to get much of his power back."

To prevent this the CIA gave lists with the names of five thousand PKI members to the generals and organized the delivery of small arms and money to the army. The US embassy provided its own lists with two thousand names. In a meeting with British officials, Gen. Sukendro requested help for the army to "consolidate its position." The meeting minutes reported on the "Army's strategy" against the PKI and how "considerations [were] being made to meet the clamor of the nationalists and the religious elements for arms."

Other Western powers also aided the massacre: the West German foreign secret service delivered arms and communication equipment worth DM300,000, while Indonesian refugee Osman Jusuf Helmi reported that Sweden had signed a contract with Suharto and Nasution "for an emergency purchase of \$10,000,000 worth of small arms and ammunition" in December 1965.

Dutch ambassador Schiff reported on October 8 that the army was conducting an "intensive smear campaign" against the PKI, and concluded that the situation was "the best" and maybe last "chance of the army to assert itself politically."

By the end of October, the US embassy received reports of violence against masses of PKI supporters in East, Central, and West Java. The US

ambassador noted that the army was "moving relentlessly to exterminate the PKI." A month later Schiff reported that "whole kampongs [villages]" had been slaughtered, supposedly as a result of local feuding. The bloodshed achieved its aim of destroying the Indonesian left. In April 1966, Schiff's minister of foreign affairs, future NATO Secretary Gen. Joseph Luns, noted "the blow dealt to the Communists (from which they are not likely to recover in the foreseeable future)." In July 1966, Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt remarked in a speech in New York that "with 50,000 to 1,000,000 Communist sympathizers knocked off, I think it is safe to assume a reorientation has taken place."

A few weeks earlier the US State Department had rejoiced that, due to the killing of "up to 300,000 Communists" and another 1.6 million Indonesian Communists renouncing their membership, the number of communists in non-bloc countries had dropped by 42 percent in one year.

The aid Western officials gave the army in late 1965 and early 1966 was a crucial political signal to Indonesia's new de facto rulers that the US and its allies were willing to support them. This backing was vital for the nascent regime because the Indonesian economy was in crisis, and Western capital remained hesitant to invest in Indonesia after Sukarno's takeover of British and Dutch companies and calls to expropriate Western capital.

The military exploited the economic crisis to undermine what was left of Sukarno's authority. British and US companies like Caltex, Goodyear, and US Rubber cut a deal with the army to channel corporate revenues into unnamed bank accounts, robbing the Indonesian state of an important source of foreign currency, further crippling Sukarno.

At the same time, the army was quick to placate its Western supporters. In

December, Suharto reassured Western oil companies that the army "would not stand for precipitous moves" against them, and just days after Sukarno officially handed power to Suharto on March 11, 1966, the US mining company Freeport was allowed back into the country to extract the rich mineral resources in Irian Jaya.

A new foreign investment law that granted extremely favorable conditions for outside capital was drafted in close cooperation with the IMF, and starting in 1967 the new regime received \$450 million annually from the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI).

The IGGI included the Asian Development Bank, the IMF, the UN Development Program, the World Bank, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United States, and was chaired by the Netherlands. The Dutch chairmanship was suggested by US officials who hoped to divert attention from US (and Japanese) involvement in the deal.

Indonesia's large cities were prioritized as aid recipients to stabilize the political situation. By 1968 the Suharto dictatorship was comfortably established and committed to pro-Western economic policies.

The Indonesian government still refuses to admit the killings were systematic violations of human rights. No one has ever been held accountable for the hundreds of thousands of deaths, and not a single one of the many known mass graves has been fully excavated to give the victims a decent burial. And in April it was announced that Sarwo Edhie [would be declared](#) a "national hero" for his deeds.

Above all, the massacres achieved their goal. To this day, the Indonesian left has not recovered.

François Vercammen, member of the Belgian section of the Fourth International

18 June 2015, by Alain Krivine, Alain Tondeur, Pierre Rousset, Sally Rousset, Thomas Weyts

A faithful companion of our comrade, Ernest Mandel, a Belgian economist recognized worldwide, François was himself the author of many books and publications and was for a long time involved with training at the Amsterdam School.

He attentively followed the debates in the LCR up to the creation of the NPA and many will remember his ability to listen, his kindness and his simplicity. Very open to all developments and debates, he nonetheless maintained the rigor necessary to revolutionary combat.

He was known for his laughter, his love of life and of activism until a stroke a few years ago which quickly cut him off from the world.

Alain Krivine

The death of our comrade François Vercammen

Our friend and comrade François Vercammen died on Tuesday, June 16, 2015. François had been ill for years and had been cared for in an institution for the last few months. He passed away peacefully, in the presence of his companion, Leen, surrounded by the affection of his loved ones.

François's conscious political life was entirely devoted to the struggle for the emancipation of the exploited and oppressed. Born into a family of

Antwerp dockworkers, François was won at a very young age to revolutionary Marxism and to the Fourth International. Through his profound knowledge of the working class, his great historic culture and his strategic vision, he rapidly established himself as a leader of the first level, first in Belgium and then in Europe.

Within the Belgian section, François was noted particularly for his fine analysis of the strength and the weaknesses of the labour movement, particularly from what he called the "oppositional reformism" of the FGTB. Many trade unionists have benefited from his insights, simple without superficiality and pedagogic without paternalism.

Within the Fourth International, François participated, with Pierre Rousset, in the foundation of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam, within which he perfected his knowledge of the Russian revolution and of the thought of Lenin, of whom he was a great admirer.

During his last active years, François threw all his strength and intelligence into the analysis of the "European despotic proto-state" and the construction of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL). Constantly travelling from one end of the continent to the other, he was involved in actively building links between the Italian PRC, the Scottish SSP, the Red-Green Alliance of Denmark, the Portuguese Left Bloc, and the French LCR, in particular.

In 2005, François took an important role in the organization of a symposium in tribute to his spiritual father, Ernest Mandel, ten years after

the death of the latter. Those who knew him retain the memory of a man who was friendly, helpful, fully dedicated to the cause of the emancipation, contemptuous of honours and those who sought them.

François was a formidable and intransigent polemicist, but someone who, in debates, never left the terrain of the ideas and principles to which he devoted his life. A special tribute will be made on July 3, 2015 in Brussels, in the afternoon (the time is not yet fixed), in the salle La Tentation, rue de Laeken 28. We will return soon on the life of François, on this site.

In the name of the LCR, we express our very sincere condolences to Leen and to François's family. The struggle continues, and "Swa" remains in our hearts.

Daniel Tanuro and Thomas Weyts

François Vercammen, a militant generation

François Vercammen was one of our leading cadre coming out of the 1960s youth radicalization. Playing an important role in the renewal of the organization in Belgium, he was actively involved in the Fourth International in the constitution a leadership team composed of activists from the same generation (from various countries and continents) -

alongside "old" comrades such as Ernest Mandel, Livio Maitan and Pierre Frank. His main field of activity was Europe.

He drew heavily on the European experience when we together launched the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam in 1982 (he remained a co-director until 1985). At the time, two three-month educational sessions were held each year in the institute. The purpose not just "transmitting" "knowledge," but more thinking collectively - with participants, as well as visiting speakers - about the lessons of the history of social and

revolutionary struggles. In particular, it was an opportunity for our generation of activists in the FI to take stock after some two decades of non-stop activity. Thus, from one session to another, the lectures were enriched by the discussions with Europeans, North and Latin Americans, Asians or Africans, belonging to a range of quite different organizations, not necessarily members of our International. The "educators" were educating themselves through these plural exchanges [8].

Beyond the West European issues, François took up at the IIRE, his

substantive work on the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Party and Lenin's thought. We came together in working on this crucial, founding experience; he had specifically in mind its teachings as seen from Europe - and I as seen in Asia.

François took history very seriously and did not think we could afford to make a clean sweep of the past - without memory organizations are disarmed. But the past must help us to think about the present, not to turn us away from it. François was as humanly as he was politically open.

Pierre Rousset and Sally Rousset

What position should the left take on the EU referendum?

18 June 2015, by Alan Thornett

For the British capitalist class the referendum raises a major strategic issue in terms of Britain's place in the world - "Europeanism or Atlanticism. This is something they have grappled with, and been bitterly divided over, for over 40 years.

Michael Heseltine famously walked out of Thatcher's cabinet in 1986 over the purchase of US rather than European helicopters. Heseltine and the pro-Europe wing of the Tory party looked towards the European market while Thatcher - despite her signing of the Single European Act of 1986 - looked across the Atlantic to the USA and world markets.

This reflects a long standing divide between manufacturing on the one hand, which tends to look first towards the European market, and the City of London that looks towards the USA and a world role. Such Atlanticism has long been a cause célèbre of the Tory right because it feeds into British nationalism and the loss of Empire.

For Cameron, however, the issue is

less about the strategic location of British capitalism and more about the management of the way this division is reflected in the Tory party - which has become increasingly toxic - and the need to deal with the rise of UKIP.

The referendum was a pre-election pledge to win UKIP voters over. Whether he would have made such a pledge had he realised he might get a Tory majority we will never know. What we do know is that it is a high-risk strategy that could split the Tory party whichever way the vote goes.

Nothing that Cameron has any change of getting from the EU elites will placate the Tory xenophobic right - the "bastards" as John Major famously called them. They want real change in terms of British sovereignty and the free movement of peoples within the EU - which is not going to happen. They have little interest in restricting a few benefits to EU migrants, however reactionary that might be, and regard the "negotiations" as at best a charade. [9]

They suspect (and they are right) that Cameron's real agenda is to play for time and use the referendum to endorse continued membership. Whatever "concessions" he gets from the EU he will claim as an historic victory and then call for a Yes vote with governmental resources behind it - and with government ministers bound by the line. Cameron (unlike Osborne) has always avoided saying that he would call for exit in the event of failure.

This growing reality has led in recent days to the main strands of the xenophobic right - UKIP and the Tory right-wing - breaking cover to set up the No campaign before Cameron's negotiations have even started. In the Tory Party unity has only lasted a month.

The first move on this was from Farage who called for a campaign to be set up as soon as possible. Then the Tory right set up a campaign called For Britain in order to start the campaign for a No vote. It has the initial support of over 50 Tory MPs and is led by the likes of Owen

Patterson, Bernard Jenkins, and John Redwood.

It is chaired by Tory MP Steve Baker, who warned that unless Britain regains sovereignty over its own laws and power to trade freely in the world they will campaign for a No vote. It appears to have the potential to at least double its membership once the campaign gets off the ground.

This means that the shape of the main 'official' No campaign is already clear. Its central components will be UKIP and the Tory right who will compete for the leadership role within it.

As things stand, of course, the most likely outcome of the referendum is the Yes vote that Cameron recommends. This is far from guaranteed, however. It will depend on events at the time and how Cameron plays his hand.

How democratic will the referendum be?

The first thing to say about the referendum itself (as set out in the Referendum Bill) is that it is deeply undemocratic in at least two important ways.

It excludes from the vote of over 2 million EU citizens living in the UK, EU citizens who have the right to vote in British local elections as well as European elections. This is a big issue, in London in particular, where a quarter of disenfranchised people live. This is clearly a concession to the Tory right rather than something Cameron would want himself. The right would be in open revolt if EU citizens were allowed to vote.

In the Scottish referendum all those living in Scotland were given the right to vote "as were the 16-17 year olds who are also excluded by the Referendum Bill. In Scotland, of course, including everyone in the vote suited the outcome Cameron wanted.

Labour supports these exclusions having reversed their opposition to the Referendum Bill and voted for it. The SNP are strongly opposed to them. Labour has made it clear that they will campaign to stay in the EU whatever the result of the 'renegotiations'.

The other issue to which the SNP is strongly opposed is the UK-wide nature of the referendum vote, which could drag Scotland, and indeed Wales, out of the EU against their will. Nicola Sturgeon is (rightly) demanding individual votes in the four nations of the British state and is warning that a No vote could trigger a second independence referendum in Scotland.

The role and nature of the EU

The fundamental nature of the EU is determined by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (with its single currency) and the Nice Treaty of 2001. This is to act as a supra-national authority charged with ensuring that the member states comply with the neo-liberal agenda, which is at the heart of the EU, in order to increase the rate of exploitation and compete more effectively in world markets.

The implementation of this agenda involved huge attacks on living standards and welfare across the EU, and was met by five years of remarkable mass struggle in the 1990s: 1994 saw strikes and demonstrations in Italy and Greece and mass strikes and huge demonstrations in France against cuts in education.

1995 saw a huge confrontation in France, which shook the government to its foundations. Millions of workers struck and demonstrated in a wave of action, which in some ways exceeded the events of May and June 1968. There were mass strikes in Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Greece, and in Germany "where the government was forced to retreat.

1996 saw the biggest wave of struggles in Europe for 20 years. There were mass strikes in Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Greece and Spain.

1997 saw millions of workers in action across the EU, mostly against the introduction of the single currency.

It was the outcome of these battles "in the end the single currency was established" that shaped the real nature of the EU as the austerity imposing welfare busting machine that we see in operation in

Greece and elsewhere today. These mechanisms impact most directly in the Eurozone but not only in the Eurozone since neo-liberalism is fundamental to the whole of the EU.

Maastricht and Nice also deepened the democratic deficit that had existed since the early days of the European project. Today the EU is in fact it is less democratic than its member states where government can be removed and replaced by elections from time to time "however inadequate these elections might be.

This is not the case within the EU as an institution. Every constitutional treaty since the Single European Act of 1986 "Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon" have degraded democracy further. The European Parliament was established to give an impression of democracy which does not exist.

Power in the EU lies with the Council of Ministers and the Commission "neither of which are elected bodies but both of which are dominated by the biggest and most powerful member states. All this means that internal reform is impossible.

TTIP

On top of this we have the prospect of TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), currently being negotiated in secret between the USA and the EU. There will be no vote on TTIP in any of the member states. It has been agreed in the European Parliament's trade commission and will come before the European Parliament later in June.

TTIP would mean that the countries covered by it would become one big market for big corporations, that public services like the NHS would be fully open to competition. Companies would be able to sue governments if those governments' policies cause a loss of profits.

It is similar to other free trade agreements in place or being negotiated elsewhere across the globe. If Britain were to leave the European Union then the Tories would undoubtedly be negotiating a bilateral

trade deal with the US and this could easily be just as reactionary as TTIP.

Greece

Today the real face of the EU is the Troika—a tripartite enforcer mechanism comprised of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the IMF.

The brutal role of the Troika in Greece over the past 6 years—which has been to use Greece as a test bed for extreme neoliberal measures which have imposed pauperisation on the Greek working class for the first time since World War I—is therefore entirely consistent with the role the EU under the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency.

The banking crisis of 2008 compounded the contradictions within both the EU and the Eurozone and threw them into an existential crisis. The response of the elites was austerity and then more austerity – and as a result the EU as a whole has remained in stagnation ever since.

Since Greece elected an anti-austerity government led by Syriza earlier this year, the Troika has been dedicated to destroying it as quickly as possible, and in the most humiliating way, in order to warn others what will happen if they take the same anti-austerity road.

In fact it has been the reluctance of the Syriza government in Greece to contemplate leaving the Eurozone (and probably therefore the EU) that has handed the initiative to the Troika and allowed them to dictate terms—although this is far from a completed process. At the moment the Syriza government is trapped between maintaining Greece's EU/Eurozone membership and sticking to their anti-austerity policies—a contradiction that they will have to resolve.

Although prior to the election Syriza stood on 'no sacrifice for the Euro' (a correct position) they have not subsequently been consistent on this.

The struggle against Maastricht in Britain

The Tory Government of John Major backed the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, though it was split down the middle over it.

In Britain there were two campaigns against the Maastricht Treaty from the opposite ends of the political spectrum. One comprised the bulk of the left, led by Tony Benn. The other comprised the Tory right.

The rightwing campaign was based on national sovereignty, the defence of the pound, and a strategic alliance with the USA.

The left campaign called for 'a different Europe, a Europe of the people and not of capital', and had a big public resonance. Benn argued that Maastricht was about 'the liberation of capital and the enslavement of labour. We have to have a programme, he argued, for the control of capital and the liberation of labour' and it has to be done on an internationalist basis.

The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) was a part of these campaigns but its politics were significantly different. It focused on the defence of national sovereignty and even the defence of the pound—which reflected its support for the nationalist Campaign against Euro-Federalism.

The International Socialist Group (ISG), as we were at the time, was a part of these campaigns both against Maastricht and the single currency. The Fourth International (FI) was very much a part of them at the European level and was central to the European Marches against the single currency.

The weakness of the left campaign was the unions. At the time of Wilson's referendum in 1975 the bulk of the unions had been against membership of the EEC (as it was then). The defeats of the 1980s, and the rise of Blairism, however, brought a big change. The TUC invited Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission to address its 1988

Congress and fully supported European integration under Maastricht. Many individual unions followed suit.

This was partly because they hoped that the Social Chapter would give them a few crumbs without the need to fight for them. Its provisions, however, were pitifully weak. It included the right to strike, for example, but in Britain this was subordinate to the Tory anti-union laws and therefore worthless. The British government secured exemptions from key elements of the Social Chapter, and took many years to phase in the Working Time Directive's restrictions on weekly hours of work for staff in the NHS.

The British Left and the EU

The left in Britain (in its broadest sense) is more pro-EU today than at any time since Britain joined the project. This has been due, at least in part, to the fact that politics here in Britain have shifted to the right to the extent that some aspects of EU policy are progressive in relation to it.

The Green party in England has always been pro-EU, though it opposed the Maastricht Treaty in the 1990s. Today it is more strongly pro-EU than ever.

The SNP—which is not part of the left but well to the left of Labour—supported a No vote in the 1975 referendum, but switched as long ago as the late 1980s to being strongly pro-EU—as did Plaid. Both Scotland and Wales (as nations) see themselves as beneficiaries of EU regional development assistance, which has been more accessible to them than investment from Westminster.

Part of the SNP and Plaid's motivation seems to be the need to appear more internationalist than the 'Westminster parties', though the danger of independent Scottish and Welsh states facing ever increasing centralisation within Europe sits uneasily with opposition to centralisation within the British state.

What is more surprising, however, given the current role of the Troika in Greece, is that the trend on the radical left has been the same. It is harder today, amongst the radical left, to argue that the EU is a bosses club than it has ever been. And even where this is accepted, as in Left Unity for example, there is probably a majority against exit under any circumstanceâ€”leaving the current referendum aside. .

Some ultra-left groups such as the CPGB and Workers Power have long held similar positions. They have argued that EU membership -rather than international solidarity - was the best way to unite the European working class. They argue the same against Scottish independenceâ€”that it would disunite the working class.

The Scottish Socialist Party has recently published a pamphlet on the referendum that not only calls for a vote to stay in, but argues that it is right to be in the EU per se and (specifically) that the task is to reform it from within.

It is true that austerity in Britain since 2010 has not been driven by the EU institutions but by a Tory-led government with its own hard line neo-liberal agenda. It is an agenda, however, that coincides with the EU's own framework of austerity. If Britain elected a government that broke from austerity to any degree (or failed to implement it effectively) it would be a very different matter, the EU would be down on it like a ton of bricks.

It is also true that the free movement of peoples within the EU is something socialists should support. This, however, has to be seen against the racist Schengen â€”fortress Europe' policyâ€”which is to have free movement internally but to erect increasing strong barriers around the perimeters of the EU, against immigrants and asylum seekers who attempt to get in. The reality of this is being played out as tens of thousands of people drown in the Mediterranean trying to get to European shores as they flee persecution and starvation.

Taking all this into account, regarding the EU as in some way progressive as against the member states or against

the British state, can seriously disorientate the movement.

It is often argued that whilst it is true that the EU is a bosses club, the British state is also one. This is true but it misses the point. EU membership gives you two bosses clubs, one at the domestic level and the other at the supra-national level which backs up the national government against the working class when support is needed and pushes it to attack the working class harder under conditions where it is holding back.

How should the left vote in the referendum?

We can say with confidence when it comes to the referendum campaign itself that it will reach new heights (or plumb new depths) in terms of xenophobia, nationalism and racism. It will be a carnival of reaction. Most (if not all) of the â€”reforms' being demanded by Cameron (to the extent that he has been prepared to reveal them) are reactionary demands. They involved putting barriers up to foreign workers or depriving them of benefits.

The main No campaign will be totally dominated by UKIP and the Tory right wing. This poses something of a dilemma for those on the left (like ourselves) who see the EU as a reactionary institution designed to ensure that the national governments impose the austerity agenda and increase the rate of exploitation more effectively but have no wish to be associated with the right in any form it might take.

SR has not yet taken a view on this. In my opinion, however, the right way to vote in this referendum will be Yes.

This could change over the next two yearsâ€”we don't know what is going to happen to Greece for exampleâ€”but given the xenophobic politics that will dominate the main No campaign it is difficult in my view to do otherwise as things stand today. Any No vote is going to be seen as lining up with the racist elements that

will be demanding this. It will be very difficult to avoid this.

A left-wing Yes campaign, under these conditions, should be based on a strong statement that recognises the real nature of the EU and explains why it is necessary to vote Yes under these conditions.

The conditions for a progressive and credible No campaign (i.e. on the basis of socialist and working class politics and significant forces) do not exist in Britain today.

With previous struggles around the EUâ€”the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency in the 1990s for exampleâ€”it was possible to be part of broad left wing No campaign that was based, at least to some extent, on socialist and working class principles and represented something significant. It did not imply any alliance or common “national” interest” between British workers and “British” capital: while resisting global ambitions of capital it also resisted spurious notions of a common interest in British “sovereignty”.

Those times were very different. The fact that a progressive campaign for a no vote was possible then does not mean it is possible now. Today the political conditions and left forces that created such campaigns no longer exist and the xenophobic right â€”the Tory right and UKIPâ€”are very much stronger.

There will be a left-wing No campaign, of course, but it is likely to comprise the same forces as No2EU: i.e. the SP and the CPB (and maybe a few from the Labour left) and it will have the similar politics based on national sovereignty. It will also be drowned out and marginalised. We could not be a part of such a campaign.

The 1975 referendum was completely different. Then there was a majority Labour government with left wing ministers like Benn and Heffer, a powerful grassroots in the party and a youth section led by the left. More importantly the trade unions had over 13 million members and controlled the majority of votes at Labour Party conference and we're overwhelmingly

anti - EEC.

Not everything about the No campaign in 1975 was good of course. Whilst it was significant because it embraced the bulk of the left and the unions, had also had reactionary nationalistic elements including immigration and import controls.

In terms of today, however, defining the EU as a reactionary anti-working class institution does not mean that we are obliged to vote for exit whatever the circumstances and whatever the consequences. We need to be guided by what best serves the interests of the working class in terms of creating the best conditions to build the fight back against austerity and win some much needed victories. Nor is it the end of the matter, or mean that we would not vote for exit under conditions where it would strengthen working class struggles.

A Yes vote in the coming referendum would be consistent with positions SR has taken for some time regarding EU exit: i.e. not to make this an agitational demand. This was one of the reasons why we refused to join the

No2EU campaign last May because it advanced it exit as an immediate agitational demand. The other reason - which would have excluded us anyway - was because No2EU was also based on national sovereignty and opposition to the free movement of people in the EU.

There is also the rather important matter of the consequences of a vote for exit at this time and under these conditions – and this is clear. It would strengthen both the Tory right and UKIP and could even bring about a dangerous realignment between them. It would be taken as a mandate for the introduction of a range of new restrictions on immigration and not just from the EU.

The Tory right, in the form of the ‘free market’ Institute for Economic Affairs, have already published scenarios that they would expect a Tory government to follow after British exit. These scenarios involve realignment of the UK state with the other major reactionary elements of the international bosses clubs - the World Trade Organisation, NATO, the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), the EU Customs Union and the European

Economic Area (EEA).

The Tories would repeal the Working Time Directive that limits (however inadequately) workers’ hours and remove the EU restrictions on introducing genetically modified crops, as first steps in a long series of reactionary policies. Reactionary Free Trade Agreements would be negotiated and the possibility of signing the UK’s own version of TTIP or even joining the USA in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is proposed.

Today we need an internationalist, not a nationalist opposition to the EU: one based on resisting the strengthening of British, European and multinational capital, resisting austerity and opposing racist barriers to access and migration. We need an alliance not with British capital or the right wing fringe of UKIP, but with workers and working class organisations in Europe and beyond. And we need to revive and strengthen working class and socialist organization in Britain to ensure that we have the basis to challenge austerity at home as well as its imposition on other countries.

Executive Summary of the report from the Debt Truth Committee

17 June 2015

In June 2015 Greece stands at a crossroad of choosing between furthering the failed macroeconomic adjustment programmes imposed by the creditors or making a real change to break the chains of debt. Five years since the economic adjustment programmes began, the country remains deeply cemented in an economic, social, democratic and ecological crisis. The black box of debt has remained closed, and until now no authority, Greek or international, has sought to bring to light the truth about how and why Greece was subjected to the [Troika](#) regime. The debt, in whose

name nothing has been spared, remains the rule through which neoliberal adjustment is imposed, and the deepest and longest recession experienced in Europe during peacetime.

There is an immediate need and social responsibility to address a range of legal, social and economic issues that demand proper consideration. In response, the Hellenic Parliament established the *Truth Committee on Public Debt* in April 2015, mandating the investigation into the creation and growth of public debt, the way and

reasons for which debt was contracted, and the impact that the conditionalities attached to the loans have had on the economy and the population. The Truth Committee has a mandate to raise awareness of issues pertaining to the Greek debt, both domestically and internationally, and to formulate arguments and options concerning the cancellation of the debt.

The research of the Committee presented in this preliminary report sheds light on the fact that the entire adjustment programme, to which

Greece has been subjugated, was and remains a politically orientated programme. The technical exercise surrounding macroeconomic variables and debt projections, figures directly relating to people's lives and livelihoods, has enabled discussions around the debt to remain at a technical level mainly revolving around the argument that the policies imposed on Greece will improve its capacity to pay the debt back. The facts presented in this report challenge this argument.

All the evidence we present in this report shows that Greece not only does not have the ability to pay this debt, but also should not pay this debt first and foremost because the debt emerging from the Troika's arrangements is a direct infringement on the fundamental human rights of the residents of Greece. Hence, we came to the conclusion that Greece should not pay this debt because it is illegal, illegitimate, and odious.

It has also come to the understanding of the Committee that the unsustainability of the Greek public debt was evident from the outset to the international creditors, the Greek authorities, and the corporate media. Yet, the Greek authorities, together with some other governments in the EU, conspired against the restructuring of public debt in 2010 in order to protect financial institutions. The corporate media hid the truth from the public by depicting a situation in which the bailout was argued to benefit Greece, whilst spinning a narrative intended to portray the population as deservers of their own wrongdoings.

Bailout funds provided in both programmes of 2010 and 2012 have been externally managed through complicated schemes, preventing any fiscal autonomy. The use of the bailout money is strictly dictated by the creditors, and so, it is revealing that less than 10% of these funds have been destined to the government's current expenditure.

This preliminary report presents a primary mapping out of the key problems and issues associated with the public debt, and notes key legal violations associated with the

contracting of the debt; it also traces out the legal foundations, on which unilateral suspension of the debt payments can be based. The findings are presented in nine chapters structured as follows:

Chapter 1, Debt before the Troika, analyses the growth of the Greek public debt since the 1980s. It concludes that the increase in debt was not due to excessive public spending, which in fact remained lower than the public spending of other Eurozone countries, but rather due to the payment of extremely high rates of [interest](#) to creditors, excessive and unjustified military spending, loss of tax revenues due to illicit capital outflows, [state recapitalization](#) of private banks, and the international imbalances created via the flaws in the design of the Monetary Union itself.

Adopting the euro led to a drastic increase of private debt in Greece to which major European private banks as well as the Greek banks were exposed. A growing banking crisis contributed to the Greek [sovereign debt](#) crisis. George Papandreou's government helped to present the elements of a banking crisis as a sovereign debt crisis in 2009 by emphasizing and boosting the public deficit and debt.

Chapter 2, Evolution of Greek public debt during 2010-2015, concludes that the first loan agreement of 2010, aimed primarily to rescue the Greek and other European private banks, and to allow the banks to reduce their exposure to Greek government bonds.

Chapter 3, Greek public debt by creditor in 2015, presents the contentious nature of Greece's current debt, delineating the loans' key characteristics, which are further analysed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 4, Debt System Mechanism in Greece reveals the mechanisms devised by the agreements that were implemented since May 2010. They created a substantial amount of new debt to bilateral creditors and the European Financial Stability Fund (EFSF), whilst generating abusive costs thus

deepening the crisis further. The mechanisms disclose how the majority of borrowed funds were transferred directly to financial institutions. Rather than benefitting Greece, they have accelerated the privatization process, through the use of [financial instruments](#).

Chapter 5, Conditionalities against sustainability, presents how the creditors imposed intrusive conditionalities attached to the loan agreements, which led directly to the economic unviability and unsustainability of debt. These conditionalities, on which the creditors still insist, have not only contributed to lower [GDP](#) as well as higher public borrowing, hence a higher public debt/GDP making Greece's debt more unsustainable, but also engineered dramatic changes in the society, and caused a humanitarian crisis. The Greek public debt can be considered as totally unsustainable at present.

Chapter 6, Impact of the "bailout programmes" on human rights, concludes that the measures implemented under the "bailout programmes" have directly affected living conditions of the people and violated human rights, which Greece and its partners are obliged to respect, protect and promote under domestic, regional and international law. The drastic adjustments, imposed on the Greek economy and society as a whole, have brought about a rapid deterioration of living standards, and remain incompatible with social justice, social cohesion, democracy and human rights.

Chapter 7, Legal issues surrounding the MOU and Loan Agreements, argues there has been a breach of human rights obligations on the part of Greece itself and the lenders, that is the Euro Area (Lender) Member States, the European Commission, the [European Central Bank](#), and the [International Monetary Fund](#), who imposed these measures on Greece. All these actors failed to assess the human rights violations as an outcome of the policies they obliged Greece to pursue, and also directly violated the Greek constitution by effectively stripping Greece of most of its sovereign rights.

The agreements contain abusive clauses, effectively coercing Greece to surrender significant aspects of its sovereignty. This is imprinted in the choice of the English law as governing law for those agreements, which facilitated the circumvention of the Greek Constitution and international human rights obligations. Conflicts with human rights and customary obligations, several indications of contracting parties acting in bad faith, which together with the unconscionable character of the agreements, render these agreements invalid.

Chapter 8, Assessment of the Debts as regards illegitimacy, odiousness, illegality, and unsustainability, provides an assessment of the Greek public debt according to the definitions regarding illegitimate, odious, illegal, and unsustainable debt adopted by the Committee.

Chapter 8 concludes that the Greek public debt as of June 2015 is unsustainable, since Greece is currently unable to service its debt without seriously impairing its capacity to fulfill its basic human rights obligations. Furthermore, for each creditor, the report provides evidence of indicative cases of illegal, illegitimate and odious debts.

Debt to the IMF should be considered illegal since its concession breached the IMF's own statutes, and its conditions breached the Greek Constitution, international customary law, and treaties to which Greece is a party. It is also illegitimate, since conditions included policy prescriptions that infringed human rights obligations. Finally, it is odious since the IMF knew that the imposed measures were undemocratic, ineffective, and would lead to serious violations of socio-economic rights.

Debts to the ECB should be considered illegal since the ECB over-stepped its mandate by imposing the application of macroeconomic adjustment programs (e.g. labour market deregulation) via its participation in the Troika. Debts to the ECB are also illegitimate and odious, since the principal raison d'être of

the Securities Market Programme (SMP) was to serve the interests of the financial institutions, allowing the major European and Greek private banks to dispose of their Greek bonds.

The EFSF engages in cashless loans which should be considered illegal because Article 122(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) was violated, and further they breach several socio-economic rights and civil liberties. Moreover, the EFSF Framework Agreement 2010 and the Master Financial Assistance Agreement of 2012 contain several abusive clauses revealing clear misconduct on the part of the lender. The EFSF also acts against democratic principles, rendering these particular debts illegitimate and odious.

The bilateral loans should be considered illegal since they violate the procedure provided by the Greek constitution. The loans involved clear misconduct by the lenders, and had conditions that contravened law or public policy. Both EU law and international law were breached in order to sideline human rights in the design of the macroeconomic programmes. The bilateral loans are furthermore illegitimate, since they were not used for the benefit of the population, but merely enabled the private creditors of Greece to be bailed out. Finally, the bilateral loans are odious since the lender states and the European Commission knew of potential violations, but in 2010 and 2012 avoided to assess the human rights impacts of the macroeconomic adjustment and fiscal consolidation that were the conditions for the loans.

The debt to private creditors should be considered illegal because private banks conducted themselves irresponsibly before the Troika came into being, failing to observe due diligence, while some private creditors such as [hedge funds](#) also acted in bad faith. Parts of the debts to private banks and hedge funds are illegitimate for the same reasons that they are illegal; furthermore, Greek banks were illegitimately recapitalized by tax-payers. Debts to private banks and hedge funds are odious, since major private creditors were aware that

these debts were not incurred in the best interests of the population but rather for their own benefit.

The report comes to a close with some practical considerations. **Chapter 9, Legal foundations for repudiation and suspension of the Greek sovereign debt**, presents the options concerning the cancellation of debt, and especially the conditions under which a sovereign state can exercise the right to unilateral act of repudiation or suspension of the payment of debt under international law.

Several legal arguments permit a State to unilaterally repudiate its illegal, odious, and illegitimate debt. In the Greek case, such a unilateral act may be based on the following arguments: the bad faith of the creditors that pushed Greece to violate national law and international obligations related to human rights; preeminence of human rights over agreements such as those signed by previous governments with creditors or the Troika; coercion; unfair terms flagrantly violating Greek sovereignty and violating the Constitution; and finally, the right recognized in international law for a State to take countermeasures against illegal acts by its creditors, which purposefully damage its fiscal sovereignty, oblige it to assume odious, illegal and illegitimate debt, violate economic self-determination and fundamental human rights. As far as unsustainable debt is concerned, every state is legally entitled to invoke necessity in exceptional situations in order to safeguard those essential interests threatened by a grave and imminent peril. In such a situation, the State may be dispensed from the fulfilment of those international obligations that augment the peril, as is the case with outstanding loan contracts. Finally, states have the right to declare themselves unilaterally insolvent where the servicing of their debt is unsustainable, in which case they commit no wrongful act and hence bear no liability.

People's dignity is

worth more than illegal, illegitimate, odious and unsustainable debt

Having concluded a preliminary investigation, the Committee considers that Greece has been and still is the victim of an attack premeditated and organized by the

International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission. This violent, illegal, and immoral mission aimed exclusively at shifting private debt onto the public sector.

Making this preliminary report available to the Greek authorities and the Greek people, the Committee considers to have fulfilled the first part of its mission as defined in the decision of the President of Parliament of 4 April 2015. The Committee hopes that the report will be a useful tool for those who want to exit the destructive

logic of austerity and stand up for what is endangered today: human rights, democracy, peoples' dignity, and the future of generations to come.

In response to those who impose unjust measures, the Greek people might invoke what Thucydides mentioned about the constitution of the Athenian people: *"As for the name, it is called a democracy, for the administration is run with a view to the interests of the many, not of the few"* (Pericles' Funeral Oration, in the speech from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*).

Liberation Through Vacation

17 June 2015, by **Michel Husson, Stephanie Treillet**

Upon the Right's accession to power following the 2002 parliamentary election, a succession of conservative administrations sought to chip away at the thirty-five-hour workweek through a variety of reforms that eased overtime restrictions and limited the law's application. Just from 2002 to 2008, the Right implemented seven substantial measures relating to working time.

And yet, partially restrained by the widespread view that the thirty-five-hour workweek is an "acquired social right" (as former President Jacques Chirac once put it), even committed neoliberals like Nicolas Sarkozy have been unable to fully repeal the statute.

Scrapping the law remains a central plank in the policy agenda of France's vocal business representatives. Last year, Pierre Gattaz, the head of MEDEF, the powerful national employers' association, called for greater flexibility in determining employee work hours. "Today, the thirty-five-hour uniformly applied, it is no longer relevant," Gattaz said, adding, "I'm not saying you have to work forty-eight hours per week. But if companies need some employees to work forty hours and other to work thirty-two hours, they must be allowed to organize them."

Attitudes on the French left have tended to be more ambivalent. For the social liberals who dominate the governing Socialist Party, reforming the working-time law fits neatly into their larger project of restructuring the French labor market along neoliberal lines.

Thus, the Finance Minister [Emmanuel Macron](#) "an ex-investment banker and free-market ideologue widely loathed by the radical left" echoed Gattaz's call for increased latitude, arguing that "the legal framework of thirty-five hours is insufficient, since employees, like companies, need more flexibility." It was only in the face of substantial union opposition that the government, headed by the historically unpopular President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls (darling of the Socialist Party right), agreed to back down, at least temporarily.

This attitude represents a major shift from the view prevalent in the less radical sections of the French left before the passage of the Aubry Laws. Initially, the proposal for a legal reduction in weekly work hours for full-time employees was suggested to Jospin by [Dominique Strauss-Kahn](#) "future head of the International Monetary, now disgraced due to

sexual assault allegations, and hardly a radical figure.

Support for the plan was traditionally strongest in the CFDT, the more conservative and less militant of France's two biggest union confederations, rather than the traditionally Communist-aligned CGT. Indeed, the idea of using working-time reduction as a means of generating new employment was not limited to the Left during the 1990s.

Even on the Right, which never accepted the idea of making the shortened workweek mandatory, there was widespread backing of efforts to use financial incentives to encourage a reduction for full-time employees: for instance, the 1996 Robien Law offered subsidies amounting to as much as 50% of employers' social security contributions if they reached agreements with employee representatives to cut working hours.

The Right's lack of antipathy made the radical left hesitant about supporting the hours reductions legislation. This ambivalence was exacerbated by the two Aubry Laws, which were seen as reinforcing the long-term trend toward greater flexibility in employment relations and the decentralization of wage bargaining.

For example, the far left objected to rule changes that allowed for the calculation of working-time on an annualized, rather than weekly basis; they were concerned that the measures would effectively undermine existing rules governing working conditions.

Some of these fears have been borne out: the workweek law has accorded employers more latitude, at employees' expense – especially after the series of post-Aubry I reforms.

But this shouldn't blind leftist observers to the radical promise and possibility embedded in the plan for a mandatory decrease in working time. In important respects, that policy offered a genuinely egalitarian and sustainable avenue for creating large numbers of full-time jobs, not through deregulation of the labor market or with the loss of pay, but through a redistribution of work hours – a vehicle for generating job growth that both boosted labor's power at the expense of capital and lessened intra-class disparities based on gender and occupation.

It is in this sense that the relevance of a shorter workweek extends far beyond the borders of France. In the following article, translated by Emal Ghamsharick and Selma Berg from the French journal [Contretemps](#), two left-wing economists in France make the case for the thirty-five-hour workweek as a non-neoliberal path to full employment.

Reduce working time to gain full employment

The question of working-time reduction is central to the history of capitalist exploitation of labor and worker resistance. Today, employers understand well that it is a crucial battle, as shown in an [October 2012](#) editorial by Denis Kessler in *Le Monde*.

France's largest employer federation, MEDEF, keeps pushing to reconsider the thirty-five-hour workweek set forth

in the Aubry Laws (though they do have limitations), and even wants to abandon any reference to a collective legal limit to working time. The national collective wage agreement (ANI), passed as a law by government majority, opens this opportunity through “competitiveness agreements.”

Even if working-time reduction has been a historic battle of the labor movement and a prominent claim of the Left for much of the twentieth century, today this battle has reached a standstill; we have collective difficulties reaching a mass scale, to resume the offensive on this question and to respond to employers' offensive. This battle has not been fought by part of the Left and the labor movement in the age of the Aubry Laws, which have negative outcomes for a significant number of salaried workers (increased flexibility, lack of compensatory hires).

The impression that real working-time reduction requires a balance of power out of reach today (while unemployment continues to rise and redundancy plans are multiplying, apparently condemning labor struggles to remain defensive) nurtures a feeling of helplessness. Additionally, we face an ideological assault, also within part of the Left, proclaiming that we must choose between employment and wages and that the current distribution of surplus value is not negotiable.

So it is essential to find ways to overcome this situation and resume fighting, including ideologically, for working-time reduction. Contrary to widespread ideas, true full employment is possible. But it requires confrontation with employers.

Nothing could be further from the truth than claiming that greatly increased productivity is the cause of unemployment. Yet it is a common misconception, especially among those who support the “End of Work” thesis, which claims that productivity is growing so fast that full employment is moving further beyond the horizon. According to this thesis, we should replace the right to work with the right to a [universal income](#). This is a

farewell to struggle and a dangerous illusion (particularly dangerous for women).

Things do not work like that. Just compare two periods: the “Trente Glorieuses” (1945-1975), with low unemployment (around 2%) and the neoliberal phase, which began in the mid-1980s, where the unemployment rate was high (around 10%). Now the first saw a very high growth of labor productivity (around 5%), which then slowed sharply to around 1 to 2%. In other words: when productivity gains slow down, unemployment explodes.

This paradox disappears if we remember that employment depends not just on the overall level of production and the productivity of labor, but also on working time. In the medium term – and this is true for both of these great periods – labor productivity increases at about the same pace as production, so that net job creation depends mainly on the reduction of working time.

We can illustrate this process by broadening the scope over the entire twentieth century: in this period, hourly labor productivity [increased by a factor of 13.6](#). How were these productivity gains distributed? By raising the standard of living (GDP multiplied by 9.7) and reducing working hours, which decreased by 44%. Employment, meanwhile, increased by only 26%, and the total number of hours worked fell by 30%.

In short, we are working part-time compared to our great-grandparents, and if it was not for this, unemployment would have reached insurmountable levels. This does not happen “naturally”: social struggles ensured that productivity gains were distributed in the form of lower working hours, not just as wage increases. The history of social struggles is permeated by conflicts about working time.

A second example is the experience of the thirty-five-hour workweek in France. It developed in socially unsatisfactory conditions, but it would be absurd to dismiss it as “anti-economic.” Indeed, over the past two decades, all new net jobs in the private sector were created during the

transition to the thirty-five-hour week. This rebuttal of conventional wisdom becomes apparent if we observe the private-sector employment curve (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Employment in the Private Sector in Millions (Source: Dares)

In the two decades before the thirty-five-hour week, good and bad economic years even out, and employment in 1997 is at about the same level as in 1978. Between 1997 and 2002, we see a spectacular boost: almost two million jobs are created. Then employment hits a ceiling, picks up a little, and drops with the crisis. The result: in the second quarter of 2013, there were 15.93 million jobs in the private sector, compared to 15.9 million in the second quarter of 2002 – eleven years lost for employment.

For thirty years, excepting this break, work has been distributed “liberally” and unequally, mostly as part-time work, mostly forced, mainly on women. Recall that in France, women entered the job market as full-time workers. Part-time work has never been a gateway to full employment, as in some countries in Northern Europe. Almost nonexistent before the 1980s, it expanded as a direct result of public policy (mostly by exempting employers from social security contributions).

Today, 30% of women employees work part-time, the vast majority involuntarily, and 80% of part-time jobs are occupied by women. In some sectors (retail, foodservice, cleaning), all created jobs are part-time, with extremely flexible hours and very low salaries. Part-time effectively means partial salary (even though most of these jobs already earn minimum wage) and partial pensions. The growth of part-time work reinforces the sexual division of labor, as we shall see.

The question is not so much if working hours will decrease, but how. The reduction can be general, with or without retention of monthly salary and compensatory hires; it can be targeted (precarity and part-time); or it can be extreme (unemployment).

Working-time reduction, collective and enforced by law, is an alternative to the expansion of part-time. Both fundamentally contradict each other.

There is a close link between working-time reduction and distribution of income. There are many ways to do it, each with obviously different effects on the distribution of wealth. The thirty-five-hour week has left wages unchanged, contrary to employers’ complaints, which accuse it of increasing the costs of labor. This result was achieved in two ways: by reducing social security contributions and by raising work intensity, which has reduced the policy’s potential for creating new jobs.

In other words, employers never stopped skimming productivity gains, thereby maintaining or even increasing their profit margins. These profits were not used to invest more, but to pay out more dividends. In 2012, an employee worked an average of twenty-six days per year for shareholders, instead of nine days in 1980.

What is not paid out to employees in the form of wage increases or job creation through working-time reduction is directly seized by the shareholders. This is why the rise and solidification of mass unemployment and this form of shareholder takeover (a good indicator of financialization) are two sides of the same “medal.”

This is also why any proposal to reduce unemployment without touching income distribution is an illusion. Here the crisis reveals the violence of social relations: while employees are laid off and 90% of new hires have fixed-term contracts of less than a month, dividend growth, interrupted in 2010 at the height of the crisis, is resuming with a vengeance.

In opposition to full employment in the neoliberal or social-liberal [sense](#), we are actually defending a type of full employment compatible with low inflation, accompanied by cyclical unemployment (called “equilibrium unemployment” in dominant theory); this is the famous NAIRU, or non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment.

In reality, this produces an [industrial reserve army](#), which today exists not only in the strict sense of unemployed labor, but also as cyclical unemployment: odd jobs, precarious employment, etc. This notion of “full employment” is the root of so-called workfare policies, which force the unemployed to accept any job under any conditions and at any price. We must distance ourselves from this notion of full employment to avoid misunderstandings and create the conditions for an [alliance](#) between unemployed, precarious and employed workers.

As shown, the Aubry Laws have created permanent jobs, but almost nobody, at least in the Socialist Party, defends this record. In addition, the rules adopted at the time have worsened the living conditions of broad segments of the working class.

The crucial point is that lowered social security contributions were not accompanied by any requirement for compensatory hiring. The Robien Law, although making it optional, demanded “10% working time reduction = 10% new hires”; Aubry I did not require more than 6%, and the Aubry II required nothing at all.

Critics of working-time reduction speak of simplified arithmetic, but it is easy to show that the math worked – and that employers know how to use a calculator. Going from 100 employees at 39 hours (3,900 hours) to 106 employees at 35 hours (3,710 hours) reduces total hours by 5.1%. To avoid having to hire more, it is “sufficient” to intensify the pace of labor and increase hourly productivity.

This is exactly what happened: hourly productivity rose by 5.1%. But since the monthly salary was stabilized, the total payroll still increased. In return, employers got a relative wage freeze and the famous social security exemptions.

The devil is often in the details, and we could cite other mechanisms that reduced the impact of the thirty five-hour week on labor, especially the exemption of small businesses and overtime. We know that when the Right returned to power it failed to undo the thirty-five-hour week –

which despite everything, is taken for granted by the French public – and thus attempted to circumvent the very concept of statutory working time.

The foregoing analysis allows us to better define the essential conditions for working-time reduction to reach its full potential. It is obviously necessary to stabilize the monthly wage, but also to create jobs proportional to the decrease in working hours. Such conditions would obviously increase total payroll expenses.

The reaction should not be new reductions of “charges,” which gradually asphyxiate the social security budget, but to proportionally reduce the cost of capital, i.e. dividend payouts and interest payments. This implies a twofold reallocation of profits: firstly, from capital-intensive sectors to sectors with a high labor component, and, secondly, from large companies to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Reducing forced labor time opens up various prospects for human and social emancipation. The possibility of emancipating ourselves from forced labor cannot be dissociated from the possibility of reducing exploitation in forced labor. This is the meaning of Simone Weil’s [sentence](#): “No one would accept to be a slave for two hours; to be accepted, daily slavery must last long enough to break something in a human.”

The [pressure](#) of unemployment also guarantees that employers can intensify conditions so much that they seem impossible to challenge. In contrast, real working-time reduction that fulfills all necessary conditions can only be achieved under the control of the employees on the job. It must be verified if the created jobs really exist

– a hiring plan must be established that is not simply a copy of the initial jobs, but takes into account actual needs, relative hardship, and the necessity of reducing precarious employment.

Part-time work reinforces the unequal sharing of domestic labor and parenting and the societal view of women’s wages as supplementary income. Sociological studies [show](#) that women switching to part-time reduces the (already low) participation of men in the household.

Even if it is a “choice,” as in civil service, part-time remains a forced choice (insufficient childcare facilities, public shaming of mothers who work). The goals that it purportedly serves (more space to breathe, do other activities, spend more time with family) can and should be achieved by collective working-time reduction – for everyone and without reducing wages.

But even if collective working-time reduction is a condition for challenging social roles and gendered task division (and also for greater political participation), it is obviously not a guarantee. Habits and social perceptions do not disappear automatically: under the thirty-five-hour workweek, in cases where wage-earners actually have more free time, this free time is divided by gender roles (men spend more time on leisure or educational/playful parenting, while women spend more time on domestic tasks or reproductive parenting).

So to make any impact, we must challenge sexist education, develop public services, etc. But egalitarian working-time reduction, together with the prohibition of forced part-time, is nonetheless a prerequisite.

Contrary to certain assertions (notably in the de-growth movement), talking about the distribution of productivity gains does not mean obedience to productivism, but its abandonment.

For two reasons: first, productivity gains should not be confused with increased work intensity. Historically, the first, enabled by technical innovation, is intended to liberate humans from their burdens, while the second means heavier (and potentially longer) work. The two often overlap in practice: technological innovation is often accompanied by reorganization and intensification of labor. Technical progress also serves to increase surplus value, not to liberate humans from labor – as it would, if its purpose was to reduce working time.

Second, besides this political issue, there is also a theoretical issue: the notion that human labor is the only creator of value and that labor is the capitalist’s sole source of profit (employers never overlook this in their campaigns to extend working time). Neither capital nor nature as such are creators of value, as advanced by mainstream economics and certain currents of deep ecology.

Working-time reduction is the means to creating massive employment and meeting social needs without necessarily undertaking further GDP growth. In all cases, it is a condition for controlling goods and services whose growth is necessary (childcare centers, schools, hospitals, social housing, public transport, renewable energy, etc.), and those which need to be reduced (advertising, packaging, weapons, etc.), i.e. for controlling the qualitative content of growth.

It is crucial to the fight for emancipation, in its various aspects.

From “huis” to “huis” we reclaim the university

16 June 2015, by **Yannis Tzaninis**

It started in the summer 2014 when the UvA social sciences were moved by the university administration from the city centre to a new complex outside the centre. Following the move, in September 2014 students and activists occupied the former common room of *Spinhuis*, one of the old locations of social sciences, running it as a bar and activist meeting space. This was the dress rehearsal for the higher-education movement that sprung up this year in Amsterdam and beyond. It was also the first clear indication of the role the UvA management (CvB) has adopted; immediately after the occupation began, the CvB placed 24/7 security - with attack dogs - ready to muscle in if the students strayed further into the building. As hypocritical as the CvB are, while pretending to value 'dialogue' with the students, they threatened them with legal action, eventually demanding â‚¬100.000 compensation per student, per day. Eventually the UvA management, with the blessing of the Rector, Dymph van den Boom, initiated and won a court case and evicted the students. Similar events took place at the *Bungehuis*, where the UvA Humanities had been housed until recently. The *Bungehuis* was also occupied by students and forcefully evicted.

These were early steps of what became a general protest movement. The Humanities have been particularly gutted by the neoliberal reforms at the UvA and are threatened with smaller programmes, fewer staff, and integration into other faculties. The university sold the *Bungehuis* to Soho House, an exclusive bourgeois club, an irony that would have been amusing if it were not so offensive.

The groups *De Nieuwe Universiteit* (students) and Humanities Rally (students and staff) began actively protesting against the neoliberal reforms, demanding the democratisation of the UvA and the accountability of the managers. Nonetheless, the UvA managers once again terrorised student activists with

threats of major fines. Eventually a violent crackdown by the police, endorsed by university management, resulted in 46 arrested students, but also major media attention. Immediately afterwards in February, during a demonstration, students stormed and occupied *Maagdenhuis*, the main UvA administration building. That has been where the radical movement has been shaped into a democratic, heterogeneous, vehement effort to challenge university reforms and create subversive politics; after all the *Maagdenhuis* is an important political symbol, as it was the site of a major student occupation in 1969 and several more since.

The ride of creating a democratic, just university has been exciting and bumpy. While the debates were developing at the occupied *Maagdenhuis*, several university workers, especially from anthropology, joined the movement as ReThink UvA. During the occupation, the movement flourished; the activist groups formed General Assemblies (a la Occupy) and developed their dialogue based on direct democracy, focusing on what has been going on, what it is we are opposing and how we can change it. Meanwhile, all kinds of activities were organised: a series of lectures (including one by the activist scholar David Graeber), live concerts, art events etc. The occupation was also supported with an online petition, signed by prominent intellectual figures like Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky and David Harvey. Once the voices at the *Maagdenhuis* started weaving ideas together, the challenges of building a radical, political movement became evident. Some demanded the resignation of the CvB, some of its chairwoman Louise Gunning, others opposed targeting specific persons, while others raised voices against going back to a white, old, male, bourgeoisie-dominated university. Especially after the first small victories (the CvB conceding something was wrong and starting a debate series, the *Maagdenhuis* being allowed to be occupied for the

moment) several staff members were ready to make concessions. Others however were realising that the struggle was just starting and victory would be both difficult and long-term.

Against the neoliberal university

What everyone agreed that the struggle should be against was the neoliberal, undemocratic character the UvA was rapidly assuming: 'flexible', temporary contracts, 'efficiency' in output and input, competitiveness, aiming at attracting capital and even real estate speculation (the UvA owns numerous large buildings in Amsterdam's city centre). The three activist groups began talks with the trade union (FNV), the UvA student council (CSR) and the UvA works council (COR), exchanging views and proceeding with organising. Eventually, after the combined failure of intimidation and empty rhetoric, the UvA management decided to evict the *Maagdenhuis* occupiers as well. The latter had announced that they would be leaving the premises right after a planned Science Festival, but the CvB preemptively mobilised the police on Saturday April 11 who appeared in riot gear, outnumbering the occupiers. The crackdown was once again prompt and brutal, resulting in several arrests. This was the latest act of intimidation endorsed by the UvA management and probably will not be the last. There was a strong public backlash against this obviously unnecessary eviction, students and staff demanded her resignation and the works council issued a vote of no confidence in her leadership - effectively forcing the chairwoman of the CvB, Louise Gunning, to resign a few days later. Surprisingly the following announcements by the CvB and Gunning contained nothing about the reasons why she was stepping down, but only praised her previous

work and how important it was that it should continue in the same way. Rector Dymph van den Boom was appointed interim chairwoman.

Meanwhile, the assemblies that took place at the *Maagdenhuis* culminated in a demand to form two independent committees to look into UvA's finances and ways to democratise the university decision-making structures. This demand has been accepted by the CvB, and most importantly the activist groups will hold the majority in the committees; the latter are currently forming. The movement is still going forward and, if not growing, it is definitely keeping its momentum. Students and staff are both active, with some seething anger now that the dust has settled after the *Maagdenhuis* eviction. On Labour Day some of the groups' members participated in the protests, and all the sister organisations of the movement had a picnic in front of the UvA Law Faculty (Oudemanhuispoort). The following Sunday, May 3, De Nieuwe Universiteit organised a Science Festival at Felix Meritis in Amsterdam, with attendance of more than 1000 people. At the same time, ReThink members are active within the faculties, pushing for better conditions, democratisation and accountability of (eventually elected) decision-makers. The struggle has spread throughout the country, providing fertile ground for other ReThink and 'Nieuwe' movements to emerge elsewhere, and even inspiring students in Canada and the UK to resist neoliberalism in their universities.

How a movement moves

People in the Netherlands are angry. While capitalism has been in crisis for several years now, the political response to it has been outright reactionary, and the UvA is no exception. When the ties between the Dutch state and universities were seriously weakened in the 1990s, the UvA started borrowing from banks, hired managers and began playing the financial capitalist. The words of the day became 'efficiency', 'excellence' and

'competitiveness', concepts the UvA management tries to make universally binding on the universities, but many of its activities involve speculation and very costly administration. After all, UvA's story is not a happy one as the university is indebted for hundreds of millions of Euro by now. The shift has been violent, crude and very obvious, leading to many people involved, students and staff, looking for alternatives. Ironically, certain actions by the management produced the very mechanisms that are opposing the neoliberal model of the UvA: first, after moving to the new Roeterseiland complex in the summer of 2014, all the Social Science faculties came together, their proximity facilitating radical organising. Second, the whole moving process was never discussed democratically, it was decided as an economic alternative as the old buildings were 'too expensive to maintain'; these historical buildings, characteristic of the UvA and intimate to many staff-members and students, became items of speculation for the market, but also symbols around which the movement anchored itself.

There are clear contradictions in the attempts to create the new brand of the 'University', let alone the 'competitive', 'excellent' and 'efficient' University. First, the whole idea of the university as an encompassing institution is too abstract. Although the UvA is being centralised into a pyramid of programmes, schools and faculties, and the overseeing managers at the top, in reality academic research and tertiary education resemble fragmented groups based on different disciplines and interests, which in content have little in common. The role of developing a single entity, called the 'University', is an attempt to create and manage a centralised, corporatised organisation.

Second, the majority of those affected by the reforms are the students and the precarious staff. Being overworked is for both categories the norm nowadays and Academia is nothing like the exclusive realm for the privileged anymore. The examples from other national education and academic research systems show what the neoliberal educational project's future looks like; in the USA the

student debt is beyond imagining (one trillion dollars), in the UK academic research is outsourced to freelancers. The mantras are 'be happy because you do what you love', and 'research costs money, education brings money'. Other times, the government's slogans are 'education is expensive', 'it is taxpayers money we are spending' in order to justify austerity and the implementation of market mechanisms. The right-wing politicians that support such measures appear protective of public money, pretending as if they will use it for the improvement of society, while the resources are basically channeled as quickly as possible into the market.

Of course it is not higher education alone that is under attack. The neoliberal project promotes the commodification of all kinds of public goods, such as healthcare and housing, while attacking worker rights all around. Many activists at the UvA are aware of this and from early on at the *Maagdenhuis* assemblies, a lot of voices called for uniting with other groups and organisations to extend the struggle. Even striking was put on the table, something uncommon for Dutch academics to say the least. It is encouraging that many acknowledged the importance of seeing ourselves as wage labourers and not as category which is denied such status simply by the grace of pleasant and creative work. Moreover, it was high time that we start addressing the skewed representation within the UvA, a heavily white institution in a multi-coloured city, an effort taken on by the 'University of Colour' initiative. The diversity of voices within the movement has been prevalent and has caused conflict more than once. Views have varied greatly, from radical actions and demands (i.e. to prosecute the managers for the UvA's finances) to, contrary, praising the former chairwoman for her work or considering every small step a victory (i.e. the CvB holding a series of debates with staff and students).

Looking ahead

Two things seem rather evident. This has been an unexpected unfolding of events. For instance, although

activists involved in the recent movement had organised a meeting on the effects of neoliberalism on higher education in May 2014, proving that there is substantial interest in the issue, nobody predicted such a dramatic turn of events. Such meetings and the actions before the occupation of the *Maagdenhuis* did cultivate and educate people and groups who have since been using that experience to play a central role in the movement. Which brings me to the second thing: this seems to be a

historic opportunity for resistance and radicalisation in the Netherlands. The momentum of the movement does not seem to be subsiding soon, as the number of radicals, young and old, appears to be increasing. Simultaneously there are similar phenomena in Canada, the UK, the US, Chile and Spain, inspiring, and being inspired by, what is happening here. Despite our long 'silences' and often longer conversations, academics can be eloquent, rational and strategic when organising. The

development of the movement has been extraordinarily fast, considering that from having little momentum in the autumn of 2014, there is now a movement affecting UvA politics and having channels to parliamentary parties. Intellectuals have often been supportive of conservative politics, but as the intellectual proletariat has massively increased and the universities are liberalised, the higher education realm has become like any other working space of struggle and potential radicalisation.

A hurricane without water: Detroit's foreclosure disaster

15 June 2015, by **Dianne Feeley**

"The truth is that mortgage and tax foreclosures have caused most of the city's blight over the last 15 years." Detroit - where 85% of the working class once owned homes - has been suffering a waterless hurricane. Predatory mortgage practices that disproportionately targeted African-American homeowners and inflated mortgages resulted in foreclosure on 25% of all residential buildings in the city between 2005 and 2011. Vacancy escalated and blight blossomed.

While Detroit endures the highest poverty rate of any major U.S. city, where schools have been closed and services cut to the bone, developers have been given land and generous tax breaks for their projects. These include turning 8.3 acres of land over to Dan Gilbert, head of Quicken Loans, to develop the Brush Park area just above central downtown. It is also a short walk from where Mike Ilitch, with \$485 million in state funds, is constructing a Hockeytown entertainment district.

One might also note that Detroit paid \$178 million for lawyers and consultants to take the city through bankruptcy, a price that Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes okayed.

For city residents, on the other hand, a second foreclosure hurricane has been brewing - tax foreclosures. Homeowners are slapped with high property taxes, and 18% interest if they do not pay up. Yet property valuations, mandated by the state to be recalculated yearly, remain grossly over-assessed.

Five years ago the city's official unemployment rate stood at 25%, and even today many believe unemployment is close to 50%. The reality is that more residents are forced to work in the suburbs, often at malls or fast food restaurants at or just above minimum wage, rather than finding jobs in the city.

Low Income, High Bills

Detroit's families have a median income of \$26,325. Monthly water bills run an average \$70 per home, and yearly taxes on a modest home might be pegged at 3-15 times its realistic market value.

The beginning of the financial crisis came earlier to Michigan than other states. As a consequence, between

2002-08 there were 18,855 tax foreclosures.

Wayne County forecloses on properties that are three years in arrears. Then the homes are sold in two rounds of auctions. In the first round, the house is offered for the amount owed; in the second, it is auctioned off with a beginning bid of \$500. Yet by 2008 only 5,585 had been sold; the majority of these mostly vacant properties became city owed.

Over the next six years, tax foreclosures rose. Another 92,312 properties went into foreclosure, with fewer than 11,000 sold. The city now owned 53,608 properties. In the intervening years, many were stripped and/or burned.

Last year newly elected mayor Mike Duggan announced that some neighborhoods would receive a 5% reduction on their current property taxes, others 10%. Yet this gesture doesn't comply with the plain letter of the law, let alone begin to deal with the fundamentals of Detroit's residential property taxes: years of over-assessment of homes, exorbitant interest rates, and tacked-on alleged unpaid water fees can quickly add thousands of dollars.

In early 2015 the Wayne County Treasurer's office announced that this year 62,000 Detroit properties will be slated for foreclosure, with probably 38,000 occupied. This could result in the displacement of as many as 100,000 Detroiters, or about one seventh of the city's population.

Creating Blight

The treasurer's office pushed back the February 2015 deadline for paying back taxes or entering into a payment plan and having one's property removed from foreclosure to May 12. On that date, to avert the emergency facing city residents, community organizations led by the American Civil Liberties Union held a press conference to demand a moratorium on the foreclosure of occupied homes. They reminded the county treasurer that during another emergency — the 1930s Great Depression — leaders had worked to protect homeowners from foreclosures.

Their letter also outlined how such foreclosure auctions were "counterproductive" — delinquent taxes are not recovered. In the past three years the county claimed it was owed \$691 million in unpaid taxes, penalties and interest but the auctions only raised \$107 million. For a 15% recovery rate, the county displaced residents and destabilized neighborhoods.

Yet according to the city assessor's office, a random sample of residential properties auctioned off in 2012 found that fully 40% exceeded the property's worth. Loveland Technologies, which has mapped Detroit's foreclosure property, concluded that there is an 86% overlap between tax evictions and blighted homes. Tax foreclosure, carried out by the city and county, is the greatest source of the city's blight.

In 2010 Washington provided \$498 million to the state of Michigan to help homeowners at high risk of foreclosure. Yet over five years Lansing has only provided \$188 million to help homeowners; \$26 million was spent on administrative expenses and \$23 million allotted for blight removal. Denying 57% of all applicants, sometimes deeming them

"too poor" to be eligible, the Step Forward program now plans to divert millions for "blight removal" instead of saving homes and neighborhoods from blight.

Of course there is a tax exemption in place for those who are too poor to pay, but unlike many other Michigan cities and towns, Detroit does not send out information about it or make the application available online. Individuals are required to apply in person, placing a burden on elderly and disabled people. This represents yet another hurdle in a city with an inadequate transit system and where 25-33% do not have access to a car.

"There is an 86% overlap between tax evictions and blighted homes." Just as with Detroit's water crisis, no governmental body addresses underlying structural problems that Detroiters — 83% African American and 9% Latino — face. It's unlike other U.S. cities in that poor people often own homes inherited from their families when Detroit was a thriving industrial city, or purchased before the homeowner became disabled or retired on a fixed income.

It's also important to remember that the city's bankruptcy was carried out on the backs of retired city workers. Retirees lost their cost-of-living increases, most of their health care, and took a 4.5% pay cut. (Uniformed retirees, who are ineligible for Social Security, took less of a cut.)

When the Wayne County Treasurer's office sent residents notices that they could work out a payment plan to take their homes off the foreclosure list, several thousand turned out. Last winter the state legislature passed a series of bills around foreclosure, including a more flexible plan that capped monthly payments at 3% of the back taxes with 10% due up front. Additionally the treasurer had the discretion to lower the 18% interest rate for the current year to 6%.

Raymond Wojtowicz, Wayne county treasurer, announced on May 5 that 9,000 occupied homes have been removed from foreclosure proceedings. But a payment plan doesn't address the structural problems of over-assessment nor

mean that those plans are affordable.

The County Treasurer's office has since pushed the foreclosure date back to June 8. As of May the revised Loveland Technologies website indicates there are probably 20,900 foreclosures on occupied homes with an additional 18,563 "reversions." (Reversions are properties that were auctioned during the 2012-14 period but have not paid their taxes and therefore have reverted to the county.)

Deluge of Water Shutoffs

Investigative reporter Curt Guyette examined the plans for the 24,743 households that signed up last year to avoid water shutoffs. The program required paying the current bill of approximately \$70 plus 10% of the overdue amount each month.

Guyette termed the program a "massive failure," with only 300 current with their bills. As water shutoffs restart at the end of May, a Detroit Free Press article reported that 28,000 customers face immediate cutoffs. Add to that the approximately 14,000 households that never had their service restored in last year's shut offs.

This year the Water Residential Assistance Program will have \$4.5 million available for Detroit and the tri-county area. A report from the Detroit City Council's legislative policy division noted that this is "significantly less" than needed to help Detroiters, where residential customers currently at least 60 days past due owe \$47.3 million. An additional complication is the Detroit Water and Sewer Department's request that City Council approve a huge 12.8% rate hike.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends that water rates not exceed 2.5% of a household's income. For their part, the Detroit People's Water Board, a coalition of organizations, has called for a water affordability plan instead of "helping" people after they're already behind on their bills. Several U.S. cities — including Cleveland and Portland —

use such a system, which sets differential rates based on a ratepayer's disposable income.

Mayor Duggan took charge of the water department last year when the shutoffs created such a scandal that the emergency manager threw up his hands. The mayor outlined a 10-point plan, but resists the concept of affordability, claiming that "free" water is not an option.

In insisting that water is a human right, no one claimed it was possible right now to have a free system. In fact in 2006 the Detroit City Council adopted a water affordability plan that set rates at 2-3% of household income but the city's law department ruled it illegal and it was never implemented by the water department. Will the water department, now in the process of regionalization, be able to move to such a proposal? Can the county treasurer learn from the failure of both past auctions and the water crisis?

If logic were the basis of Detroit's planning, this approach to water usage makes sense. And there is also a solution to tax evictions. After June 8

the county formally owns the property that is to be auctioned off in the fall, and could simply arrange to sell the homes back to residents for a small fee, wipe out the back debt and reassess the property. That would stabilize several neighborhoods and there would be a lot less blight to clean up.

If gentrification is the goal, however, the plans in place will continue to displace a Black working class and level neighborhoods. The truth is that mortgage and tax foreclosures have caused most of the city's blight over the last 15 years — and given that only 35% of homeowners are current with their property taxes, next year will see another round of city-initiated foreclosures.

Foreclosures have been a major factor in pushing Detroiters beyond the city limits. While the 2000 census counted just under a million city residents, there were only 714,000 a decade later. And the decline continues, although it has slowed with gentrification and is currently the population is estimated at 680,000.

Whose Future City Is This?

Clearly the gentrification process of the downtown area won't expand to reach most of the city's 140 square miles. Detroit Future City, a plan developed by various foundations, outlines the fate of neighborhoods. Some will be devoted to water catchments or tree farms, others to industry or strengthen industrial corridor that links the Midwest to Ontario, and some to working-class neighborhoods.

When we label this process racist, officials and developers reply that those of all colors who have the money are welcome, and so they are. They are designing a future Detroit in a place where the affluent will live, work, eat and play. Resistance, hampered by big money and structural barriers, continues, facing powerful forces. So far it seems that we are able to win an individual case or two, but in a world where life for the working class is precarious, barriers are firmly in place.

[Black Agenda Report](#)

HDP election success: victory of the oppressed, a nightmare for the AKP

14 June 2015, by **Uraz Aydin**

A gamble that paid off

It was a real challenge for the HDP, a unitary party but mainly linked to the Kurdish movement, to try to exceed all the political, national-ethnic and religious divisions and obtain at least 3.5% more than the 6.5% per cent that it scored in the parliamentary elections of 2011, although at the presidential elections of 2014 its candidate (and main leader) Selahattin Demirtaş had obtained

9.8%.

It was this result which impelled the HDP to participate in the parliamentary elections in the form of a party (and no longer as an individual candidate - a form under which the 10% threshold does not apply). However there was no guarantee that the HDP would score more than this exceptional achievement which owed much to the charismatic figure of Demirtaş, and the desire of secular voters to penalize the HPC (Kemalist-republican-centre-left) which had

presented an openly conservative right wing candidate. So it was a gamble on the part of the HDP, but with the will and the patient propaganda work of thousands of activists and volunteers the gamble has paid off and the HDP finally doubled its vote in relation to 2011 and obtained an unheard of 13%, which corresponds to 80 members of parliament.

Votes of solidarity

According to estimates the HDP was supported by 3- 3.5% of voter from religious Kurds who had previously voted for the AKP. It is clear that with these elections there was competition for the Kurdish vote between the HDP and the AKP, whose vote greatly declined in Kurdistan (northern/Turkey). For example, in Diyarbakir the AKP elected six members of parliament and the HDP five in 2011, while today the AKP has one against ten for the HDP. There are several reasons for this.

First, the refusal of the AKP to take concrete steps that would satisfy in part the claims of the Kurdish people, and would be necessary for the progress of the negotiations with Abdullah Ocalan (leader of the PKK). On the other hand the behaviour of the AKP during the siege of Kobanî^a. “Kobanî is on the verge of falling”, Erdogan had said, and his generosity towards Islamic State had provoked a violent reaction among the Kurds of Turkey with the riots of October 6-7, 2014. Another reason lies in the nationalist turn of the AKP and President Erdogan in particular (denying even the existence of a “Kurdish question”) who tried thus to regain the votes (hostile to the process of negotiations with the PKK) that they were losing to the extreme right MHP party. On the other hand, the hundreds of attacks on the premises and the activists of the HDP during the election campaign, but especially the bomb attack at the meeting with Demirtaş in Diyarbakir two days before the election, which caused several deaths and a hundred injured, certainly contributed to the desertion of the AKP by a significant share of religious Kurds.

The HDP also benefited from 2-2.5% of votes coming from secular, republican, democratic Turks, the main electoral base of the CHP. Horror at Erdogan’s project to establish a presidential regime where he would decide everything, like a sultan, from his gigantic palace (with 2,000 rooms!) and the fact that only the entry of the HDP into parliament could prevent the AKP from having the required number of member for a

change of constitution that would allow the achievement of this fantasy were the main objects of motivation for this “transfer of votes” on the part of (especially young) Kemalist-republicans. But we must also recognize that, during its election campaign the HDP managed to truly adopt a discourse able to embrace the claims and aspirations of all these different social and cultural strata. This was not settled in advance.

The fact that Demirtaş (and therefore the HDP), was not at the beginning of his campaign clear on the relations that his party would have with the AKP in the event they would succeed in being represented in parliament (coalition, support for the project of constitutional reform and so on) led to some reticence from the secular sector which did not exclude the possibility of voting for the HDP. On this, the HDP leadership considering that their party could not expand its electoral base without being categorical on this issue, made an explicit statement to Demirtaş, who repeated three times in succession during a meeting in the parliament: “We will prevent your presidency!” And this worked! This sentence, summarizing in fact the real issue of these elections, became the motto of the HDP, but also of all those who were opposed to Erdogan’s delusions of grandeur.

The CHP, while contributing, through the vote of solidarity of a part of its base, to the HDP being represented in parliament, maintained its 25%. The CHP is made up of two main poles, one with rather social democratic references (this party is a member of the Socialist International) and the other much more nationalistic. This second pole will surely seize the situation to attempt to overthrow the president Kemal Kilicdaroglu, considered close to the democratic wing. The MHP obtained a better result than in 2011 (13%), with 16.5%. As an irony of history, today the party from the Kurdish national movement (HDP) and the historical party of Turkish nationalism (MHP) each have 80 members of parliament. We should also stress another important fact concerning both the CHP and the MHP; none of the leaders of these two parties attacked the HDP during the

campaign, concentrating all their criticisms on the AKP and Erdogan.

The beginning of the end

The big defeat was of course that of the AKP, but even more that of Erdogan, who throughout the campaign multiplied his rallies (whereas as president of the Republic he should be impartial) to explain that these elections were a referendum on the presidential system. Thus he did not hesitate to reduce Ahmet Davutoglu, president of the AKP and current prime minister, to a kind of figurehead, who does not even attempt to emerge from Erdogan’s shadow. Erdogan also benefited from all the means that the state provided him (means of transport, omnipresence in the media, obligation to be present at meetings for civil servants, teachers and so on).

The AKP remains much the most powerful party. But by regressing from 50% to 40.8%, it has not succeeded in obtaining the 330 members of parliament required to submit the constitutional reform to referendum, and worse, with its 258 members it does not have a majority i.e. the 276 votes needed to form a government alone, for the first time since 2002. It is obvious that a significant part of its electorate has sanctioned the AKP for its authoritarian tendencies, its discourse aimed at polarizing society, its corruption and so on. Another irony of history, but especially of the electoral system: the AKP came to power in 2002 with 34%, but must now leave it with 41%.

The victory of the HDP is an indisputable victory for all the oppressed people of Turkey, for women first and foremost, for workers, the LGBTI, ethnic and religious minorities, the young and so on. A reformist party of the left, advocating a “radical democracy”, the HDP has succeeded in forming a hegemonic pole for those wishing to oppose the autocratic regime of Erdogan. However, it should be added that this political convergence at the electoral level would not be possible

without the experience of the revolt of Gezi where citizens of different political horizons have seen the need to unite against a common enemy, and also that they were able to unite, to fight together, side by side. It was during this resistance that the seeds of this *sympatheia* – from the ancient Greek, *σῆμα* (together) and *pathos* (passion) – have sprouted. We should also stress that the HDP opened its lists to the representatives of various revolutionary organizations, and the radical left has for the first time obtained more members of parliament (nearly twenty) than during the

historic elections of 1965 when the Turkish Workers' Party (TIP) elected 15 members.

It is time now to observe, to analyze what coalition possibilities will emerge from the relationship of forces in parliament or whether early elections will be taking place. Where will the negotiation process go? Will the three opposition parties to the AKP be able to agree to abolish the 10% threshold inherited from the 1980 coup? Can the HDP consolidate this new database and retain its radical democratic position in the dark corridors of

realpolitik? These are the new challenges. But the election-street dialectic continues to operate: the social movements, the popular anti-authoritarian consciousness, the Kurdish movement and the radical left who have contributed to the success of the HDP, are today more powerful, with a tremendous sense of hope. It is not by deserting the streets that we will enable the HDP, under the pressure of an institutionalization already underway, from holding firm. But in the meantime we can savour our victory: "We have prevented your presidency!"

A defeat that generated feelings of victory

12 June 2015, by **Farooq Tariq**

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) candidate got 8245 votes and won the seat. He is the former ruler of Hunza estate with billions of rupees at his disposal. Pakistan Peoples' Party which had won this seat in the 2009 election trailed behind Baba Jan with 3201 votes and the most popular newly established bourgeois party of cricketer Imran Khan Tehreek Insaaf (Justice Movement) was in fourth position with less than 2291 votes. The religious Shia party Majlis Wahadat Muslimeen (MWM) was in fifth position 1041 votes, and the candidate of the party established by former dictator General Musharaf, called All Pakistan Muslim League, was on 254.

Baba Jan has been in jail since September 2014 and is serving a life sentence announced by an anti-terrorist court. His real crime was to help the victims of climate change in the area who had protested for fair compensation for all effects of Atta Abad artificial lake created by the land slide on River Hunza in 2010. Baba Jan led a mass movement as leader of Progressive Youth Front, where the town of Ali Abad was under control of the locals for four days. They were demanding the registration of murder case against the police officer who

killed a protesting father and son.

Baba Jan was arrested in 2011, spent two years in jail before being released on bail and was arrested again after a brief period when a life sentence was awarded to him. A second life sentence was awarded to him few days later. The Appellate Court (Supreme Court GB) has acquitted Baba Jan and his 12 comrades in one case and an appeal is being launched against the second life sentence.

Baba Jan was allowed to take part in the election of 35 seat Gilgit Baltistan legislative assembly, 24 seats were to be contested directly and the rest filled through different quotas.

Baba Jan hails from a working class family. He had no billions of rupees at his disposal to spend on the election campaign. However, he had led the mass movements and was known throughout the most scenic Hunza valley bordering China, India and Afghanistan.

No party before

When Baba Jan and his comrades decided to take part in the elections, there was no formal structure of Awami Workers Party. AWP had

decided not to build AWP in the valley because constitutionally Gilgit Baltistan is not part of Pakistan. And AWP respected the independent views of the comrades residing in the valley who were fighting for greater autonomy and rights.

However, if comrades in the valley decided to build a party on the name of Awami Workers Party GB, we would have no objection. It was already decided by Baba Jan and other comrades in the valley to name the new party as AWP GB but the process was still underway to establish the formal structures.

At the founding congress of AWP in September 2014, two slots on the federal committee were allotted to the comrades of Gilgit Baltistan. Two were elected including Baba Jan who was in jail and other was residing in Islamabad for his professional duties. Who would run the campaign?

A great comradely discussion started within AWP about what to do. The view that without the party, the election of Baba Jan was not much of benefit had quite a weight. The other view was "let's build the party during the election campaign". To start with, we must establish an organising committee of AWP in Hunza.

This was agreed after a lot of informal meetings and discussions among the top leadership of AWP in consultation with Baba Jan and the other FC member from the area.

The organising committee was elected at the first AWP membership meeting in Hunza at the beginning of May, a month before the election. A broader election campaign organising committee was established with the main activists of nationalists, progressives and AWP comrades led by veteran left activist Engineer Aman Ullah.

Baba Jan is a towering left activist with no hint of sectarianism. He had built great respect among all the progressive with his full time revolutionary work over a decade. As a student leader, he was the top leader of PPP youth. He left them to join Labour Party Pakistan in 2001 and became part of the top leadership of the party. His main contribution was to build Progressive Youth Front, a youth organisation started by supporters of LPP. LPP merged to form AWP in 2012 and Baba Jan became the first vice president of AWP.

Now after the elections, we have an AWP organising committee with new membership, and 1000 membership forms have been distributed among the youth. We hope to expand the network to other areas of the valley as well.

Personalities do matter

Baba Jan participated in all the mass movements in the valley along with the nationalist forces but still kept his socialist ideas intact and never joined a nationalist group. He took up the issue of the artificial lake and toured around Pakistan addressing press conferences, organising youth meeting to warn about the great dangers of climate change. The Atta Abad Lake became a national issue because of great personal initiatives.

He was also one of the main leaders of Awami Action Committee which organised a mass movement against

the withdrawal of state subsidy on wheat. He was part of the sit-in for weeks and addressed thousands every day. He is a great orator. The movement forced the PPP government in 2013 to withdraw the suggestion of removing subsidies.

Baba Jan was always for the organisation of a left party, and is not an individual who is keen to promote himself above the party building process.

Baba Jan's name is very sweet, Baba literally means an old wise person and Jan means life. During the election campaign the most popular slogan with a great rhythm was "Teri Jan Meri Jan Baba Jan Baba Jan". It means your life and my life is Baba Jan.

Campaign

We had no amount in our party account that could be used for elections. The decision was not calculated as the sudden announcement by PMLN government to go for election had surprised everyone. The PMLN government had just signed a 140 Billion dollar agreement with the Chinese to build an economic corridor from Gwader port to China which would pass through Gilgit Baltistan. An impression was created that the valley would be the main beneficiary. They wanted to be on the receiving end of this political mileage.

An immediate donation appeal was sent to all friends and comrades inside and outside. However, AWP had been raising funds again and again on several initiatives during the year. So there was not much hope.

The posters, flexes and party flags were printed and sent from Lahore. It takes nearly 48 hours to send things to Gilgit from Lahore. Several students from Gilgit who had been working along with Baba Jan had already announced they would go back home to take part in the election campaign. This was a great beginning. Young students from elite private universities opted to carry all this printed matter with them all the way to Gilgit. As the first batch of students with printed matter arrived, it was snatched within hours by supporters who wanted to

take this to their own areas.

The constituency is spread over hundreds of miles around the mountains and valleys; it was one of the largest constituencies with 36,000 voters. "Send us another 1000 AWP flags and 10,000 posters" was the call we received on the day.

Flag making also takes time. Within three days another round of printed matter was sent. The first great rally was taken out on May 24 which surprised everyone. People of the area brought their own vehicles, motorcycles and tractors for this rally. The second rally that I participated in on March 31 was an historic one. Never in the history of this constituency had so many people with hundreds of cars, motorcycles and tractors participated in a very charged rally. We had the largest public meeting in the home town of PMLN candidate and challenged his royal authority.

Here is what one young socialist and member AWP Islamabad Ammar Rashid accurately wrote about the election campaign after his return from the area.

"Just returned from Hunza after the conclusion of Baba Jan's election campaign, where I was witness to some truly remarkable sights.

In the middle of the majestic Karakorams, thousands of young working class men and women have staged a revolt against the political and economic status-quo under the leadership of AWP's socialist candidate for the GB Assembly, Comrade Baba Jan.

Baba Jan remains a political prisoner but his decision to run for election from behind bars has unlocked the floodgates of pent-up disaffection among the young and working poor of Hunza. The already-acknowledged popularity he enjoyed has now spilled over into visible, effective mass support the likes of which has been seldom witnessed in this most remote of regions. The red and white colors of the AWP now dot the landscape of Hunza from Nasirabad to Chipursan.

This was no run-of-the-mill election campaign. Something that started off

without any funds organisational experience transformed into a mass uprising in a matter of days. People donated their homes and shops as campaign offices across the valley. Others gave whatever little they had for arranging transport and logistics for rallies, often on the spot as organisers appealed for assistance. Several others contributed with original poetry and music that became the mainstay of the public gatherings.

For the first time in Hunza's history, women were at the forefront of a political campaign, opening their own election offices, organising their own rallies and leading the fray with their own improvised, heavily-charged slogans and speeches. Compared to the patronage-based political logic of all other parties in Hunza, this was a movement truly started, owned and sustained by the people.

This was not empty-minded, hero-worshipping populism either. Among all the activists involved, serious questions were being debated, from the nature of class exploitation, to Gilgit-Baltistan's place in the federation, to debates on national identity, to the reality of state hegemony, repression and exclusion, to the legitimacy of the heavily classist electoral process, to the significance of gender equality, to the need for inter-faith, inter-sect and inter-ethnic solidarity. There was a palpable sense of an opportunity to critically engage with contradictions of society and state that are all too often brushed under the carpet.

As Gilgit-Baltistan votes today, the imprisoned Baba Jan will be up against the combined might of the traditional Hunza royalty, established bureaucratic mandarins, and the political and financial might of the heavily-moneyed mainstream parties. For his working class supporters, even arranging transport for remote voters on election day will be nigh impossible, much less competing with the millions in election handouts being distributed by the likes of Marvi Memon of the PMLN and others.

Whatever the election result though, Baba Jan has, through his defiance, commitment and ideological perseverance, laid the foundations for genuine political transformation in Gilgit-Baltistan and created space for the flowering of a renewed Leftist political consciousness. It is merely a start and one with a potentially deeply hazardous future, especially in the face of severe human and financial resource constraints. But it is this peerless example from Pakistan's ignored periphery that progressives must look to if we are to resurrect the Left in Pakistan."

After the defeat

After the defeat of Baba Jan, there is no unpleasant feeling of defeat. The defeat has generated more energy among the comrades. It has provided comrades an unforgettable experience of mass mobilisation without real resources. Everyone I talked to spoke of a great campaign and that we have

not lost anything, more than that there is feeling of victory underneath the defeat. All supporters of the campaign congratulated each other.

The mood was set by Baba Jan himself from behind bars.

"There is a victory in the defeat. No one has challenged the former royalty as powerfully as we did. I had no block vote of a tribe, cast, and area or on religious basis. I came second at almost all polling stations. I got votes from everywhere unlike my billionaire opponents who had block votes in some areas. It was working class and working people everywhere who rose from the shackles of slavery of the corrupt capitalist system and voted for me fearlessly. It was the youth who had no votes but were seen everywhere chanting slogans of revolution. May be good that I did not win, because of the massive expectations that have been generated from my campaign, and maybe I would have not been able to meet those. Now we have more time to prepare. I have won the hearts and soul of my class and that is a victory and not a defeat".

He told me a day after the election campaign. "Please convey my thanks to our friends abroad and inside Pakistan that supported my campaign anyway they could". He repeated it several times.

A political and organisational follow up is being discussed. But the most important task is to strengthen the campaign for the release of all three climate change victims who are still behind bars, including Baba Jan.

The changes in the political landscape in France

11 June 2015, by **François Sabado**

Although the strong state has been maintained, all the social conquests have been challenged in recent years.

The long period of liberal counter-

reforms from the mid-1980s in France, their acceleration with the open crisis in 2008, the austerity policies and corporate social demolition implemented by the Socialist

government of Holland, have deconstructed and dismantled what constituted this French exception. It is not a collapse, but a deconstruction, a gradual dismantling.

Socio-economic upheavals

The austerity policies conducted in recent years have not been just the umpteenth austerity policies; they have a completely different magnitude. They have two objectives: The first is to liquidate what remains of the "French social model" which is considered by the ruling classes as a major obstacle in global capitalist competition. The second is to reorganize society, moving from the "generalized market economy to the market society", privatizing, deregulating and rendering economic and social existence precarious. Hence the centrality of "reforms of the labour market", with a deregulation of social relations and a deconstruction of the Labour Code that weaken the positions of workers and reinforces those of the employers. These policies are also accompanied by massive unemployment - in reality, nearly 20 per cent of the working population - by a decline in purchasing power with the blocking of wages and pensions and by substantial tax increases. There has been an explosive growth of precarious work.

The policies of reduction of social spending, of central government funds allocated to local authorities, of the budgets for the health system and public education, exacerbate the living conditions of the working classes. The policies of aid and hand-outs to employers have resulted in a transfer of wealth of tens of billions of euros, from ordinary households to capitalist profits. Admittedly, the consequences of the crisis are not as severe as in Greece, Portugal or Spain. France is the sixth world power: it still has significant positions in the world market; faced with the crisis, it has been able to make a series of social shock absorbers function, but the effects of austerity policies are devastating. The economic recovery experienced in Europe and in France is not being felt on the level of employment and purchasing power. There is an impoverishment of the working classes, and indeed processes of social decay in certain working-class suburbs and neighborhoods. To austerity policies have been added

authoritarian tendencies; in the name of counter-terrorism policies, basic democratic rights are being undermined. We had not seen in France such a situation, where the Left mounts attacks on civil liberties, since the Algerian War.

But to the economic and social crisis there has been added a political crisis, precisely because it is the Left (the Socialist Party, PS) which is conducting these policies, which has attacked the workers, which has lost a part of its social base and which therefore can only rely, to govern the country, on a very much diminished social and political base.

The bourgeois transformation of the Socialist Party

In 2012, the Socialists occupied all the positions of power in elected institutions: the Presidency of the Republic, a majority in the National Assembly, the Senate, in the main cities, in the departments and in almost all regions. Today they have lost them or are going to do so. In the last departmental elections, where the rate of abstention was almost 50 per cent, the PS was only the third-biggest party, with 21 per cent of the vote, behind the National Front with 25 per cent and the conservative Right with 29 per cent. They went from 280,000 members in 2006 to 130,000 in December 2014. Only 70,000 "active members" voted for the upcoming congress of the party. But the French PS is not experiencing "Pasokisation". They still have more than 20 per cent of the vote. There is no collapse. France is not Greece. That relates to differences in the level of the crisis in the two countries. But there is a considerable weakening of the PS and above all a change in the fundamental nature of that party. There is what could be called an acceleration in the bourgeois transformation of social democracy. A process that started a long time ago, but which is speeding up. This transformation has led to an unprecedented integration of the apparatuses of social democracy into the leading circles of the state and the globalized economy. The socialist

parties have become "less and less working-class and more and more bourgeois." The brutality of the neoliberal policies endorsed by social democracy is undermining its social and political bases.

Some theoreticians of the PS in France - the leaders of the "think tank" Terra Nova - drew the conclusion that it was necessary to change the social target audience of social democracy. Blue- and white-collar and technicians had to be replaced by managers, the liberal professions and the upper layers of wage-earners. In short, it was necessary to "have a change of people." The composition of the leading bodies has also been modified: teachers, trade union bureaucrats, lawyers, (the "café-owners", Trotsky added in his time), have given way to "énarques" [10], technocrats and financiers. To a point where socialist parties are experiencing a kind of devitalization, a break with whole sections of their history. Adherents are replaced by professional politicians: elected representatives and their assistants. The policies of the European Union (EU) have aggravated this qualitative change. In different forms, the socialist parties are being transformed into bourgeois parties. Does that mean that they have become bourgeois parties like the others? Not quite, the practice of parties alternating in government demands that the socialist parties mark out their differences with other bourgeois parties. They remain linked, by their historical origin, to the workers' movement, but it is only a question of traces that are fading away in the memories of activists. This nevertheless creates contradictions and oppositions in these parties. They can maintain a certain relationship with the "people of the left", although it is increasingly distended. This qualitative change, if it was carried through to its conclusion, would transform these parties into "American-style democratic parties."

This neoliberal bourgeois transformation - it is more correct to call it neoliberal than social-liberal, because there is not much that is social in the evolution of social democracy - is now crystallized, but it is not sufficient for the most right-

wing current of social democracy. In France, for example, Manuel Valls (Prime Minister under President François Hollande) has stated several times that "it was necessary to liquidate all social democratic references." Emmanuel Macron, a banker and Holland's finance minister, went further, calling also to abandon "all the old-fashioned ideas of the Left." What they want is to transform the changes that are underway into a finished process, even if it means breaking the Socialist Party. This is an approach that, if there is another debacle at the next presidential election in 2017, could win a majority in the PS. The right-wing currents of the PS are now on the offensive, but it has to be recognized that faced with the advocates of a forced march towards neoliberal transformation, the various oppositions are not reconnecting with classical reformism and still less with the ideas of the historic left currents of social democracy. Neoliberal policies are rectified only at the margin. The leaders of the internal opposition in the PS voted for the "European Fiscal Compact" (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance, signed in March 2012.) They voted in the National Assembly for the ANI (Agreement on competitiveness and security of employment) - a deregulation of social relations - and the increase in the retirement age. The years of neo-liberal counter-reforms and the setbacks experienced by the workers' movement in Europe have left their mark. The horizon of those within the socialist parties who are opposed to the most glaring "betrayals" is bounded by the fundamental tenets of neoliberal policies.

The Right and the far Right on the offensive

As a result, this policy leads to electoral defeat. At this stage, the Right and the far Right are on the offensive. It is always risky to embark on predictions. But what is most likely, for the next presidential election in 2017, is a second round between the candidate of the Right and Marine Le

Pen. The Socialist candidate will be eliminated in the first round. The PS can only rely on "judicial affairs" that can liquidate Sarkozy or on divisions of the Right, such that it would not be able to take part in the second round of the presidential election. These divisions are a real problem for the French Right. In almost all European countries the Right has the wind in its sails, but in France there is the National Front (FN), which is exerting all its influence - 25 per cent of the electorate - on the traditional Right, and which is producing cracks. There are thus two main currents within the Right. A current embodied by Sarkozy that goes hunting on the political terrain of the FN, "in order to contain it and win back voters". There is also in a series of regions a real porosity between the electorates of the Right and the far Right. This part of the Right takes up the racist and authoritarian themes of the FN. And then there is a current of the Right and centre that keeps its distance from the ideas of the FN. Both currents place themselves in the framework of the EU, unlike the National Front. Up until now, the Right has contained the rise of the far Right, but how long will that last?

The National Front already occupies a central place in political life. With 25 per cent, it has sunk roots. It now has a popular electorate. One question remains open - what are the consequences of the present crisis in its leadership and in the Le Pen family, because today the global political crisis is affecting the National Front. This crisis expresses the interests of clans and cliques, and also financial conflicts, but it is also the expression of an internal political struggle. The National Front is not a fascist party as existed in the 1930s, because we are not in the 1930s. The origin of its leadership is fascist, its national-socialist themes repeat the classic themes of the far Right, the national preference (priority for French people), the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim racism, are central to its policies. It is not a fascist party, but it is not a bourgeois party like the others. With 25 per cent, it is faced with the problem of power. And there is obviously a violent debate: there is the old Jean-Marie Le Pen, for whom coming to power is linked to the

collapse of the system and its replacement by the nationalist movement. And there is another strategy, which has a majority in the FN, presently grouped around Marine Le Pen, that aims to conquer positions in the system in order to split the traditional Right and make it explode, so as to subordinate a large part of it to itself. But it is not, as in Italy, a project of the type of Gianfranco Fini. The latter, coming from the Italian Social Movement and then becoming the founder of the National Alliance in 1995, joined in 2009 Berlusconi's party, the People of Freedom, before separating from it in 2010. He was a minister in Berlusconi's second and third governments.

The majority of the FN does not want to make alliances where it would be in a subordinate position. Its leaders want to break the Right and replace it. As a result, they are in an impasse, because by not making alliances they cannot go beyond a certain threshold, unless the crisis worsens and the traditional Right explodes. For now the Right is containing this pressure, but for how long?

Of most concern, beyond the electoral phenomena, is a far-reaching change in French society. A whole system of social, cultural and ideological representations is exploding. There is frenzied individualism, the rejection of solidarity, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, the war of the poor against the poor, with a hysterical denunciation of "handouts". A few years ago, the PCF used a formula to express the rise of reactionary phenomena, "society is shifting to the right." We could argue about the formula, but there is a movement of this type that is the consequence of the bankruptcy of the Left. Thus, although the protests (on 15 January 2015) against the attack that hit "Charlie" (7 January) sparked a democratic and humanist reaction of several million people in the streets of the country, it did not result in a decline of racism. Encouraged by the attitude of governments and of the European Union, the reactions towards the migrants in the Mediterranean, as recorded in opinion polls, are quite dreadful. They clearly show the degree of "inhumanity" that has been reached among sectors of

the population.

Suggestions for an anti-capitalist alternative

"You do not want classes or their struggle? You will have the plebs and the anomic multitudes. You no longer want the peoples? You will have bands and tribes. You do not want the party? You will have the despotism of public opinion!" (Daniel Bensaïd, *Eloge de la politique profane*.)

And in this context, what is the situation of the workers' movement: a deterioration of the relationship of forces. The curves of the class struggle are turning downwards. In France today we are at one of the lowest points since the 1960s. The membership of trade unions and left parties - all of them - is declining. The CGT (General Confederation of Labour), the biggest union organization in the country, has experienced an enormous leadership crisis around questions of corruption. Nevertheless, social resistance exists: there are struggles on wages, on jobs, there are demonstrations of teachers and health-workers, and ecological mobilizations. However, up until now they have not been able to block the neoliberal counter-reforms and the attacks of the employers. Yet when all political and institutional ways out are blocked, there can be social explosions; but as the quote from Daniel Bensaïd indicates, the problem is the meaning of these explosions. The class struggle continues. It is now mainly being conducted by the employers. It gives rise to elementary resistance; it can lead to brutal social eruptions. The problem is in its political expression, in terms of consciousness and organization. And here there is a real problem in the present situation in France.

There is a difference with Greece and Spain. There is no Podemos or Syriza in France, taking into account, of course, the political and historical differences between the two formations. Since 1995, there have been three political-electoral

experiences, and I insist on the electoral form of these experiences. In 1995 with Arlette Laguiller and Lutte Ouvrière; in 2002 and 2007 with the LCR - then the NPA - and Olivier Besancenot; and in 2010-2012, with the Left Front and Jean Luc Mélenchon, who received in 2012 more than 4.5 million votes. Three experiments that have shown the potential for political reorganization to the left of the Left, but also its limits and its failure and. That also explains the space left free for the National Front.

The radical Left is fragmented, in retreat, divided over its relationship to the PS. The French Communist Party (PCF) relaunched itself with the Left Front, but it continues to decline. It has fewer than 40,000 members. Especially, it does not manage to break with the PS. Admittedly, it refuses to follow the neoliberalism of François Hollande and Manuel Valls, but it is willing to relaunch a "union of the left" with the Greens or the internal opponents in the PS, who voted the main counter-reforms of the government. Mélenchon occupies a position more to the left, more clearly defined, than the Socialist Party. But some of his positions are marked by anti-German nationalism or sympathies for Putin in the Ukrainian conflict, which makes the conditions for discussing a political alternative more complicated. How can we rebuild a social and political anticapitalist alternative? That is the difficulty that we have, trying to avoid sectarian pitfalls or adaptations to the dominant left reformist forces. Let us try to respond to them:

• By building social struggles or mobilizations, trying to get partial victories on social questions, particularly on wage issues, where there has been a series of struggles over the last period. The terrain of the democratic struggle against all forms of racism as well as the fight against the FN - especially against the effects of discriminatory policies in the cities it controls - must be taken up by activists. By engaging in all the new configurations of social movements: urban spaces and not just factories, squares, occupations. In the 1990s, Daniel Bensaïd warned against "the social illusion" and the

underestimation of political questions. Today, while taking advantage of all possibilities on the political and institutional level, we must rather be wary of "political and electoral illusions," and remember that any process of radical transformation must rely on self-emancipation of the workers, on their self-organization, on direct action.

• By a unitary policy in struggles as well as in political action, to bring together all the forces that break with the PS. This is a serious question. In a situation of confusion, of rejection of the PS, we must at the same time put forward an anti-austerity emergency programme with an anticapitalist dynamic and maintain a clear demarcation from the PS, even if it's difficult.

• We have no experience of the kind of Syriza or Podemos - although we must stress that these two phenomena are not identical - but there is a strong idea there, which is the necessity of rebuilding a social and political movement, something new, which is outside the old traditional organizations of the workers' movement, a new political representation. This will involve a series of unitary actions and debates, for which we are not always prepared, or which are refused by the sectarians.

Some conclusions...

The combination of the long period of the neoliberal counter-reforms that began in the late 1970s - and which deepened with the crisis of 2008 - the destruction caused by Stalinism, the effects of the "balance sheet of the century" for the workers' movement, including all of its components, the very partial reorganization of a new movement, its differentiations, its fragmentation: all of this adds up to the end of the historic workers' movement. This is related to the end of a type of capitalism that shaped the workers' movement over a period of decades, which is in a certain fashion the end of an era ... Not the end of the class struggle, which continues, but which will give rise to new

expressions, to new organizations, with the admixture of segments of the old and the new.

We must therefore participate in this process of rebuilding, in a situation of

the deterioration of the relationship of forces, but especially in a period of history that is unstable, in a situation of "what is already no longer there" - post-war capitalism, the workers'

movement of the last century - and "what is not yet there" - social struggles and policies of a breadth and magnitude that generate politics, but especially new experiences of building social and political movements.

Electoral amnesia in Argentina

10 June 2015, by **Claudio Katz**

Nestor Kirchner's 2003 election restored the party to power, and the subsequent appointment and reelection of his widow, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (popularly referred to as CFK) after his death in 2007 cemented Kirchnerismo's dominance over the party for more than a dozen years. But a series of scandals—including the mysterious death of Alberto Nisman, a special prosecutor who the right alleges planned to implicate CFK's administration in a cover of a terrorist bombing of a Jewish cultural center—and a slowing economy have cast a pall over the Kirchner's contribution to Latin America's "Pink Tide"—so named for the string of left and center-left governments that have ruled most of South America for more than a decade.

This year's election will present Argentine voters will a dizzying array of choices, especially at the local level, but also in the fight for the presidency. Daniel Scioli, whose career has included stints as a professional powerboat racer and Nestor Kirchner's vice president, hopes to carry on his political patron's administration under the Justicialista-led Front for Victory (FpV) electoral alliance. But a series of splits have divided the ruling party into a multitude of factions. One of the most successful is headed by one-time Kirchnerista Sergio Massa, who served as Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers in 2008 and 2009 for Fernandez de Kirchner. Massa is running on the dissident Justicialista Renewal Front.

On the right, the current mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri, heads a coalition of strange bedfellows composed of Macri's own conservative PRO party (Propuesta Republicana) and the longstanding social democratic Radical Civic Union (Unión Cívica Radical, or UCR). The pact is justified on opposition to the Kirchnerismo's supposed authoritarian tendencies, but smacks of rank electoral opportunism.

Meanwhile, the collapse of any credible mainstream challenge to the left of Kirchnerismo has opened the door for the Left and Workers Front (Frente de la Izquierda y los Trabajadores, or FIT). This coalition came together in 2011 in response to a new electoral law raising the threshold for small parties to win seats in Argentina's generously proportional system. Initially composed of the Socialist Workers Party (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas, PTS), the Workers Party (Partido Obrero, PO) and the smaller Socialist Left (Izquierda Socialista, IS), the Front won 2.5 percent of the presidential vote in 2011 and won three seats in the National Congress. The Front and its constituent groups command a significant following among students, workers and the poor. But it has incorporated only a minority of the existing revolutionary left organizations and is now engaged in a discussion about whether to open the coalition to broader left-wing forces—and if so, how.

In an article originally published at Rebellion.org and here abridged slightly in translation, Claudio Katz,

widely published Argentine author and member of the Economists of the Left collective, dissects the economic and political landscape, putting the upcoming elections in the context of rising social tensions and the beginnings of a potentially historic political reorganization of the country's revolutionary left. — Todd Chretien

Daniel ScioliDaniel Scioli

ARGENTINA FINDS itself in the midst of an unusual electoral sequence. On very few occasions have there been so many opportunities to vote in so little time, and the electoral calendar isn't letting up. Between national, local and primary elections, people will go to the polls five or six times this year.

This succession of elections has involved lots of voting, but not much debate. The main candidates promote similar agendas and even look a lot alike. You have to use a magnifying glass to find the real differences between Mauricio Macri, Sergio Massa and Daniel Scioli. It has never been so clear that the three candidates in play are really all the same.

The presidential administrations of first Nestor Kirchner and then his widow Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (popularly know as CFK) of the last decade are coming to a close at long last. They are ridden with merely artificial polarization and stacked with clearly right-wing proposals. The only thing that is in question is who will get to lead the conservative turn that is coming down the road.

The Trio's Similarities

The tremendous similarities between Scioli, Massa and Marci are confirmed by the stampede of political operatives racing from one camp to another. These sorts of jumps are common to Justicialismo, but the practice has now been extended across the political spectrum. Right up to the filing dates for candidates, it's been hunting season for party insiders and financiers.

Once in motion, the candidates competed over who could say the least in a flood of ads set to pop music. All of this has prompted laughter and thousands of jokes. This vacuous parade has stoked cynicism from many commentators who offer up the candidates' patent lies as the common sense of these electoral battles. Everyone assumes that former presidents Carlos Menem's or Fernando de la R  a's broken promises would be repeated, and that no candidate would carry out their pledges once elected. The principles of bourgeois government are on full display.

Another indication of the charade was the rush to conjure up candidates. Publicists sought out well-known figures to attract votes. The precedent that was inaugurated when the Justicialistas recruited singer and actor Palito Ortega and Formula One racing star Carlos Reutemann to run for office and has now been adopted by all competing parties. And in the province of Buenos Aires, the ballot lines are headed by models, boxers and experts in frivolity.

Given all of this, Argentina's most popular TV host Marcello Tinelli set the tone for the campaign, making imitations, dancing around stage and sharing crude jokes prerequisites for any candidate wanting to appear presidential. A quick glance affirms that this clowning around tells you all you need to know about of our hopeful future heads of state. In fact, they have already been filtered through the establishment's selection process at the provincial or municipal level, and the only question left for the public is if they retain a certain degree of sympathy or charisma to win

elections.

Cynics justify this circus by blaming society at large. They argue that the people "don't want to see reality," but they are forgetting how the powers that be (and not the people in general) manipulate the electoral choices available.

Their empty phrases are just another indication of the fraud underway. Scioli emphasizes "continuity," Macri stresses "change," and Massa promotes something in between which is equally indecipherable. Meanwhile, the men of the PRO drone on about the need for "dialogue in place of confrontation." They deploy all manner of bells and whistles, offering up happy thoughts to stamp out pessimism.

It's the same marketing that the Latin American right has used to reinvent itself based by inventing new social discourses, promises of assistance, and youthful candidate profiles. They emphasize the centrality of management and proclaim the dissolution of all ideologies.

This degradation of politics fits right in with PRO's plans, which looks to absorb not only the traditional right wing that organized the cacerolazos—the pot-banging protests against the Kirchners—but also the minions of the privatizing NGOs. These sectors are more comfortable with apolitical messages than with the old reactionary anti-communist line.

Massa's operators have opted for a suitably accommodating slogan "Change within continuity," which allows him to "preserve the positive" and "change the negative." He hopes to use these concepts to obscure his ultra-conservative stance, which he nonetheless put on full display during his visit to the United States.

Scioli doesn't need any advice on how to maneuver without saying anything of substance. He managed to climb to the highest posts in the Menem and Kirchner administrations without ever once speaking a single sentence that meant anything.

The government's publicists try to fill in this gaping hole with Scioli's main

campaign message: defend what has been gained against a return to the 1990s. But this supposed contrast to the past must omit Scioli's whole political trajectory and his striking similarity to the other candidates, all of whom have traveled the same path designed by the establishment.

No one knows who will win the trophy in October. Most current opinion polls have been conducted by campaign operatives and offer unreliable data, leading to a constant reevaluation of who is out in front. Recently, the populist Massa's numbers have been in a free fall, and this is adding to pressure on him to drop out of the race. But reaching an agreement with right-wing Macri will be difficult because the posts up for grabs extend beyond the heads of each ticket.

The establishment finds itself in its traditional dilemma. Its most reliable man (Macri) isn't the person who will guarantee them their tightest control over the state (Scioli). Thus, the powers that be are handing out campaign contributions to both candidates, incentivizing Macri to converge with sections of the Justicialistas (Reutemann and Massa), while Scioli is encouraged to build bridges to the right-wing elite.

The real problem for these power brokers is not who is going to win, but how the eventual winner will deal with the social-economic crisis waiting in the wings.

Preparing for Economic Adjustment

The current government has managed to cover up the conservative economic turn it made this spring. By maintaining the link to the dollar (it would have risen by 15 percent) in the face of inflation (not less than 25 percent), consumption was restructured over the course of the year, and all adjustments have been passed along to the incoming administration.

This trick is par for the course and has been used before elections in the past. As this strategy required coming to rapid agreements with joint labor-management boards, government officials negotiated strict ceilings on

wage increases with the union bureaucracy.

On the one hand, the union leaderships acceded to the wages lost during the year, but on the other hand, they stabilized purchasing power for the months leading up to the elections. The same end was accomplished by adjustments announced for taxes on profits, which provide benefits for the unemployed.

The cosmetics applied today only go to shield the blows that all three candidates are preparing tomorrow. All aim to reduce the fiscal deficit, reduce wages and apply steep tariffs on energy and transportation.

Their programs include devaluations to eliminate the currency black market. Macri wants to eliminate this immediately, Massa talks about doing it in 100 days, while Scioli suggests a longer period. This convergence of goals also extends to substituting investment for consumption as the government's priority. But this turn requires enticing the capitalists who supply the money and implies offering them bigger subsidies in a period of large budget cuts.

The trio plans to finance their new model with international borrowing. Fortunately for them, the current government has already headed down this path, signing agreements with the Paris Club, renationalizing part of Argentina's oil fields (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales, or YPF) and settling disputes through the World Bank (specifically, the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes).

CFK has pursued this course by securing credit from China and issuing bonds on the international market. These new bond issues will not go to finance productive projects. They pay three times the interest offered by the rest of South America and are solely aimed at guaranteeing currency reserves and consumption during the election season.

The financing secured so far will also allow the winner in October to build a bridge to settle with the so-called vultures—U.S. speculators who have refused to settle outstanding

Argentine debt, insisting on being repaid \$5.4 billion for junk bonds.

An agreement with Thomas Griesa, the U.S. judge appointed to oversee restructuring of Argentinian debt, will be the precondition for a significant influx of dollars, which the incoming president will use to implement structural adjustment. This pending agreement, if it can be reached, will signal a truce with the markets. So far, the vultures have failed to block Argentina from obtaining credit, while the government has failed to win the change of venue to Buenos Aires to settle repayment of the bonds in dispute.

Macri, Massa and Scioli are all eager to settle this conflict, putting into practice some of the initiatives promoted by CFK (changing the law on guarantees, writing off part of the balance, issuing new bonds).

While preparing this turn, the candidates promise a flood of dollars that will make any adjustment painless, and they are competing to show who can sure up the most market confidence to accelerate the bonanza. But none of them explain what will be offered to the potential providers of all this foreign exchange.

Money never flows in because of sympathy with a new president. The lords of finance always first verify that the new head of state has the ability to bestow favors on their business. The great Argentine capitalists are eager to add to their fortunes under the next administration. They are hiding some \$70 billion inside the country and another \$300 billion abroad.

The failure of fiscal money laundering—tried again and again by the government—illustrates the shortcomings of amnesties in encouraging evaders to repatriate their money.

The rich require stronger official measures to guarantee capitalist profitability. Macri, Massa and Scioli are all disposed to offer them this protection, arguing that "we need their dollars," as if the lack of liquidity were somehow natural instead of arising from paying off illegitimate debts to the vultures and others, and

tolerating currency flight.

All of this notwithstanding, the same government which allowed this offshoring will finish up its time in office by launching a parliamentary investigation into the illegal loss of these funds. During the elections, it will attempt to air some aspects of the fraud it has accepted for a decade, but don't hold your breath. A similar commission—which investigated financial maneuvers conducted during 2001-03—eventually shelved its conclusions.

At any rate, the bankers all have confidence in the services they will get from Macri, Massa and Sciola, which is why the price for both public bonds and private stocks are rising in all Argentine markets. They are especially hopeful for big business in the petroleum sector because of a new hydrocarbon bill which the government called on Chevron to design.

The partial nationalization of YPF will not allow the state to recover sub-soil profits; on the contrary, it reinforces the profitability of its associated companies by adjusting the prices, which the state enterprise sets. These additional profits have long been demanded by the companies that extract conventional crude oil, as well as those aspiring to exploit shale deposits. And this same trend holds for all projects in the pipeline, especially in the fields of communication, mining and soybeans.

There is a lot of talk about the speed of the coming adjustment. Some expect that Macri will aim for shock therapy, while others believe Scioli will proceed more gradually. But both will be forced to act under the conditions in which they find themselves upon taking office: one either defined by offers of international relief or one much less favorable. Experts are inclined towards the latter. Forecasts predict falling prices and shrinking export purchases, in a context of a rising dollar and interest rates.

Another critical factor will be the level of popular resistance. Each of the presidential candidates can be seen testing the waters when they appeal to

"dialogue and negotiation." Some analysts foresee a pact with the trade union leadership, while others predict a coalition government.

However, unlike what occurred under presidents Raúl Alfonsín and Menem, no one expects a sharp economic collapse. The fiscal imbalance is limited, the banks are stable, and the international picture is even manageable.

Still, there is a strong pressure on the establishment to accelerate the adjustment. Not only is the massive Techint Group demanding wage reductions and the elimination of export taxes, but the Talibans of the bourgeoisie (economists such as Miguel Angel Broda, José Luis Espert, Carlos Melconian and Nicolás Dujovne) are talking about eliminating labor-management boards, reinstating the Domingo Cavallo team (the Minister of Economy under de la Rúa, who pegged the peso to the dollar), and cutting the fiscal deficit in half.

The electoral amnesia predominant today serves to make everyone forget these powerful players. But the same opinions can be heard from the economists advising the trio of presidential candidates (Miguel Beín, Roberto Lavagna and Rojelio Frigerio). They are careful to use moderate language and a strong dose of diplomacy, but they are all talking about the structural adjustment, which is in the making.

----- Repression as Temptation

Workers' ability to resist constitutes a major obstacle to the blows that Macri, Scioli and Mass are all preparing. The last general strike was an example of this potential force. It attained a level of cohesion greater than the three previous strikes. Unions pushed for a complete shutdown in the face of a government which didn't even try to persuade them not to.

The strike not only served as a warning to whoever becomes the next president, it also demonstrated the weakness of all the official arguments against the protests. The workers were not thrown off by the media's

heavy artillery against "political strikes" that were only "hurting the poor," "helping the bureaucrats" and using "inappropriate methods."

Far from being a battle of the "labor aristocracy" to the detriment of the poorest workers, the strike's demand to raise the threshold on income taxes as part of wage negotiations will stimulate action by all of the oppressed. Because inflation is so high, workers who never before made nearly enough money to cross the threshold are now being forced to pay income taxes, even though their pay is simply being adjusted for inflation.

These strikes may help revive the old traditions of workers with higher salaries taking the lead, and they make the point that relief for the poorest should be financed from business taxes, and not based on taxing incomes of the better-paid employees.

The strikes against the tax, moreover, have clarified the real social situation in the country. If only 10 percent of employed workers are impacted by this tax, the immense majority of workers earn salaries less than what is required for subsistence. The 15,000 pesos threshold for this tax is barely more than the 12,000 pesos needed to meet a family's basic needs. That half of the population survives on incomes lower than 5,500 pesos is hardly compatible with the image of a winning decade.

Macri, Scioli and Mass have all necessarily decided to continue hiding this somber reality behind statistical smokescreens. After proclaiming that Argentina had arrived in the First World—eradicating indigence and reducing poverty to 4.7 percent—the National Institute of Statistics and the Census went silent about all other indices. In fact, poverty has remained at the same rates since the 1990s (around 25 percent), with two important differences: unemployment is not as high, and there is a high level of social spending on assistance to the poor.

At the same time, structural misery has consolidated social degradation and led to an increase in crime. No one even pretends to know the exact

figures, but the rough crime numbers tell the story of an obvious multiplication in violent robberies, owing to the terrible marginalization that accompanies the drug trade.

The only response to this social drama on offer from the presidential trio is for the strong hand of the police. This means that security makes up a preeminent place in their campaigns, while they only differ over the nuances of the same punitive populism. All propose stiffer criminal sentences and promise to increase the prison population.

Macri, Scioli and Massa have all spent many years in office and know how crime works, as they have all arranged agreements granting police chiefs immunity in their own districts. These conspiracies are really responsible for reproducing crime, despite the chaos that drug trafficking has introduced.

An enormous ring of corruption surrounds the three candidates, including their close relations with the soccer hooligans who control local territory and engage in shady dealings. Macri is involved with the gangs in Boca, Massa with the same sorts around Tigre, and Sciolo deals with the mafia of the Tristán Suárez sports club.

The repressive inclinations of the establishment trio are obvious. All aim to criminalize social protest and legislate some variant of anti-picketing laws, which CFK tried to do without success. They all regularly proclaim that "protests may have been valid in the 1990s," but that is no longer the case in the current universe of well-being.

This turn towards authoritarianism has also been paved by the government. After presiding over cases of genocide, retrieving grandchildren and codifying significant democratic gains after the fall of the military dictatorship, CFK kept the accused torturer César Milani at the head of the army and delegated the management of security to the ultra right-wing Sergio Berni.

----- Hopes on the Left

The entrance of the Left and Workers Front (Frente de la Izquierda y de los Trabajadores, or FIT) onto the scene as a national force constitutes the most promising element in an otherwise grim electoral scene. Its advance can be explained by the significant presence of left-wing organizers in recent social struggles, successfully directing part of this resistance into the political arena.

Many analysts are surprised by the influence that the three Trotskyist forces who initiated the FIT have gained, pointing out that there is no equivalent situation anywhere in the world. Yet these foreign observers often misunderstand critical factors. For instance, it is important to keep in mind the specific history of Peronismo and the traditional left's (both socialist and communist) failure to understand this movement.

In the current circumstances, the FIT is resisting a polarization that has already ground down significant actors on the political spectrum. The results from the last elections confirm the Front's gravitational pull, even though it did not surpass those of 2013. But if upcoming elections produce merely similar results, then the great hopes for a large break to the left, away from Kirchnerismo, will remain unrealized.

Most evidence points to a right turn in the upcoming elections, based on a conservative reaction to the perceived onset of an economic slowdown and a rise in unemployment. There is fear that what has been gained over the last decade will be lost, and this sentiment leads to paralysis and reinforces loyalty to the status quo.

These reactions are stoked by the incumbent party's reviving memories of 2001, while their right-wing opponents offer an alternative imaginary tale. The latter attribute all

the nation's ills to Kirchner's so-called progressive policies, divorced from what has happened in the rest of the world. Brazil's right wing is placing its hopes in a similar narrative.

Faced with these restricted electoral horizons, the left has captured a section of progressive, anti-Kirchner voters. Yet CFK has demonstrated a capacity to react to crises (the fight with the vultures, the mysterious death of special prosecutor Alberto Nisman, etc.). and Kirchnerismo has won the allegiance of an important part of the new militancy in the streets. These tendencies must be kept in mind in order to avoid the exaggerated expectation of the imminent "collapse of bourgeois nationalism."

Clearly, Peronismo has lost the loyalty and mythical status it enjoyed in the past, but this loss is more commonly felt in the hallways of the ministries than it is expressed in militant protests in the streets. And however one measures it, this weakness should not be equated with the extinction of Peronismo as the nation's main political structure of the past seventy years.

The sharp crises that periodically confront Peronismo at the close of each political cycle reopen the possibilities for building a large left-wing force. Various forces have sought to direct these energies in the past, and it is falling to the FIT to attempt this task today.

To do so, the sectarian legacy of orthodox Trotskyism in Argentina must be overcome. The first step past this obstacle was the conclusion of an agreement between the different parties within the FIT. The second step is being confirmed in practice as the old dogmatic rhetoric has vanished from the FIT's speeches, posters and messages directed to the

general public.

However, the most controversial problem involves opening up the FIT beyond the closed agreement of the three initiating parties to other organizations and currents originating in different political traditions on the left.

This process has not really begun, and it remains to be seen if FIT will be capable of making this transition. Yet we must not write off this potential beforehand and must emphasize the positive role it has played in rebuilding the Argentine left, even as we point out some of the FIT's negative features—such as its hostility to the Bolivarian revolutionary process in Venezuela or to the Cuban Revolution.

The FIT occupies the vacuum left by political currents that decided to dissolve themselves into Justicialista or into the anti-Kirchnerismo center-left. If the path to returning to this space together is uncertain, then the alternative path of voting for Scioli or for Margerita Stolbizer (the centrist social democrat, currently with little traction in the polls) means political suicide. The Front doesn't provide easy answers for building revolutionary socialism in Latin America, but it does constitute the best chances for doing so up until now.

In the immediate future, a vote for the left is a mandate for resistance to abuses coming down the pike, and this is the chief argument for voting for the FIT. The more deputies and legislators the left wins, the stronger our armor will be when it comes to fighting the new government's plans for structural adjustment.

June 3, 2015

Translated by Todd Chretien for socialistworker.org.

An illegitimate regime, a success that

prepares triumphs

9 June 2015, by **Guillermo Almeyra**

The percentages obtained by the parties participating in the electoral farce must be calculated in the light of these figures because they are exaggerated due to the very low number of voters, so that the 30% vote for the PRI represents in reality 30% of the 40% who voted, or 13% of the total electorate, while the PRD's 11% is 11% of 40%, or a little more than 4.5%.

From the polls it is evident that this is a repudiated, minority, illegitimate system that, despite the fraud, the purchase of votes, the media campaigns of cultural intoxication, the state terrorism and militarization, could prevent neither the boycott in significant areas of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas, or the censure of blank and invalid votes whose number now exceeds most of the small parties participating in the electoral manoeuvre.

We must add to these results that the votes achieved by MORENA are votes against the PRI and its supporters, and in part votes against the system by those who did not have in their region another way to organize and

express themselves, or believed in a form of struggle by contesting positions in the institutions in this round of voting (which was marked by the disappearances in Ayotzinapa and the militarization of the country).

The real situation is that the Mexican state clearly appears as a semi-state, which does not have "the monopoly of legitimate violence" or weapons, does not control large parts of the territory, and is governed by an oligarchic clique that lacks consensus. The levels of awareness, of moral opposition and organization of the combative trade unions and grassroots groups opposed to the electoral farce are without precedent and, with the election results, will increase and will be the basis for and even more massive mobilizations with great popular support.

All parties participating in the fraudulent elections lost votes and the PRI cannot rule alone, having to resort to their "green" puppets in the PVEM or Alianza, in addition to making agreements with the PAN and the PRD, which continues to survive

against all odds, but is now mortally wounded because MORENA has grown at its expense.

The leadership of MORENA, before the achievement of seats in the Parliament and institutional positions in replacement of the PRD, claims victory and justifies its electioneering line by pretending to ignore the fact that the percentage of voters is much lower than the percentage of those who have the right to vote and that, therefore, MORENA is much more in a minority position than the PRD.

It is difficult, therefore, for MORENA to change its line adopted years ago of orientation towards a utopian and electoralist view of conquering the presidency in 2018 because the verticality of its caudillista structure "locks" the political conservatism of that party. But it is to be hoped that many honest activists analyze not only the results of this election - which highlight the isolation not only of the government but also of all of those who play the game - and seek to guide their party toward the social struggles and not only toward the presidential elections as in 1988 and 2006.

Israel's "selective compassion"

9 June 2015

How come?

For starters, Nepal is a common destination for Israeli tourists, including ones who have just completed their military service; apparently, the country's natural landscape and cheap prices make it an ideal spot to unwind after prolonged engagement in Palestinian oppression.

According to the [Times of Israel](#), the country far outshone others in terms of rescuing stranded citizens. In a matter of four days, nearly all of the approximately two thousand Israelis affected by the quake had been rescued, with just one Israeli unaccounted for. (France, it was noted, had still failed to account for about half of its citizens in Nepal.)

The Times describes the rescue operation:

Four planes were sent to airlift Israelis out, along with helicopters and jeeps rented for the effort, while a combination of IDF, insurance company-sponsored rescue teams and various volunteer groups helped reach nearly all the Israelis stranded in remote parts of the mountainous

country.

Run-of-the-mill Israeli tourists were not the only ones on the receiving end of relief efforts. Quickly stealing the spotlight were babies born to surrogate mothers in Nepal on behalf of same-sex Israeli couples.

Because gay couples are prohibited from relying on surrogates within Israel, many have sought to fulfill child-production aspirations abroad — and in Nepal, the process is up to five times cheaper than in other locations.

India was previously a preferred surrogacy hub for Israelis, but when [new regulations](#) in 2013 significantly restricted that particular outsourced industry, much of the business migrated to Nepal, along with a number of Indian surrogate mothers.

In recent weeks, twenty-six babies destined for Israeli couples were born in Nepalese territory. In the aftermath of the earthquake, they were all evacuated to Israel — sans the proper paperwork and sans the women that gave birth to them. [TIME reported](#) that the director of the international department of the Red Star of David, Israel's national emergency medical response organization, "said that in addition to operating [a] field hospital [in Kathmandu] and assisting local doctors, the evacuation of the newborn children had been his organization's top priority."

But consider the implications of the surrogate baby rescue effort. According to a surrogacy expert at the

University of Haifa [interviewed](#) by the Jerusalem Post, the imported babies may face religious obstacles from local rabbinate on account of the fact that "the fetuses were produced by the men's sperm and ova purchased in the US, South Africa and other countries from non-Jewish women." Of course, this hasn't prevented the Israeli government from temporarily waiving the bureaucratic requirements for the babies to enter the country.

What this means is that embryos that have gestated in Nepal — often the offspring of a non-Jewish mother and carried by a non-Jewish surrogate — can effectively claim a birthright to the self-appointed Jewish state, while Palestinians literally born in the land cannot.

As for still-gestating embryos in Nepal, [TIME](#) notes that one hundred additional Nepalese and Indian women in the earthquake-ravaged nation are currently carrying babies for Israelis.

The Israeli [interior minister](#), with support from various government institutions, has [proposed](#) allowing the surrogate moms to travel to Israel to complete their pregnancies, although no arrangements have thus far been made. Nor has it been explained what will happen to said women once they deliver their finished products to respective clients. (Israel generally isn't in the market for a surplus of non-Jews with darker skin.)

Meanwhile, all of Israel's self-conducted [fanfare](#) over its various contributions to disaster relief in Nepal (including selectively air-lifting made-for-Israeli babies, which doesn't really help the majority of disaster

victims) serves to distract from the fact that it is actively inflicting disaster at home.

A recent [Haaretz op-ed](#) on Israel's "selective compassion" illustrates how the country's intermittently impressive humanitarian performance abroad — not only in Nepal but also in Haiti, Japan, and elsewhere — isn't attended by any similar humanitarian concern for the Gaza Strip, where the regular carnage and infrastructural damage is hardly a result of natural disasters.

The institutionalized Israeli disregard for certain human life forms is underscored by its treatment of pregnant Palestinians, who frequently find themselves under bombardment or going into labor at Israeli checkpoints — both situations highly conducive to fatalities. Emergency airlifts are never proposed in response.

In the case of the Nepal earthquake, some Israelis have managed to cast themselves as the fundamental victims. A [Huffington Post](#) article quotes one half of a gay couple expecting twins from an Indian surrogate in Kathmandu on the difficulties of procuring children: "We've had ups and downs, and a fucking earthquake. When we finally get to meet our babies, we're just going to sit down and cry."

Never mind all of the folks who perished, or the often exploitative and dangerous nature of the gestational-surrogacy industry itself.

If only justice were an industry.

Kurds, Labor, and the Left in Turkey: an Interview with Erdem Yörük

8 June 2015, by [Erdem Yörük](#)

With Turkey's parliamentary elections on Sunday fast approaching, all eyes

are on the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) contesting its first ever election

as a party, rather than a coalition of nominally independent candidates: a

momentous decision on the part of the party leadership, which stands to gain clout in parliament and solidify its position as the electoral standard-bearer of the radical Left—or fall below the constitutionally mandated 10% barrier and be excluded from parliament entirely. At issue is whether the party has succeeded at building a leftist coalition including, but not limited to, its base of support in the Kurdish national movement. At stake is whether or not the party will play a key role in a successful effort to block Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) from gaining the number of seats necessary to rewrite the constitution and transform Turkey into an executive republic with Erdoğan as its quasi-omnipotent head.

The importance of the relatively new left-wing party in this election has not gone unnoticed by those whose tactic is violence. In the last few days assaults on HDP activists and others working for the party have mounted, with four people killed in a party rally in Diyarbakır yesterday, most likely by far-right forces, in an apparent attempt to assassinate party co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş, who was standing about thirty meters from where the bomb exploded.

Over the last few decades violence both physical and structural has played a major part in the creation of a sociopolitical terrain in which, in proletarian sections of many major cities, the AKP and the HDP are now the two parties fighting over votes. Recently we sat down with Erdem Yörük, sociologist at Koç University in Istanbul and expert on the recent history of the working class in Turkey, to discuss these historical developments and assess the HDP's chances of making history in this critical election.

LE: Your work provides some perspectives on the changing face of the labor movement in Turkey in relation to the plight of Kurdish workers displaced by the state's war with the PKK in the 1980's and 90's. Could you briefly sketch for us the direction that your work takes in this regard?

E.Y.: It was in the aftermath of the

shift in economic planning that happened around 1980, that the whole face of the working class in Turkey changed. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, the developmentalist economy featuring tariff protections, state-owned enterprises and an emphasis on agricultural self-sufficiency gave way to an export-economy fueled by low-wage labor by a new class: the informal proletariat. The plans for this shift were laid early in 1980 and solidified under the military regime and in its immediate aftermath. These reforms weakened the position of small farmers in the overall economy, necessitating internal immigration to the cities in search of wage-labor—and other forces augmented this trend.

As far as the labor movement is concerned, of course the general suppression of the Left during the 1980 coup played a role here, but a still more significant factor in the decline of organized labor and the rise of the informal proletariat was the war between the state and the PKK. Internally displaced Kurds who left villages that had been destroyed by the army or an economy generally ruined by war were desperate, and willing to do even the worst jobs, without social security or job security, often on a temporary basis, in what came to be known as the informal sector. These people swelled into the big cities, which were on every level—in terms of housing, infrastructure, health—barely able to accommodate them, and everything in their daily lives became a matter of makeshift solutions and negotiation. Without these wage-laborers at the bottom of the economic pyramid, the industries that have grown in Turkey over the last few decades would not have gotten off the ground; the country's economic growth that has gotten such press internationally is due to their labor.

The huge changes to the class landscape brought about by neoliberalism were bound to have political consequences as well. The 1980's were a time of political tranquility in Turkey, but in the 1990's ideological competition in Turkish politics really intensified, with political Islam on the ascendant. Because political Islam was able to organize

social aid on a local and communitarian basis, it filled the vacuum left by a retreating Left that had not adjusted to the new realities of the informal economy, and managed to address the destitute workers of the cities and earn their loyalty. The Kurdish national movement did similar things. Meanwhile the labor unions, which were unable to absorb the huge influx of internal immigrants and in any case restricted in various ways by anti-union legislation, went into decline.

Your dissertation concerns welfare policy as an instrument of social control. How does this work under the AKP?

The distribution of charity by the representatives of political Islam—not only the AKP but also its predecessors including the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) going back to the 1980's and 1990's, has had two goals: not only to maintain control through dependence, but to cultivate political support. The party cultivates support from impoverished workers by distributing aid on the understanding that membership in the right cultural and religious community positively affects the chances of getting aid. The goal is to foster a sense of community and common belonging among these people that translates into support for the party. Since coming to power, the AKP government has specifically targeted Kurdish citizens as recipients of its strategic generosity, while still ruthlessly combating other forces, such as the Kurdish national movement, which might become rivals for these people's loyalty.

Since 2002 the government has very skillfully built up a system of patrimonial charity to substitute for the kind of working-class solidarity one finds in the labor movement; it has increased non-pension welfare spending while attacking the unions. What can or should the Left do in response to this strategy?

Many leftists in Turkey have traditionally opposed welfare provision, arguing instead for more structural solutions. Of course they are right to insist that structural solutions are necessary, but in the

meantime people are hungry and want to know who is going to help them. I think this has been a serious problem for the Left in Turkey. When someone is hungry, telling him you have a structural solution to that is just not going to be convincing. You have to give him something in the short term while continuing to work on your structural solutions for the long term. Right now many in the informal proletariat are dependent on aid from the government, which is being given out as a favor that can be revoked at any time. What the Left should do is to develop the notion that such aid is not a favor but a right. This is what has to be done.

President Erdoğan recently declared that “there is no longer a Kurdish problem in Turkey,” as if the Kurds or their condition had been a problem but that his government had solved it. This kind of negationist rhetoric was the standard discourse on the Kurdish movement for Turkish governments before the AKP; both the center-left Bülent Ecevit and the Islamist Necmettin Erbakan embraced it. What do you think the return to this rhetoric signals as far as policy in the near future is concerned?

Such statements are purely tactical. Erdoğan is approaching an election and he knows that the nationalist votes outnumber the votes in favor of a peaceful solution to the conflict. Later he may move back. He has made such tactical moves before, and he will probably make them again.

Many international leftists now see the Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) as the great hope for a revival of the Left in Turkey. Do you think these hopes are well placed?

I do, and I’ll tell you, I am a member of the party and active within in, and I believe very much in its promise; in short I believe that the HDP can break the impasse Turkish politics is currently in and help democratize the country. I am not Kurdish myself, I am an ethnic Turk, and I joined the party because of the principles it espouses. It is not only a Kurdish party but rather aspires to be a broad coalition

for the Left in Turkey. They have reached out to various minority communities, to the LGBT’s...

Yet at the same time some of its parliamentarians, for instance Altan Tan, have said that they did not like this outreach and, if I remember correctly, refused to be photographed with the LGBT activists at the event that the party leadership had organized for them.

Yes, Altan Tan took that stance, and he represents a reality among conservative Kurdish constituency. We have to remember that the political and social composition of the HDP coalition is quite heterogeneous. Yet the party is working not only to advance the rights of the Kurdish people, but also to expand the hegemony of the left in whole Turkey and among the Kurds alike, and by doing that they are taking a risk. They are allying themselves to the LGBT’s, the Alevis and other excluded groups, even at the risk of alienating more conservative, religious elements within the Kurdish constituency. Let’s remember that both conservatism and religion are more prevalent among the Kurds than among the citizens of Turkey taken as a whole. And some of those conservative Muslims are very active and important figures in the party, and so you have Altan Tan. And Altan Tan is a Muslim; Altan Tan is pious. And he is a very important figure in Kurdistan. Yet at the same time the party has been joining forces with the LGBT’s, feminists and other groups. What the party does deserve our respect: trying to raise the hegemony of the left while forming alliances with all progressive forces, Muslim or non-Muslim.

Recently there was a poll bandied about in the Turkish press that purported to show a large portion of the Kurdish residents of Istanbul, a majority of whom voted for the ruling party in 2011, now supporting HDP. Do you think such reports are accurate and if so, do they signal a nationwide trend?

Yes, I think such reports are accurate. I think a similar shift is taking place elsewhere in the country as well. Kobane is the turning point. Polls

show that before Kobane, %50 of Kurds in Turkey voted for the AKP, and %40 for the HDP. Now it is %60 for the HDP and %30 for the AKP. Kurds felt extremely disappointed and threatened during the battle for Kobane.

Many in the ulusalç? or left-nationalist camp suspect that the HDP may be willing to suspend its opposition to Erdoğan nationally in return for a successful conclusion to the negotiations between the state and the PKK. Turkey would then be left with an all-powerful Erdoğan presidency along with regional autonomy for the Kurdish regions. What do you think of such fears?

First of all, a couple of months ago, the ulusalç? solcular, the nationalist leftists said that the HDP had decided to join the election as a party because they had made a deal with the ruling party: that they would stay outside the parliament intentionally in order to support the AKP. This was the conspiracy theory, and it was a most stupid one, a racist one as it blames the Kurds for being stupid....and now that the HDP is organized so deeply in the elections, this kind of conspiracy theory has just disappeared, but another one has taken its place. This second conspiracy theory holds that the HDP would support the presidency of Erdoğan. And Selahattin Demirtaş said, seni Ba?kan yapt?rmayaca??z! “We will not make your president!” So this conspiracy theory too has disappeared. So now the third one: that the HDP will make a coalition with the AKP. Demirtaş said “We will not make a coalition with the AKP.”

So the party will respond to this conspiracy theory and next week another conspiracy theory will emerge, because there is a big sense of distrust, a structural distrust of the Kurds. The nationalist Left sees the Kurds as terrorists and they see the HDP as the party of the Kurds. There’s this logic: Kurds have their own particular interests, and these interests can be traded with the AKP at the expense of the interests of the Left and of the other components of the country. But this kind of logic misses the fact that the HDP itself is a huge coalition of different groups.

Kurds are the largest part, but in terms of the administrators, the activists, and the supporters of the party, half of the party consists of socialists, LGBT people, women, Alevis, etc., and these groups know that if Erdoğan gets what he wants, I mean if the authoritarian tendencies of the AKP increase, they will become the first targets of this tendency. This other part will never let the party ally itself to the AKP. This is the structural guarantee of the impossibility of this kind of an alliance. So this too is complicated but to make a long story short, this kind of an alliance is only a conspiracy theory.

Also, there is one more concrete thing to falsify these conspiracy theories. During the last couple of months, the AKP has based its elections campaign almost exclusively on developing hatred towards the HDP. This has manifested itself in several physical attacks on the party. Yesterday, in HDP Diyarbakır meeting, bombing killed 4 people. Before Adana and Mersin headquarters of the HDP were bomb-attacked. So far during the campaign, 175 of our election bureaus have been attacked. One of our campaign staff was first tortured and then killed, one of them was burned and he is still in intensive care in the hospital. Many of ballot observers have recently been taken into custody. These are systematic attacks on the HDP and many people find the government responsible.

Do you think that the traditional center-left opposition, for instance the Republican People's Party

(CHP), has any role to play in the construction of a more just and democratic Turkey, or have they missed that chance?

They have lost that chance for the last eighty years, actually...but it seems that they have taken some lessons in the last couple of years. With pressure from the HDP they have moved to the left. They have made some proposals that appeal to the working class and some members of the CHP have said they would consider making an alliance with the HDP as well. These are positive things that are good for democracy in Turkey. I don't think that the CHP is a real candidate for government in this election, as the polls show them with only 26%-27% of the vote, but in the future things may change.

...in which case the CHP's new openness to work with groups like the HDP would be of benefit both to them and to the country.

I think so.

One more question. What relation, if any, do you think ruling party's conservative cultural agenda bears to the class struggle in Turkey?

I think that during the last ten years AKP has hijacked the class struggle in Turkey. They have mobilized all the class-related grievances of the working class with an anti-elite discourse, a populist discourse, and populist policies also—the social policy etc.; the AKP has presented itself as the representative of the working class, the millet, and it claims

that the CHP represents the elite, the upper class and westernized people, and the West. There is some kind of reality behind this, because when you look at the statistics, there's a positive correlation between income level and CHP voting and a negative correlation between income level and AKP voting. The AKP is a bourgeois party that pretends to represent the working class. It's like Louis Bonaparte...

...which as we know in the Marxist tradition tends to be seen as the anticipation of fascism, right?

Yes. So what do they say about history? The first time a tragedy, the second time a farce, and the third time...I don't know!

So the classes have formed their identity between these two parties: the lower middle class supports the AKP and the upper middle class the CHP; the HDP is trying to break down this polarization and become the party of the working class of different ethnic and religious groups and democratic factions of the middle class. Because insofar as political discourse continues the way it has been going, it is really difficult to conduct a real class struggle in the country. Religiosity increases among the working class, and conservatism increases among the working class, and the AKP has tried to eliminate any other kind of discourse among the working class. So this is why I think the first agenda of the Left in the country is to struggle against the government.

Source: [LeftEast](#).

Catalonia: earthquake in common

7 June 2015, by Josep María Antentas

The results of the convergence and the new candidacies show the enormous potential of the situation and record some notable successes, with Barcelona at the head. [11] We must not forget, however, that apparatus interests and some

“sectarianism in common” have led to missed opportunities in many locations. This is something to bear in mind in the decisive months that lie ahead, in which breadth of vision and strategic ambition should govern the movements of all the actors fighting

for another model of society. As an orientation compass, one equation stands out: unity (or convergence) and an aspiration of rupture. Which, in turn, has a reverse negative to exorcise: sectarianism and the mentality of routine institutional

management. Each of the two sides of the equation (and of its antithesis) combines separately, but without a synthesis between the two any strategy is lame.

The victory of *Barcelona en Comú*⁹ has highlighted the great hidden truth about Catalan politics: the historic weakness of CiU, its narrow social support and the vulnerability of its hegemony, despite its electoral rebound after the referendum on independence.

The Catalan popular forces (like those in the rest of the state) face a double strategic challenge: governing Barcelona and the other areas conquered in a spirit of rupture and, at the same time, articulating a majority alternative in the country as a whole. These are interrelated actions. Entrenching oneself in municipalism and neglecting the national level would be a mistake in the long run that would weaken the transformative potential at the local level, while focusing on how to beat Mas without taking into account the new realities of local convergence would be to deprive ourselves of powerful levers rooted in the territory that allow us to “go up” with more force than ever. Let us be frank: we are in uncharted territory.

The Barcelona earthquake, resting on other local success, can be replicated at the Catalan level. Not by mechanically copying models, but by being inspired by its goals and looking for appropriate formulas. After 24 May we face a challenge which is both complex and perhaps unrepeatable, so urgent and historical is it: articulating an alternative to Artur Mas, that definitively dynamites the moribund party system for the benefit of those at the bottom and changes all the coordinates of the political debate. Two strategic axes should guide us: an anti-austerity programme and the opening of a constituent process. Both are sufficiently important to generate convergences, both are flexible enough to accommodate diverse identities.

The Catalan popular forces are crossed by a double contradiction that must be faced: the tension between a culture of rupture and an

institutionalist culture, and the position to take in relation to the independence process. Its non-resolution would give new life to Artur Mas, who seems to govern more because of the inability of others to build an alternative than his own capacity to refound his political space and articulate a new instrument (the “party of the President”) to ensure a new and lasting Catalan rightist hegemony as he has done with the CiU for two decades. There are multiple possibilities, various combinations, and many proposals, for moving forward and undoing existing obstructions. But they are either trying to articulate a comprehensive block (with Podem ICV, CUP and so on) as proposed by the Proceso Constituent of Teresa Forcades and Arcadi Oliveres; or working with the idea of two differentiated political blocs: one, that of the majority, in the wake of *Barcelona en Comú*⁹, for which the candidacy of Albano Dante in the Podemos primaries can be the embryo for going further and articulating the necessary convergences; and the other, around the CUP. Seeking a post-election collaboration appears as an impossible challenge.

Within the pro-independence campaign the situation is particularly fluid. In 2014 Artur Mas seemed drowned out by an ERC that progressed in last year’s European elections and was emerging as the new hegemon of the centre left, playing on a rupture at the national level and on continuity at the social level. The 9 November referendum marked a turning point, in which ERC was sidelined and Mas began to regain ground, capitalizing on the success of the consultation. A comeback that, however, does not contradict the historical decline of CiU and does not eliminate the need to “refound” and expand its political space through the failed unitary list. Another phenomenon emerged after the consultation: the rise of the CUP, which had been converted to a relevant actor for the management of the referendum, and propelled politically and in media terms by false friends interested in using them either (unsuccessfully) to curb Podem and Ada Colau, or by claiming (with success in places such as Barcelona)

to outflank the ERC from the left.

The result is that ERC, despite consolidating important political space in the 24 May elections where it scored remarkable results, sees its claim to contest Mas’s leadership undermined. The rise of the CUP is a positive factor that strengthens the forces of rupture, while in the short-term serving to weaken ERC as Mas’s only competitor in pro-sovereignty camp. In the long term, it is only going to increase the instability of the pro-sovereignty process and leave Mas in a blind alley, as he can hardly lead a parliamentary majority post 27S that depends upon the CUP. This raises a possible scenario in which all false friends can become deadly adversaries: what to do before the investiture of Mas if the latter wins the elections and if the parliamentary majority depends on the CUP.

Ada Colau’s victory destabilises the official political story built in Catalonia, all attempts to analyse Catalan politics based solely on the independence process, without seeing that this overlaps, in a way that is inconsistent and not rhythmic, with 15M and its legacy of *Mareas* of all kinds. There are many problems in Catalonia, with many political expressions, many contradictions to solve. Catalonia cannot be read in a single dimension. In its cartography, politics intersects with the social and national, and both are driven by a desire for democracy.

How does Ada’s victory affect the independence process? This is the big question that torments politicians and commentators these days. The question, basically, is quite terrifying: why should an independence process that seeks a better country be disturbed by the victory in Barcelona of a candidacy which is not pro-independence but favourable to the right to decide, with a head of list who votes yes-yes, and which embodies a project of social justice? In reality, the question itself shows the structural defects of the independence process and its political and strategic limits – the absence of an explicit social content accompanying the demand for independence, the stagist prioritization of the latter over everything else, and the uncritical

assumption of Mas's political leadership.

A double strategic lesson emerges from the process opened by the 11 September 2012 Catalan independence demonstration and, primarily, for all its components except CiU: broadening its social basis, incorporating an emergency social plan against the crisis, and a proposal for a detailed popular constituent process that opens the door to a real discussion of the model for the country. The generic references to social justice with which the *Asamblea Nacional Catalana* (ANC) increasingly associates its

message evaporate into nothing if they are not specified in an explicit programme of social minima for the national transition process that, according to their road map, should be opened by September 27, with clearer demarcations from the economic policy of Mas.

May 24 marks the beginning of an open situation, undoubtedly with unexpected turns and twists. It bodes well for a scenario of fragility of the party system, fissured by growing gaps which can only open opportunities for change from below. The victory of *Barcelona en Comú* allows people who are opposed to

Mas's Catalonia to go on the offensive in this final stretch of the agonizing journey up to the parliamentary elections of September 27. What is key is not to lose the political initiative and to complete what began on May 24. To do this one thing seems necessary. To ensure that Artur Mas ceases to appear as the indispensable man, the only one who has a credible narrative, and make him appear as what he is: one of the major obstacles to a sovereign Catalonia from all points of view in which the term could be construed seriously.

Translated by IVP from [Tiempo roto blog](#).

"Perhaps with unstable governments the citizens will win"

6 June 2015, by **Teresa Rodriguez**

Will Podemos govern in Cadiz?

I guess that the PSOE will be thinking that it would be quite difficult to explain to the locals that it will let Teofila Martinez govern for four more years after such a big electoral upheaval, and when there is hope of change in the city. What if we would like to see is that beyond voting for the inauguration because they have no choice, there would be a prior level of agreement to have a stable mandate, where we can exercise the action of government, agreeing sometimes, and with discrepancies at other times, but seeking the governability of the city. We want them to be responsible and if they vote in favour this project goes ahead.

Does that mean that the PSOE would enter the municipal government?

No. In Cadiz, the comrades are going to have a debate with two political forces. With the PSOE and with "Ganar Cádiz en Común". Not with the PP, because we are proposing an alternative to Teofila Martinez. And

not with Ciudadanos either because its economic programme is too similar to that of the PP. We understand yes there is confluence and coincidence in action with the other two parties, despite how different we are. The PSOE brings too heavy a burden with the policies that have been developed and because we know how the forces that govern with them behave. We have seen it in Andalusia in the last three years...

What is the objective of Podemos with the municipalities? IU, for example, wants to dislodge the PP to the maximum extent possible. Are you looking for the same?

Each candidacy will take its decisions and is autonomous. We can have a common approach for those registering for candidacies based on three points: Throw the PP out of the institutions because we understand that it has a special responsibility in what has been done in the past few years in this country, which has resulted in the suffering of many people. As the PSOE unfortunately has also formed part of that strategy for a

long time, we are not going to be part of governments with the PSOE. That is to say, what we are going to put in the centre, as in Madrid, Barcelona or in the Parliament, are what we understand as urgent measures related to corruption and transparency, evictions and public services. That is what we are going to put on the table, and not the exchange of parcels of power.

So in principle tripartite deals are ruled out?

That is our position, but each candidate will make their decision. We will be opposing shortcuts and aiming to squeeze the full potential out of the parliaments, to regain ownership in relation to the governments.

There are parties that warn that this situation creates a dangerous instability in the institutions

I think we have seen that the more stable the governments were, the more instability citizens suffer in their daily lives. In the councils of ministers, absolute majorities approved Friday

after Friday the toughest measures against the people. Every Thursday half of Spain wondered what would be taken from them on Friday. There was stability in the institutions and instability among the people.

Employment reforms, social cuts, worse conditions in schools, in the health centres ... If it now appears that instability has moved to the spaces of public representation, maybe we can have stability for the citizens. That is to say, governments have only been stable for cutting social and employment rights. If they now have to deal with an internal resistance to continuing to pursue their plans concerning social rights in Europe, those who gain will be the citizens. In Belgium they were a year and a half without government and all the indicators improved. Because there was no government to implement the austerity measures that cut wages and that leave people unable to consume. Therefore, they maintained a few minima for a year and a half. And I would not say that there is no government. In addition, the regional government is in office.

To what extent does Podemos look to the general elections and can you influence the voting in the municipal and regional pacts?

In our case no. In Andalusia we have had very clear conditions from the start, since the meeting in San Telmo after the regional elections. We are now bound to our words. We cannot now change our approach. Among other things, because no one has told us what we can or cannot do. We haven't even managed to persuade our socialist interlocutors to respond on whether we can close some of the Junta's bank accounts.

Do you think that the PSOE has kidnapped the Parliament?

There is a certain desire that the Parliament does not work. But anyway, from what I see here every day, I have the impression that it has never been especially proactive. We hope that when the commissions are set up they will be places of intensive work. For us it is so unusual to be members who want to show intensive dedication to a task of the first level, as is to legislate for nine million inhabitants. I am surprised to see the Parliament empty and the lack of basic rules of respect that there is in the plenary sessions. I believe that there is little respect for the Parliament in general. Right now we are meeting with groups that have disputes with the Junta of Andalusia.

You have said that before entering the Parliament it is necessary to deal with the "seduction of the institutions". What do you mean?

It is very important to do that - among other things, because the people require me to do so. When they look at me in the street, on the bus or train they want me to begin to do things for the Andalusians, that we resolve the situation and that we continue to work. This means that you will not forget. It is easy to settle in this space, because it is a place of recognition, suddenly you're the "honourable member", working in a nice place, the people in the street know you because you appear in the media ... I believe that it is relatively easy to settle in and not understand that what we're doing here is exceptional for the citizens. To manage collective life is a very special opportunity that has been given to us.

Are you concerned about the threats from Susana D'Áaz to call new elections in Andalusia if you do not support their investiture?

No, but we want to continue talking and it amazes us that the PSOE does not want to do so. Resuming the dialogue is serious, sensible and mature. The rest is just game playing.

HDP's poetic call for "Great Humanity" and the Parliamentary elections in Turkey

5 June 2015, by Maral Jefroudi

The HDP was founded in 2012 as a direct successor to the Peoples' Democratic Congress, a union formed after the 2011 parliamentary elections by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), various socialist parties, groups from various segments of civil society like feminist movements, LGBTQ movements, branches of trade unions, and other progressive groups such as the organization of young leftist Armenians, Nor Zartonk among others. In 2011, the last pro-Kurdish

party of its kind, the BDP, made it into parliament as part of the umbrella group of independent candidates, Labour, Democracy and Freedom. This allowed them to bypass the infamous 10% electoral threshold required to get elected under Turkish law. More than half of the Bloc's candidates, 36 out of 65, were elected to the Parliament in 2011. The founding of the HDP was therefore an attempt to solidify this solidarity, and success.

Since the 1980 coup modern Turkish politics has witnessed the formation of various political parties stemming from the Kurdish movement, which were successively banned and re-formed under new names. Accordingly, there have also been solidarity initiatives from various leftist political parties, ranging from social democrats to revolutionary socialists, in their electoral struggle.

The parliamentary quest of the

Kurdish movement started with People's Labour Party, HEP in 1990. 18 HEP - rooted deputies were elected to the parliament via the Kemalist, Social Democrat Peoples' Party, SHP. One of them, Leyla Zana, a 30 year old Kurdish woman activist, added a Kurdish sentence after her parliamentary vow: "I take this oath for the sisterhood of Turkish and Kurdish peoples." She was wearing a yellow, red and green head band and was booed in the parliament. After three years her parliamentary impunity was stripped, and with three other Kurdish deputies she was charged with affiliation with the PKK, spending ten years in prison.

Being aware of the political climate, the Kurdish parties worked with a back-up system. Upon realising that the HEP would be banned, the Freedom and Democracy Party (OZDEP) was founded, only to be banned in 1993. It was followed by Democracy Party (DEP), which was banned in 1994. Then Democratic Change Party (DDP) was banned in 1996, Democratic Mass Party (DKP) in 1999, People's Democratic Party (HADEP) in 2003, and Democratic Society Party (DTP) in 2009. Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), was founded in 2008, and merged with the HDP in 2014. Therefore, since the 1990s, there have been 7 political parties that were formed as a part of the organized Kurdish movement with attachment to its leader Abdullah Ocalan's line, and then were outlawed in Turkey.

The formation of the HDP and the dissolution of the BDP into it have a slightly different story though, and that explains the halo of interest around this newly formed party. Firstly, its public appearance as a political party out of the People's Democratic Congress took place in the political climate of the Gezi protests of 2013, the biggest mass protests in Turkey since the 1980 coup. The heterogeneity of the protesting groups, and ad hoc alliances at the barricades created a milieu that made oppositional alliances relevant. The conventional parliamentarist reflex of reaping the product of a mass movement at the ballot box found its setting in two consecutive elections after Gezi Protests. In March 2014

municipal elections took place, and in August 2014 the President was elected.

HDP made its first appearance in the March 2014 elections. Four well known deputies of the BDP, Ertugrul Kurkcu, Levent Tuzel, Sirri Sureyya Onder and Sebahat Tuncel resigned from BDP and joined HDP. Onder was a well-known face in the Gezi protests since they began, and became HDP's municipal candidate for Istanbul. However, Onder's personal connection with Gezi movement could not provide HDP with more than a synthetic connection with the June 2013 Gezi movements, despite its claim. The drawback was one that still haunts the HDP in the general elections, namely the Kurdish organized movement's complicated relationship with the Gezi movement. One of the most important reasons for this was the high and one-sided expectations of some of the participants of the latter.

In addition, revolutionary leftist movements of Turkey had gone through various alliances after the coup and lately, since 2007, supported various blocs, lead by the organized Kurdish movement, for independent candidates, and results have caused internal strife and splits among others. Digging a tunnel to the parliament, as the saying went through the campaigns, did not bring a new dynamic to the revolutionary struggle and the connection between the selected independent candidates and the grassroots movements could not be founded. Parliamentarism led to the formation of personality cults, sometimes used as a tactic by some segments of political left to provide visibility for campaigns. As a result, HDP got 4.8 per cent of the votes in Istanbul where Onder was a candidate. It is hard to say that his candidacy broadened the base of the party, which was formed by the organized Kurdish movement. At previous elections, its predecessor, DTP, had 4.7 per cent of the votes. Therefore, this first appearance of HDP was not a breakout. However, a clear demonstration of the will to establish the HDP as a party that goes beyond its Kurdish and pro-Kurdish base became visible with the decision of the BDP to leave western cities to the HDP and run in elections in

Kurdish majority regions of the east.

The second appearance of the HDP came with the Presidential election in August 2014. This time was different from its first appearance, which had been mostly based on Onder's personality, the taken for granted "united front" dynamic of the Gezi movement and a politics of being against the AKP and its opponent, the Kemalist social democrats, CHP. This time Selahattin Demirtas, the co-spokesperson of HDP, came with a "new life declaration" as the presidential candidate of the HDP. The declaration began with greetings in 15 languages spoken in Turkey and introduced "radical democracy," as the alternative to the current system.

According to the declaration, the new life would grow on the same the side as the oppressed, and those discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, religion, class and gender. It envisioned a system that was based on decentralization and forming peoples' assemblies for democratic, participatory governance. The leading role in this new life was given to women. Abolishing the religious affairs directorate that was based on the promotion of Sunni Islam, strengthening social welfare rights of workers, fighting against homophobia and transphobia were among many non-conventional axes of political intervention that were drafted. In accordance with the current stance of the Kurdish movement, the declaration defined the solution of the Kurdish issue as a part of the total democratization process of Turkey. This new life declaration would form the basis of the "great humanity" document prepared for the parliamentary elections of 2015.

This second appearance of the HDP was a success. Demirtas got 9.76 per cent of the total votes (3.9 million), increasing the HDP and BDP's combined votes (2.9 million) in the local elections that took place five months before.

The Presidential elections gave visibility to the HDP and its co-spokesperson Demirtas. When the party declared that this time it will not use the backdoor to the parliament by organizing a left-wing libertarian bloc

that would support “independent candidates” to by-pass the ten percent threshold, and instead participate in the elections as the HDP, it was considered to be a risky maneuver. However, the last few months proved otherwise. Basing its campaign not only on the illegitimacy of the ten percent threshold, but also on its election manifesto, titled “great humanity,” this time the HDP worked on communicating the alternatives to the oppressive, ten-year old AKP rule, and went beyond the call for solidarity with the unrepresented Kurdish constituency.

The 28-page call to great humanity starts with the statement that the absolute power of the state and capital destroys society and nature, and that it does not recognize our existence, identities, desires and necessities. The election manifesto states that empowering the society means empowering the oppressed segments of the society, it means secure work conditions for workers, rights to preserve and use our mother tongues, supporting women in their fight against male dominance, freeing the youth from anxiety for the future, ending poverty, ending the state’s imposition of forced identities and acknowledging that nature is not a resource but life itself.

The manifesto argues for a new democratic constitution that would replace the 1980 Coup constitution and argues clearly against the concentration of power, as would be created by the presidency system that Erdogan is fighting for. The new constitution would guarantee a number of fundamental rights, such as the right to peace, the right to truth, the right to organize, strike and be covered by collective agreements, social security, a basic income, the right to respectful accommodation and transport, disability rights, the right to clean water and sufficient food, conscientious objection, cultural identity rights, the right to use mother tongues, the right to education, the right to a fair and just trial, rights of children, rights of elderly people, animal rights, freedom of expression and organization, and religious freedom.

A number of the HDP’s arguments

were considered to be un-pragmatic for a political party that aims to broaden its base and pass the ten percent threshold. These included clear cut positions on historically taboo issues like the Armenian genocide, abolition of obligatory religious (Sunni) classes at schools and the directorate of religious affairs, and acknowledgement of the legacy of the Kurdish struggle and the movement’s leader, Ocalan. But in fact, this became a point of strength for HDP. The clearer their positions were declared, the more trustworthy the HDP became. In a political climate where the trend is concentration of power in few hands and impunity of the leader from any criticism, the co-spokesperson of HDP, Demirtas emerged as a figure who answered all questions with clarity and sincerity. He clearly rejected the assumption that the HDP would support or form a coalition with Erdogan’s AKP after the elections, and stated unequivocally that what happened in 1915 was a genocide. He also acknowledged the role of Ocalan in the making of HDP’s political line. Having been a human rights lawyer and activist for many years, and coming from the legacy of the Kurdish movement, the 41-year old politician represented a new face in the Turkish politics, where successful politicians were associated with patriarchal authority figures. Demirtas was not embraced as a father or an elder brother, or the future omnipotent leader of the country; he made it clear that the HDP was not there to create new leaders, but to empower grassroots democracy. It did not claim to be a socialist or revolutionary party, but a party of the broader left, a snowplow that would open the way for socialists and activists from other political tendencies.

Revolutionary socialists who did not endorse the HDP’s political line totally nevertheless organized their own pro-HDP campaigns inside and out of Turkey. In Turkey, two main campaigns, 10’dan Sonra (after 10), which refers to the 10 percent threshold and +1, which builds its campaign on being an extra vote to HDP, testifies to the aura that the HDP has created for itself. Critical of parliamentarism, these initiatives not only campaign for strategic votes to

the HDP to help end the one party rule of the AKP, but also helped disseminating HDP’s message for the “great humanity.” Progressive groups outside Turkey, such as the federation of democratic workers’ association, DİDF, have openly declared solidarity with the HDP for the elections as well.

Mathematical calculations about the election point to the importance of voting for the HDP to weaken the AKP. One of the videos of the 10’dan sonra campaign shows that if the AKP gets 44 per cent, CHP 25, and the nationalist party MHP 16, AKP will have 333 deputies. However, if HDP passes the 10 percent threshold, the AKP will be the most effected, with a loss in their number of deputies. In the latter scenario, the HDP gets 60 - 70 deputies, while AKP loses around 50. If the HDP gets more, and AKP gets around 40-41 per cent of the votes, the AKP will not be able to form the government by itself and will have to go for a coalition.

Whatever the results turn out to be, this is an election that has inserted hope, and proved that despite former frictions in attempts to form “united fronts”, collective working practice is still possible for the broad left in Turkey. It is also impressive that a guerrilla force (PKK), with 40 years of armed struggle behind it, has paved way to the formation of a self-critical, modest, inclusive and cheerful political party. Supporting the HDP in this elections does not necessarily mean endorsing its legacy and political line totally, but supporting their bid to stop the AKP’s will to concentrate power in its hands, which would sever the conditions for social and political movements to spring up and exist.

Moreover, issues raised in the “great humanity” manifesto, if put on the agenda and discussed in and out of the parliament, will provide stimulus for progressive, revolutionary change. The fact that this political phenomenon came into being with the initiative of the Kurdish movement, with its years of organising, sturdy social movement and guerrilla force in Turkey, should not be seen as an obstacle but the icing on the cake.

The title of election manifesto, which

is a direct reference to Nazim Hikmet's poem named "Great humanity", breaks the clouds of disenchantment lingering on Turkish society for a period, which predates AKP's rule. Nazim ends the poem like

this:

*The great humanity has no shade on
his soil*

no lamp on his road

no glass on his window

but the great humanity has hope

you can't live without hope.

Caste violence

4 June 2015, by **Radical Socialist**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) in New Delhi claims to have received an anonymous complaint about "the distribution of controversial posters and pamphlets" by APSC in the IIT Madras campus. The nature of this allegedly controversial material was simply anti-Modi views. This got the government's hackles up, as it is determined to silence all critical voices, especially voices from outside the spectrum of parliamentary parties. Following this, the HRD ministry wrote to IIT Madras and asked the institution to respond about the above matter. The Dean of Students (DoS) of IIT Madras decided to derecognise the student group even before APSC got a chance to explain their end of the story.

The APSC was created in April 2014 to foster conversation and raise awareness about Ambedkar-Periyar and rampant caste violence in the country. In June 2014, the Dean of Students, Dr. M.S. Sivakumar, directed APSC to change the name of the group; because according to him "Ambedkar Periyar" are politically motivated names, and student organisations should be apolitical and should not have names of individuals. No such decree for right-wing organisations operating under the name of "Vivekananda Study Circle." Consider this one gem of an example from the Vivekananda Study Circle website: The title of the page is "Is Kali Black?" and has the following quote claimed by them to be from The Gospel of Ramakrishna "Is Kali, my Divine Mother, of a black complexion? She appears black because She is viewed

from a distance; but when intimately known She is no longer so. The sky appears blue at a distance; but look at it close by and you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance, but when you go near and take it in your hand, you find that it is colourless." [12].

India is a society replete with caste violence. Some estimates claim that each week: 13 Dalits are murdered; 5 Dalit homes are burned down; 6 Dalit people are kidnapped or abducted; 21 Dalit women are raped. It is not a coincidence that majority of manual scavengers are from the downtrodden classes. There are systemic and structural issues in Indian society why such violence happens on a regular basis and are under-reported in the mainstream media. It is important that such issues are talked about more, and we stand in solidarity with every initiative that raises awareness about caste violence, Ambedkar and Periyar. The egregious politics of skin colour, as the example cited above suggests, and violence towards the downtrodden caste is prevalent in Indian society. We cannot eradicate caste distinction by not talking about it, by avoiding to name organisations after Ambedkar-Periyar "it is exactly the opposite" we need to confront caste politics head on as a nation, admit the historical injustices meted out to dalits, adivasis and other lower castes, and admit that a lot of it are ongoing.

We understand that this current action by the HRD ministry to pressurise IIT Madras, and the subsequent actions taken by the Dean of Students to be a continuation of the

brahminisation project of the hindutva forces in the Indian polity, whose most recent manifestations have been in the spate of ghar-wapsi, church violence and increase in incidents of communal violence across the country. We decry all such efforts by the hindutva forces, the direct involvement of the government in arm twisting anti-brahminical endeavours and condemn IIT Madras, the premiere institution that it is, for the shameful decision to intimidate and muzzle conversation on caste.

We also condemn the failure of the so called liberal oppositions. It is significant that only after two days of hue and cry in the Social Media did the liberal mainstream media report on the issue. For mainstream politics, there are certain shared premises. While the alleged upholders of political liberalism and secularism condemn actions of the Sanghis, they do not desire to challenge the upper caste dominations. We call upon all Marxist and socialist forces to recognise that without a serious attack on the oppression of the lower castes, the unity of the toilers cannot be achieved, and therefore, fighting for the rights of dalits is a vital part of any genuine Marxist politics in India.

Finally, we stress that the ban on the APSC is part of the increasing violation of democratic rights. It is therefore necessary for the APSC and their supporters, as well as for any organisation fighting for democratic rights, to link up this specific struggle (the restoration of the rights of the APSC) with the general struggle for democratic rights.

Scotland after the British general election

3 June 2015, by Murray Smith

Comparing the election results in Scotland and England the phrase “two countries” frequently comes up. The pattern of voting in Scotland and England was indeed entirely different. In spite of the five per cent difference in votes (36 per cent Conservative, 31 per cent Labour only a handful of seats changed hands between Conservatives and Labour and the gains and losses cancelled each other out. The Conservatives won because enough of their bedrock vote stuck with them and did not go to UKIP, whereas UKIP damaged Labour more than Conservatives and the Lib Dems collapsed, largely to the benefit of the Conservatives.

The only common point in Scotland was the collapse of the LibDems, all but one of whose ten seats fell to the SNP. But the big, historic news was the utter rout of the Scottish Labour Party, which lost 40 of the 41 seats it had held. And in the vast majority of cases, not by a narrow margin. For example in Glasgow, where the SNP took all seven seats from Labour, it won an absolute majority in each of those constituencies, ranging from 52 to nearly 59 per cent; It was the same story in former Labour bastions like Coatbridge, Motherwell, Falkirk, Inverclyde and Gordon Brown’s old seat in Kirkcaldy. There was across the country a massive shift of working-class voters from Labour to the SNP and the tendency was that the safer the Labour seat had been, the bigger the shift. The SNP probably also gained from the higher turnout in Scotland (71.1 per cent as against 66.1 for the UK as whole).

It can of course be pointed out that due to the well-known effects of first-past-the-post the SNP won 56 seats with just over 50 per cent of the vote. But Labour had benefited from the

same system for many years. In 2010 it took over two-thirds of the seats with 42 per cent of the vote. The fact is that between 2010 and 2015 the SNP went from 20 to 50 per cent and Labour from 42 to 24.3 per cent.

Having been widely anticipated by the polls, the result was not a surprise, but it was at the upper end of the range of predictions. And looking around Edinburgh in the days before the election it seemed that if not everyone was wearing SNP badges or had their posters in their windows, there wasn’t much visible sign of the other parties.

The reason for this massive shift clearly has its roots in the referendum campaign. As the campaign progressed, more and more Labour voters were being won over to independence. The four regions that voted Yes were predominantly Labour. The Labour Party did not simply campaign for a No vote. It conducted an extremely virulent and confrontational campaign, freely relying on the “fear factor”, playing on supposedly negative consequences of independence, some rather surreal and others quite effective, for example over pensions. Furthermore it did so in alliance with the Conservatives and LibDems, which gave the Yes campaign the chance to remind people how much Labour was part of the same neo-liberal consensus as its allies.

Unsurprisingly, on May 7 the SNP took the votes of the vast majority of those who had voted Yes, most of them from Labour. But it also took some No votes. The SNP campaign was centred on two ideas. First of all that they were the best party to defend Scotland’s interests in Westminster, with the frequently repeated assurance that this election was not about independence. Secondly

the SNP campaigned around opposition to austerity, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon making a considerable impact outside Scotland via the televised debates and forming a de facto alliance with Leanne Wood of Plaid Cymru and Natalie Bennett of the (English and Welsh) Greens.

Former Secretary of State for Scotland Alistair Carmichael, the sole LibDem MP left in Scotland, has come under considerable pressure to resign his Orkney and Shetland seat. He finally admitted being behind a story that Nicola Sturgeon had said to the French ambassador that she wanted a Tory victory, which was immediately denied not only by Sturgeon but by the Ambassador. So she clearly didn’t say it – but did she think it? It is not hard to imagine how a Tory victory could help the cause of independence. But whether or not she and the SNP would secretly have preferred a Tory victory, they certainly weren’t expecting it. Like everyone else, including David Cameron, they were counting on a hung Parliament and making plans accordingly. In their case, to give conditional support to a Labour government.

But of course that’s not how things turned out. With what consequences for Scotland? In the medium- to long-term nothing could favour the cause of independence more than Scotland being condemned to five years of a Tory government with minimal support in Scotland: back to the period before 1997. But in the short term the new and unexpected situation may create some problems for the SNP. The perspective of propping up Labour, doing deals, being able to say they were “making a difference” by at least putting some checks on austerity could have been good for them. Now they are in

opposition. Certainly as the third-biggest party at Westminster they will get to chair two parliamentary committees and ask the Prime Minister two questions every week. But they will not be able to influence Tory policies as they had hoped to influence Labour. Not in Parliament, anyway. This government will have to be fought outside Parliament, by mass action. It's not what the SNP do best. And there are others who do it better. Two countries, perhaps – but still one state. And the government of that state will be hell-bent on austerity, imposing it on a Scotland that never voted for it. All the parties and forces who situate themselves on the left of the political spectrum and who are pro-independence will have to respond to the new situation. They will have to combat austerity issue by issue and at the same time seek to present a credible perspective that “another Scotland is possible”, however each of them define that other Scotland.

Who are these forces? – essentially, the SNP, the Greens, the SSP and the nascent Scottish Left Project.

The SNP is not only the third political force at Westminster, it also makes up the government in Edinburgh. It will not only have to combat austerity on a UK level, it will also have to try and demonstrate that it can moderate its effects in Scotland. This may turn out to be complicated. Scotland is not about to see “devo max” – powers over everything but defence and foreign affairs. Broader devolution is being offered in the form of a new Scotland Bill based on the report of the Smith Commission set up after the referendum. As it stands it looks like a trap. The SNP is being offered wider powers, involving greater spending and responsibilities. But its ability to raise revenue is limited to taxing earned income, not savings or investment, in other words to taxing ordinary working people. It seems unlikely that this was unintended by the British government.

As Joyce McMillan pointed out in *The Scotsman* on May 2, the SNP has three choices: accept the proposals and try and make them work, a risky option; refuse to use the new powers and open themselves up to the charge of not using their powers to limit

austerity; or take the debate onto another level by arguing that austerity cannot be ended by tinkering with devolution. In fact there are only two possible ways to save Scotland from austerity: either reverse it at UK level, or break from it in an independent Scotland. Many people in Scotland might conclude that the second solution is more realistic than the first.

In an article in the latest [Scottish Left Review](#), Gregor Gall goes to some lengths to argue that the SNP is not a social-democratic party, as Nicola Sturgeon claims and as many believe. His criteria are not entirely convincing (for example his definition of social democracy includes nationalizing the banks, which was done in some countries, but not for example by the British Labour Party). However the use of the term is secondary. The point is that the SNP is and is perceived to be to the left of the Labour Party on many questions, something exemplified by free prescriptions, free health, which Labour oppose and would reverse if they ever came back to power in Edinburgh. That is why, in spite of criticisms that can be made of the SNP in government, its campaign against austerity was credible.

The SNP is certainly not a socialist party: it has absolutely no intention of going beyond capitalism. Nevertheless, the influx of new members since the referendum and even some of its new MPs may try to push the party to the left and may succeed to some extent.

The Scottish Greens are a different kettle of fish. They have succeeded in occupying at least part of the space to the left of the SNP. Their election campaign not only promised to end austerity and roll back welfare cuts, but to defend public services and renationalize the railways. One of the reasons cited for their opposition to the TTIP was that it would “lock-in” privatizations. In a campaign where there was huge pressure to vote for the SNP, they held their own, saving their deposits in a number of constituencies, particularly in Edinburgh – though their best result, over six per cent, was in one of the Glasgow seats.

The Greens, like the SNP, saw a flood

of new members after the referendum campaign. So did the SSP. This was a welcome relief after what might reasonably be called the crossing of the desert after the crisis brought about by the Sheridan affair. Many young, working-class people have joined the party and this was reflected in its May 23 conference. It was all the more welcome that at that conference the party did not let success go to its head and think it could be the left alternative on its own. It voted to take part in the project of building a broad left alliance to stand candidates at the next Scottish parliamentary elections in spring 2016, a project the Herald newspaper has called the “Scottish Syriza”. And the decision was important. Today the SSP alone cannot represent the left alternative in Scotland. But a broad left alliance without the SSP would be considerably weaker.

Apart from the SSP, any other left groups that are involved will be very small. This project will not be an alliance of parties. Among its initiators are people who played leading roles in the Radical Independence Campaign, Women for Independence and other grassroots campaigns and networks that made up the left wing of the Yes campaign, and the way those networks functioned will influence it strongly. It has also been supported by trade unionists, including veterans of the 1971 UCS sit-in, and a number of academics and writers, as well as by Myrto Tsakatika, a leading figure in Syriza Scotland. Its references are to parties in Europe like Syriza and Podemos.

There is clearly considerable potential for this left alliance in gestation. There is an audience in Scotland for a force representing a socialist challenge, defending direct participatory democracy, social ownership, redistribution of wealth and a break with the British state. And the road to those people was found during the referendum campaign by consistent work at the grassroots and by initiating dialogue rather than talking down to people. That can be repeated not only on the electoral terrain but in the multiple forms of resistance to austerity that will manifest themselves in the coming period.

Hijacking the Anthropocene

2 June 2015, by **Ian Angus**

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."
—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

What can lobbyists do when science contradicts their political messages? Some simply deny the science, as many conservatives do with climate change. Others pretend to embrace the science, while ignoring or purging the disagreeable content. That's what the Breakthrough Institute (BTI) is doing with one of the most widely discussed issues in 21st century science, the proposal to define a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene.

BTI has been described as "the leading big money, anti-green, pro-nuclear think tank in the United States, dedicated to propagandizing capitalist technological-investment 'solutions' to climate change." [13] Founded in 2003 by lobbyist Michael Shellenberger and pollster Ted Nordhaus, its philosophy is based on what's known in academic circles as ecological modernization theory - described by Richard York and Eugene Rosa as the view that "industrialization, technological development, economic growth, and capitalism are not only potentially compatible with ecological sustainability but also may be key drivers of environmental reform." [14]

In BTI's simplified pop version, to which they've assigned catchier label ecomodernism, there is no "may" about it - their literature consistently couples a professed concern for the environment with rejection of actual pro-environmental policies, on the grounds that new technology, growth and capitalism are the only solution to all environmental concerns.

Most notably, BTI opposes efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions, claiming that investment in nuclear

reactors and shale gas will produce all the energy we need, and global warming will wither away as a side-effect. "The best way to move forward on climate policy," write Shellenberger and Nordhaus, "is to not focus on climate at all." [15]

As Australian environmentalist Clive Hamilton comments, BTI's founders "do not deny global warming; instead they skate over the top of it, insisting that whatever limits and tipping points the Earth system might throw up, human technology and ingenuity will transcend them." [16]

In 2004, Shellenberger and Nordhaus wrote a notorious pamphlet, *The Death of Environmentalism*. That title wasn't an announcement - it was a goal. They declared their conviction "that modern environmentalism ... must die so that something new can live." [17] Their organization has worked to achieve that death ever since.

Bill Blackwater has exposed the "self-contradictions, simplistic fantasy, and the sheer insubstantiality" of BTI's thought, and John Bellamy Foster has shown that ecological modernization theory involves "a dangerous and irresponsible case of technological hubris [and] a fateful concession to capitalism's almost unlimited destructive powers." [18] In this article I examine one specific feature of BTI's current activity: its attempt to hijack the Anthropocene, to misrepresent one of the most important scientific developments of our time so that it seems to serve Breakthrough's anti-environmental agenda.

Scientists define the Anthropocene

For scientists, the arrival of a new geological epoch signifies that there

has been a qualitative change in the Earth System. For 12,000 years we have been in the Holocene epoch, but we now face conditions that are as different from that as the Holocene was from the ice age Pleistocene that preceded it. Paul Crutzen, the Nobel Prize winner who first suggested that such a change had occurred, and Will Steffen, former director of the International Geophysical-Biophysical Program, write:

"The Earth System has recently moved well outside the range of natural variability exhibited over at least the last half million years. The nature of changes now occurring simultaneously in the Earth System, their magnitudes and rates of change, are unprecedented and unsustainable." [19]

The name Anthropocene, from the Greek *anthropos*, meaning human being, was proposed to emphasize that the new epoch is driven by a radical change in humanity's relationship with the rest of the Earth System - that "global-scale social and economic processes are now becoming significant features in the functioning of the system." [20]

The shift began with the growing use of fossil fuels in the Industrial Revolution, and went into overdrive in the "Great Acceleration" of economic activity, pollution and environmental destruction in the second half of the 20th century. Now human activity is "overwhelming the great forces of nature," to the point that if "the institutions and economic system that have driven the Great Acceleration continue to dominate human affairs ... [then] collapse of modern, globalized society under uncontrollable environmental change is one possible outcome." [21]

Foster describes the Anthropocene as "both a description of a new burden falling on humanity and a recognition

of an immense crisis – a potential terminal event in geological evolution that could destroy the world as we know it.”[1[John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York. *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Earth*. New York, Monthly Review Press, 2010), 18.]]

Similarly, the editors of *Nature* say it “reflects a grim reality on the ground, and it provides a powerful framework for considering global change and how to manage it.” [22]

By contrast, Nordhaus and Shellenberger want us to believe that everything’s going to be just fine. They tell the world that “by 2100, nearly all of us will be prosperous enough to live healthy, free and creative lives.” All we need to do is “once and for all embrace human power, technology, and the larger process of modernization.” [23]

Foolish environmentalists may “warn that degrading nonhuman natures will undermine the basis for human civilization but history has shown the opposite: the degradation of nonhuman environments has made us rich.” Environmental problems are merely unfortunate side-effects of developments that are fundamentally positive for humanity: “the solution to the unintended consequences of modernity is, and always has been, more modernity.” [24]

Hijacking a word, misrepresenting science

Given the huge difference in views, it would have been appropriate and honest for BTI to declare how and why it disagrees with the scientists who have identified profound changes in the Earth System and are proposing to declare a new epoch.

Instead, when the word Anthropocene started appearing frequently in academic journals and mainstream media, Nordhaus and Shellenberger jumped on the bandwagon and tried to steer it in a direction more congenial to their views. In contrast to scientists they deem to be depressing,

pessimistic, and catastrophist, they declared that the Anthropocene isn’t a crisis, it’s an opportunity to build a global technological utopia, in which humanity embraces nuclear power and shale gas, and we all enjoy US-style consumerism forever.

What they offer is a homeopathically diluted Anthropocene, in which the only remaining trace of Earth System science is the fact that the Earth is dominated by human activity – and even that, BTI insists, is neither a recent development or a matter for concern.

Nordhaus and Shellenberger gave the game away in an article they wrote for *Orion* magazine and then reprinted in a BTI-published e-book. After agreeing that humans are “rapidly transforming nonhuman nature at a pace not seen for many hundreds of millions of years,” they wrote:

“But the difference between the new ecological crises and the ways in which humans and even prehumans have shaped nonhuman nature for tens of thousands of years is one of scope and scale, not kind.” [25]

Read that again. If it’s true, then there is no case for declaring a new epoch. There has been no qualitative change, so we are still in the Holocene, still doing what humans have always done, since long before the ice sheets retreated.

Landscape ecologist Erle Ellis, a Breakthrough Institute Senior Fellow, has been arguing for the “scope and scale, not kind” view in the Anthropocene Working Group, the international committee that is evaluating the proposal for a new geological epoch. He supports an early Anthropocene – the view that the Anthropocene began not recently but thousands of years ago, when humans first made large-scale changes to landscapes and ecosystems.

Official endorsement of an early date would strengthen the Nordhaus/Shellenberger claim that there is no qualitative break between current and past human impacts on the Earth. As Clive Hamilton and Jacques Grinevald write, the early Anthropocene option justifies a

business-as-usual understanding of the present.

“It ‘gradualizes’ the new epoch so that it is no longer a rupture due principally to the burning of fossil fuels but a creeping phenomenon due to the incremental spread of human influence over the landscape. This misconstrues the suddenness, severity, duration and irreversibility of the Anthropocene leading to a serious underestimation and mischaracterization of the kind of human response necessary to slow its onset and ameliorate its impacts.” [26]

BTI’s website describes Ellis as “a leading theorist of what scientists increasingly describe as the Anthropocene,” [27] but doesn’t mention that his early Anthropocene position, while compatible with BTI’s philosophy, has little support among the other scientists involved.

In January 2015, over two-thirds of the Anthropocene Working Group’s 38 members endorsed 1945 as the beginning of the Anthropocene, both because the Great Acceleration is an historical turning point, and because it can be located in geological strata by the presence of radiation from nuclear fallout. The early Anthropocene argument, they write, unduly emphasizes just one aspect of the case for a new epoch:

“The significance of the Anthropocene lies not so much in seeing within it the ‘first traces of our species’ (i.e. an anthropocentric perspective upon geology), but in the scale, significance and longevity of change (that happens to be currently human-driven) to the Earth system.” [28]

The AWG hasn’t formally decided yet, but Ellis, who evidently believes he has lost the debate, recently told an editor of the journal *Nature* that he opposes making any official decision. “We should set a time, perhaps 1,000 years from now, in which we would officially investigate this.... Making a decision before that would be premature.” [29] That would allow BTI to continue misusing the word, but he seems to have little support: a recent article in *Science*, proposing to “avoid the confinement imposed by a single formal designation” has only four

signatures, and of them, only Ellis is a member of the AWG. [30]

Oxymoron alert

Breakthrough has invited influential environmental writers to a luxury California resort in June, all expenses paid, for a two-day seminar on “The Good Anthropocene.” [31] So don’t be surprised if articles using that oxymoron appear in the mainstream media this summer. Phrases like “unprecedented and unsustainable” will not be emphasized, if they appear at all.

The seminar’s message was revealed in April, in An Ecomodernist Manifesto, signed by Nordhaus and Shellenberger and 16 others, all closely associated with BTI. Subtitled From the death of environmentalism to the birth of ecomodernism, it is self-described as “an affirmative and optimistic vision for a future in which we can have universal human development, freedom, and more nature through continued technological and social modernization.” [32]

The manifesto extends the oxymoron, promising “a good, or even great, Anthropocene” if only we will reject the “long-standing environmental ideal ... that human societies must harmonize with nature to avoid economic and ecological collapse.”

Yes, you read that right. BTI’s pseudo-Anthropocene requires deliberately expanding the metabolic rift between

humanity and the rest of nature into a permanent chasm. After all, “humans have remade the world for millennia,” so more of the same must be good.

A striking feature of all BTI propaganda is the gulf between the concrete problems they admit exist and what Bill Blackwater calls “the daydream quality of their positive solutions.” [33] That is clearly on display in their Ecomodernist Manifesto, which proposes to solve the pressing problem of climate change with “next-generation solar, advanced nuclear fission and nuclear fusion” – technologies that don’t exist and won’t soon arrive. In the meantime, BTI proposes reliance on hydroelectric dams, which can cause major environmental problems, and on carbon capture and storage, which doesn’t exist in any practical form.

Clearly, BTI’s “Good Anthropocene” won’t arrive before the climate and other essential elements of the Earth System reach tipping points. As Blackwater says, BTI’s purported realism is actually “the very height of fantasy,” a contemporary form of what C. Wright Mills used to call “crackpot realism.”

It’s time to defog

The pundits, politicians and CEOs whose interests are served by the Breakthrough Institute don’t want to be identified with the science deniers of the far right, but neither do they want the radical measures that responding to the real Anthropocene requires. BTI’s fantasy of a Good

Anthropocene builds the illusion that both objectives are easily achieved. Don’t worry, be happy – technological ingenuity will save capitalism from itself.

BTI could have avoided mentioning the Anthropocene, but that would have left a widely discussed concept unchallenged, posing the possibility that public understanding of the state of the Earth System will grow, strengthening the environmentalism that BTI wants to kill. It’s far more effective to appropriate the word, to sow confusion by promoting a caricature that has nothing to do with the actual Anthropocene and everything to do with preserving the status quo.

There can be no question about which side the left is on in this conflict. We may not endorse every element of the Anthropocene project, but we must not allow Earth System science to be hijacked and misused by enemies of the environment.

As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, the scientists whose work BTI is trying to undermine “are not necessarily anticapitalist scholars, and yet clearly they are not for business-as-usual capitalism either.” [34] Many are adopting more radical views as they study what’s happening to the Earth System. It’s our responsibility to help them blow away Breakthrough’s fog of confusion, and work with them to stop capitalism’s drive to ecological disaster.

[Climate and Capitalism](#)

Auditing the Greek Debt: unity of place, time and action

1 June 2015, by **Éric Toussaint**

In Greece the situation is different.

The recent debt currently being claimed presents features that make it

irregular, illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable, and even odious. Allegedly Greek debts that were cumulated before 2010 were already

to a large extent illegitimate and / or illegal (arms contracts involving fraud and corruption, large-scale construction-work related to the 2004

Olympics with overbilling and all sorts of embezzlement, tax giveaways to a privileged minority, bailing out of banks, excessive interest rates) but what is striking is the extent to which debts contracted since 2010 are flawed.

The memoranda, restructuring, and accumulated Greek public debt are all characterized by irregular, illegitimate, illegal and in many cases odious features.

New creditors, with successive Greek governments aiding and abetting, have cornered Greece into a situation where repayment is impossible. The creditors (the Troika) enforced policies and conditions with two major objectives:

- bailing out foreign and Greek private banks even though they are largely responsible for the current crisis;
- enforcing recessives and regressive neoliberal macroeconomic policies (privatisations, layoffs, drastic reduction of income, etc.) thus violating economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. The process amounted to a brutal internal devaluation. [35]

In 2015 alone, creditors have claimed €23 bn from Greece. While several deadlines have been met since agreements were signed in February 2015, Greece is now close to financial unsustainability. Many analysts consider this to be the case already, and some add that repaying its public debt is unsustainable with regard to human rights given the extent of the humanitarian crisis and the urgent need to muster financial means to find solutions. Several ‘heterodox’ journalists in the mainstream financial press (Wolfgang Munchau in the Financial Times, Romaric Godin in La Tribune,...) argue for a suspension of payment and for a cancellation of the Greek debt.

Considering how urgent the situation is, as well as the expectations of citizens who voted for change, the Committee for the Truth on the Greek Debt is focusing on an analysis of the 2010-2015 period. Obviously previous debts will also be audited and some members of the Committee are already working on this.

Among the debts that the Committee

has undertaken to analyse, we note obvious characteristics of illegality and unsustainability.

Here are the four definitions I put forward as soon as the setting up of the Committee was announced at the press conference on 17 March 2015.

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

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

c. **Odious public debt:** granted on conditions that violate fundamental human rights (social, economic, cultural, civic and political rights of the people).

d. **Unsustainable public debt:** debt that can only be paid back with dire consequences for the people such as a dramatic degradation of their living conditions, of access to health care or education and an increase in unemployment. In short, a debt that undermines basic human rights. In other words, an unsustainable debt is a debt whose repayment makes it impossible for governments to guarantee the population's fundamental human rights (good public health system, good public educational system, good social protection system, decent wages and retirement pensions, etc.)

During its second plenary session from 4 to 7 May 2015, the Committee for the Truth on the Greek Public Debt adopted definitions for illegitimate, illegal, odious and unsustainable debts [36]

After studying several aspects of the debt currently claimed from Greece, I am convinced that we can find evidence of it being irregular, illegal, fraudulent and unsustainable, which leads us to the conclusion that most of it is legally void.

With regard to the illegitimate or indeed odious nature of the debt, several authors consider that three conditions must be present, namely

- lack of consent;

- lack of benefit to the population;

- awareness of the lenders.

I put forward that those three conditions are present in the case of the Greek debt:

- o - neither the population nor its representatives gave their bona fide consent, democratic rules were not adhered to;
- o - the population most obviously has not benefited from the policies implemented;
- o - creditors, particularly the Troika institutions, were aware of the fact that the measures they enforced would not improve the population's living conditions since they demanded and still demand that tens of thousands workers be laid off, that wages and pensions be lowered, social expenditure decreased, freedom of negotiation restricted, etc.

Why is this third aspect essential?

Most public debts of industrialized countries are in the form of bonds or securities that States sold on the financial markets. The buyers (in most cases banks) generally claim not to know exactly how the money received by governments is used. Now in the case of Greece, this argument does not hold water since the money is loaned with contracts that stipulate a number of conditions that are made explicit in agreements and attached documents such as memoranda and implementation reports.

The Committee's conclusions cannot be dealt with by any international debt tribunal because there is no such thing. There is still no mechanism to solve sovereign debt crises. Only now is the UN General Assembly about to start work on these issues.

The Committee's findings can result in several outcomes:

- raise national and international public awareness about the illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable or odious nature of the debt claimed from Greece;
- raise awareness in the European Parliament and in the national parliaments of EU member states about the illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable or odious nature of the debt claimed from Greece;
- provide the Greek government with arguments in its negotiations to radically reduce the debt;
- provide the Greek government with arguments to enforce a moratorium on the repayment of unsustainable debt so that creditors are compelled to negotiate in earnest;
- provide the Greek government with arguments to take unilateral sovereign measures in case negotiations should fail;
- prompt the local tribunals to take legal action against those who are involved in fraudulent acts, or indeed in any form of financial crime;
- prompt the legislative power to vote laws that hedge the reproduction of illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable or odious debts;
- in the case of a constituent process, encourage the voting of constitutional provisions that would hedge the reproduction of illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable or odious debts;
- make creditors responsible for what they do to reduce moral

hazard and prevent them from granting loans that violate fundamental human rights.

- Other outcomes will probably be added.

Conclusion

We ought to stress the historic nature of the current auditing process in Greece. There have been many sovereign debt crises over the past two centuries. In the 1930s, most European countries went through extensive periods of default. At the time of the London agreement on the German debt in 1953, Germany had been defaulting since 1932 (i.e. for over 20 years). Since the Second World War there have been 170 cases of defaulting and over 600 cases of debt restructuring. But the Greek situation is unique: for the first time in Europe, a country's government has set up an independent auditing process with citizens' participation. This makes the President of the Greek parliament Zoe Konstantopoulou's initiative an exemplary democratic gesture.

Translation: Christine Pagnouille et Vicki Briault Manus

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