



IV487 - August 2015

“We must Defeat Mahinda’s fascist politics”

31 August 2015, by Vickramabahu Karunaratne

You openly supported President Maithripala Sirisena’s “Yahapalana” plan during the last Presidential election. So why are you hoping to contest independently at the general elections?

Actually all parties which were together during that period against former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and now they were separated out in many ways. Essentially even I am still providing my support to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with my agreement for “Vipaksha Virodaya” (Against Oppositional Parties). That agreement we had started long time back and I am still with that concord. Even in the last ten years we have been working together but when elections came we have separately represented ourselves.

I am still with Ranil Wickremesinghe on democratic issues and as for an example against dictatorship, against racism, against the repression of homosexuals, against repression of other religions and for rationalist programmes, we are backing him.

So even in the elections I work together with him in that sense. Getting elected is not a problem but we have to have a common campaign and that campaign is obtainable.

What is the most crucial issue for you and your party that needs

immediate attention?

The crucial issue is the Fascist movement of Mahinda Rajapaksa. He represents a very repressive movement. Mahinda Rajapaksa was corrupt so in that sense he is Fascist and it goes beyond the country’s rule of law.

He makes use of ethnic campaigns to oppress others. We have to defeat that and that is the first democratic task before us. We are asking people to vote against the Mahinda faction. Even within the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) there was only a fraction that supported him and even the leader of the party opposed Mahinda. But they conspired by all their means and captured a section and we are trying to defeat them, which is our first task, even in this election.

And at the same time we are trying to change the country into a hyper democracy further and we believe Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s democracy plan is liberal and is guided by parliamentary democracy and also the Commonwealth criteria.

But we want to go beyond that because we feel that Mahinda Rajapaksa’s fascist faction is in the streets, and is going on in the mass movement. So we have to face it. I would like to give a piece of advice to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe

that we must defeat these conspiracies and must show them that we are not sacred.

What is your view about the two main political parties alternatively ruling the country?

The development of the parties has created different factions. If we take the United National Party (UNP) of the early period, during D.S.Senanayake, it was a very conservative party but during Ranil Wickremesinghe’s period it has changed over to a radical party and only a radical party can go and have a peace agreement with LTTE Leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and he signed a peace agreement with him. That was impossible to believe in the UNP even in those days.

So therefore parties have changed. SLFP also have changed.

Over history it has been proved beyond doubt that the majority of voters cast their votes to the two main parties. In this backdrop do you think it is practical for smaller parties to contest?

My purpose is that I have the right to talk and I can meet the general public. If I did not contest I do not have that right. So I am contributing that and it is a massive operation. I am going to see various places, and I am writing articles, I am giving interviews and it is an achievement.

Then secondly I might be able to say things which are not said by the main parties. For example even in the UNP some of the criticism that I am making may not be there. And also I might get some votes and that will be crucial.

In the sense that I could show the others "Look here, we have some votes and so that means some people are listening to us." That could pressurize them and have a mass agitation on the basis of them.

You have been strong on behalf of the minority rights. At this moment there is a debate over the

demand by certain Tamil parties for a federal solution for the ethnic issue. What is your view?

The name federal is not important. What is important is how much power they demand. Currently they demand land powers, police powers etc. I should take India as an example; it is not a country that is a federal republic but the States has a set of powers. It is a separate country but it is a Unitary State.

Therefore captivating about federalism is not useful but what is

useful is to itemise, what powers we need and do by experiments. How to get our culture, language and our identity reserved and improved and it can be discussed. Taking it as a word which has been debated in the country; "Power sharing", I used the word power sharing and let us talk about the power sharing. We should refer and have an accurate idea of how much we should share and how much power we should possess as a country. -

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[Daily Mirror Lanka](#)

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31 August 2015, by robm

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Oaxaca Braces for Conflict

30 August 2015, by Dan La Botz

Mexican teachers are mobilizing once again â€”demonstrating by the tens of thousandsâ€”this time against anti-union reforms and the militarization of the state of Oaxaca by its governor Gabino Cué Monteagudo from the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Nine years after the 2006 teachers' rebellion, Oaxaca is bracing for another potentially violent conflict.

For the last year, tens of thousands of Mexican teachers have demonstrated, carried out lengthy strikes, seized highway toll booths and government buildings, and clashed with the police and army. These teachers, mainly from the southern and western states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán oppose the 2013 education reform, which grants the government

power to evaluate the country's 1.4 million teachers and remove them if they don't pass a standardized test. President Enrique Peñón Nieto argues that the reform will improve education for the country's youth, but teachers insist that it is designed to break the union, weaken public education, and destroy what's left of the country's social compact.

The teachers, many of whom are indigenous and bilingual, argue that they have developed an educational model appropriate for the communities, parents, and students they serve. The national test, they argue, will not benefit them or their students. Nor will it benefit their own families: In 1992 Oaxaca's teachers won the right to pass their teaching positions on to family members. Many

teachers believe that they should be able to turn their jobs over to their children, but if graduates of other colleges can compete, their children may not get their jobs.

Led by the National Teachers' Coordinating Committee (CNTE), a dissident left-wing caucus of the National Teachers Union (SNTE), teachers have prevented the examinations from taking place in their stronghold states, closing test sites, burning testing materials, and cutting the hair of any teachers who attempt to take the test. When the national elections for Congress, state governors, and mayors took place this past June, teachers called for a boycott, arguing that all the parties were corrupt and anti-union. And in Oaxaca the union went further, closing

polling places and burning ballots in the street, coming into conflict with the police and army and sometimes with grassroots community groups that wanted to vote.

Since June Oaxaca has been occupied by thousands of soldiers and police, and only a few days ago it came to light that in late July the governor had officially called upon the federal government to send the Army, Air Force, and Navy to maintain order. Governor Cué has argued that the strength of la CNTE, which has shown that it can put over 80,000 teachers into the streets, makes it impossible for him to govern without the backing of the military.

Oaxaca has been at the heart of the militant teachers movement, and the federal and state governments are determined to break the union's significant power there. Since 1992 when, under teacher pressure, the state created the State Institute of Public Education of Oaxaca (IEEPO), the Oaxaca state government has been obliged to hire all graduates of the teachers colleges, which are dominated by the same left groups that lead la CNTE.

Local 22 of the Mexican Teachers Union "controlled by the CNTE" has played a large role in IEEPO where its members hold some 300 of the Institute's 4,000 jobs. The government alleges that many teachers collect salaries without ever showing up to teach in a classroom.

Governor Cué and la CNTE have been heading toward confrontation since last month when the governor announced that he was replacing IEEPO with a new structure. He also secretly called upon the federal government to send in the military. The CNTE sought an injunction against the closing of the Institute, but a judge threw the union's request out of court, ruling that the governor's closing of the agency was legal and that the injunction was against the public interest. The CNTE has called for a national strike to coincide with the beginning of the Mexican school year on August 24, but Cué has announced that any teacher who misses three consecutive days will be fired, in accordance with the 2013

Education Reform Law. In a recent development, courts in Oaxaca City have issued arrest warrants on August 19 for 15 teachers who were accused of having destroyed election materials in the June 7 federal elections.

While education reform has been the central issue, teachers in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Michoacán also joined the massive demonstrations following the forcible disappearance of 43 protestors last September 26 in Iguala, Guerrero, most of them students at the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College. Though over 120,000 Mexicans have been killed, 25,000 forcibly disappeared and hundreds of thousands displaced since former President Felipe Calderón began his war on the drug cartels in 2006, it was the forced disappearance of 43 young students that put a human face on the killings that have plagued Mexico. While the core of the teachers' opposition is based in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán, in this latest spate of protests against state repression, teachers in Morelos and Puebla in central Mexico and by others in Chihuahua and Durango in the north also took to the streets.

Marching under the slogan "alive they were taken, alive we want them back," parents of the disappeared college students have mounted what has become an international campaign to find their children. Accounts of the violent events, however, suggest that the police colluded with a criminal gang in the killing of the students and the subsequent burning of their bodies.

Though La CNTE's teachers have shown a remarkable ability over the last 30 years to mobilize tens and even hundreds of thousands of teachers, today they have few allies in the working class. And while the teachers' strikes and militant protests might appear to be the vanguard of a rising, radical worker movement, they may in fact, be the desperate rearguard action of a labor movement in decline.

Ten years ago things were different. Then the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME), an independent union unlike most in Mexico, would have joined teacher protests. But in

October 2009 former President Felipe Calderón seized the electrical facilities, liquidated the company, fired 44,000 workers, and eliminated the union. Some 16,000 SME members continue to fight for their jobs, but the union no longer has any economic or political power.

Ten years ago the Miners and Metal Workers (SNTMMRM) might have also offered support, but a 2006 disaster at the Pasta de Conchos mine in the state of Coahuila that killed 65 miners changed that. Union president Napoleon Gómez Urrutia called the tragedy "industrial homicide," blaming the companies and the government for lax enforcement of safety standards. In retaliation, President Felipe Calderón's administration falsely accused Gómez Urrutia of embezzling \$50 million from his union. With the help of the United Steel Workers of Canada and the United States, Gómez Urrutia fled to Vancouver, B.C. to avoid being imprisoned.

With the miners on the defensive, Grupo Mexico, one of the country's largest mining corporations, waged a war against the union and eventually eliminated it from the Cananea mine. While the courts have thrown out all charges against Gómez Urrutia, he has continued to lead the union from Canada, fearing to return to Mexico.

Occasionally some group of workers does decide to fight, but this almost always leads to swift retribution. In March, for example, farmworkers in San Quintán, Baja California struck for higher wages against both their employers and the state-controlled union that represents them. The coalition of indigenous fieldworker organizations shut down the Trans-Peninsular Highway that carries produce from the fields to stores in the United States and paralyzed the agricultural assembly line. President Peña Nieto's government promised investigations but sent the army and police, which successfully broke the strike. Afterwards the companies continued to pay the same low wages.

Most of Mexico's "official unions" do the government's bidding: they prevent strikes, work with the company to eliminate rank-and-file militants, and they keep wages low to

attract domestic and foreign investment. Many, run by gangsters and lawyers, are “ghost unions” unknown to their members, while 80% to 90% of all collective bargaining agreements are thought to be “protection contracts” that offer only the legal minimum while allowing employers to say they have a union and a contract in order to keep out independent unions. The most

important independent union is the National Union of Workers (UNT) made up largely of the telephone workers and university workers unions and some small federations like the Authentic Labor Front (FAT). But their impact is limited.

So the teachers fight on virtually alone, a militant minority whose interests seem selfish to some and

whose tactics seem violent to others. Yet many CNTE teachers are convinced that they fight not only for themselves, but also for their union, their communities, and for the Mexican people at large.

20 August

[North American Congress on Latin America](#)

The Iran Deal: Up, Down or Sideways?

27 August 2015, by David Finkel

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, after lining up his entire 54-member majority to vote down the agreement, states that it’s “quite likely” that the presidential veto of the disapproval resolution will be upheld. This is the man, remember, who once announced that his political agenda revolved around “making Barack Obama a one-term President.” Now it’s as if he’s pleading with the Democrats: It’s up to you to round up 34 of your Senators to uphold the veto and keep us from all going over the cliff.

A sophisticated Israeli analyst, Uri Savir, writes that it’s time for Tel Aviv to give up on blowing up the deal and develop new security understandings with regional Arab states (“Rethinking the Middle East’s Nuclear Balance,” [al-Monitor.com](#), posted August 16). And when the founding president of United Against Nuclear Iran, nuclear weapons expert Gary Samore, resigns with a statement that he finds the deal better than anyone could have expected, it looks like rational thinking may be blowing in the wind.

Then again, this is America, the land of the Crack Brothers and AIPAC and Sheldon Adelson and 17 Republican presidential candidates in an election that’s only 14 months away – one Super Bowl, one NBA Finals and two World Series from now.

Let’s try to unpack the real from the rhetorical and the ridiculous in the

raging political fight around the agreement. In particular, what are its loudest opponents actually defending?

What the Deal Does

As suggested above, the deal to drastically reduce Iran’s nuclear development programs and remove sanctions reflects “rational thinking” among all the parties. That’s not quite the same thing as “progressive thinking,” even though every liberal and progressive-leaning force in the land is understandably throwing itself into lobbying Congressional Democrats to uphold it.

This is a deal among four imperialist states – the United States, Britain, France and Germany; two emerging or aspiring ones, Russia and China (depending on your definition of imperialism); and Iran, ruled by a theocratic-military partnership. It reflects a convergence of interests among the dominant elites and ruling classes of these states, amidst all their other conflicts and brutalities, recognizing that this deal is better than the alternative of sliding toward a U.S.-Iran war.

Underlying the agreement is the emergence of a new Middle East reality. If this language seems detached and bloodless, let’s never forget all the immediate horrors of the

region. These are the lands of the Syrian regime’s hundred Guernicas, of the genocidal and mass rape cult called the “Islamic State,” of Yemen’s state meltdown and mass child starvation, the crushing of Egypt’s democracy and the hopes of the Arab Spring, of U.S. drone strikes and bombings that rarely fail to make the most appalling situations even worse, of refugees fleeing by the millions for dubious safety on European shores.

The agreement with Iran solves none of these, nor does it bring justice for the Palestinian people any closer, or any promise for internal reforms in Iran or anywhere else, let alone a nuclear-free Middle East – although to be sure, defeating it would surely make the regional wars, the repression in Iran and the danger of nuclear weapons proliferation much worse. What then does it actually mean, and what’s at stake in the political war around it?

1) The P5+1 deal with Iran at bottom reflects an emerging U.S.-led strategy – which Russia and China would also see in their state interests – to “stabilize” the mess that imperialism created in the Middle East. The big change: Israel will be an important but no longer the absolutely primary U.S. strategic ally. Instead, it’s now necessary to develop a multilateral set of tactical and strategic balances that will include Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt, along with Israel as

first-but-not-only partner.

2) The essence of the fight is that “pro-Israel” hawks reject this multilateral strategy and insist on maintaining Israel-uber-alles. It’s not about an Iranian military threat to Israel, which is nonexistent regardless of Iran’s nuclear status. (If anything, it’s the Saudis who have more serious real concerns about Iran.) Iran’s nuclear weapons contingency plan was developed against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, which invaded Iran with U.S. encouragement in the 1980s. Tehran was prepared for a grand bargain with the United States after the U.S., invasion toppled Saddam in 2003 – an opening that the Cheney-Bush gang arrogantly refused.

Senator Charles Schumer’s statement of opposition to the deal is revealing in this regard. Obviously, his pledge not “to be affected by politics or party” was never to be taken seriously. Further, he’s certainly smart enough to know that the Iranian mullahs’ “Death to the Zionist entity” rallies – which draw visibly dwindling crowds of Iranians – are “for the goyim” (i.e. for the entertainment of the foolish and ignorant). Interestingly, Schumer concedes that the deal is acceptable in its early stages, but problematic down the road – a concession that Netanyahu’s comical “weeks or months to the Iranian bomb” is drivel. It’s the future, in which Israel’s demands on the U.S. may no longer reign unquestionably supreme above other considerations, where his problem lies.

3) For the dead-end neoconservatives who supply the ideology for the AIPAC wing of the Israel Lobby, and for the entrenched bureaucracies of major U.S. Jewish organizations, the main threat is the diminution of their own power in the new Middle East policy dispensation. Ever since 1967, a cohort of intellectuals attaching themselves to the project of American power ruling the world – many but by no means all Jewish, and many but not all ex-liberals – have derived considerable influence as bridges between U.S. and Israeli military, political and economic power elites.

It’s not Israel’s existence that’s at stake here – the threat to its future

lies in its own internal rapidly deteriorating politics and creeping social disaster, but that’s another whole story. The fury of AIPAC and allied organizations is a rearguard defense of themselves, their unparalleled access to the halls of power and their capacity to bully and intimidate dissident politicians. That helps explain why they are doubling down on trying to kill the Iran deal – even when Jewish Americans favor the deal in higher proportions than the overall U.S. population.

What if it Fails?

4) In view of the consequences of a congressional overturn of the agreement (a 2/3 veto override in both House and Senate), such an outcome seems almost unthinkable. Presumably, votes are being carefully calculated to allow some Democrats to vote against it without actually killing the deal. I think it can also be predicted that if the deal is upheld, the Republican candidates’ current pronouncements that they’d cancel it are the hot air of August before the primaries. But we do need to think about what a rejection would mean.

5) An overturn of the deal by Congress would obviously cripple this administration’s foreign policy for the rest of its term, and possibly the next one. It might conceivably wreck the final Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations, where the U.S. is going up against all the other TPP countries in its crusade to protect the monopoly super-profits of Big Pharma. A president desperately trying to save his remaining “legacy” deal will not be in a strong position to arm-wrestle the rest of the world.

As Obama and Kerry are warning, most likely the Russians, Chinese and ultimately Europeans would walk away from the global sanctions on Iran – whether overtly or unofficially. Why bother with a U.S. administration that couldn’t even get support from one-third of its Congress?

6) The enormous reservoir of popular pro-U.S. feeling in Iran would take a huge hit. Iranian “hardliners,” mainly the Revolutionary Guard elements who control much of the economy and

have become rich because of the sanctions, would rejoice. It might be effectively curtains for Rouhani’s presidency.

7) The defeat of the Iran deal would hugely expand the already significant split in the U.S. Jewish community. Furthermore, while the power of the Israel Lobby in U.S. politics would be enhanced at least in the short term, the global picture would be quite different. The raging opponents of the agreement can’t all be stupid enough (though some surely are) to fail to recognize this: Internationally, this could be Israel’s all-time biggest political disaster.

The crippling of U.S. Middle East policy would entail huge damage to its capacity and perhaps willingness to continue defending Israel’s outrageous actions in Palestine. There would likely be a vast mushrooming of BDS globally, including possible European sanctions against Israeli banks that are already threatened. How much of its remaining credibility would the Obama administration want to expend in protecting Israel from the consequences of wrecking such a strategically critical deal?

What Will Netanyahu Do?

8) How the Israeli government might respond to a defeat, or the more likely near-defeat of the agreement – what Netanyahu calls “resounding moral majority” against it – is speculative and as always dependent on internal political considerations. What’s certain is that Israel will demand even more U.S. military aid, and almost surely get it as a consolation prize (and a way for Obama to buy a few Congressional votes).

A unilateral military attack on Iran is out of the question – Israeli generals know it’s crazy – but there might be the possibility (for example) of resuming Israeli assassinations of Iranian scientists as a provocation, in the hopes of getting an Iranian retaliation that would give Israel a pretext for escalation.

If Netanyahu wants to go for some

kind of new war (in Gaza or Lebanon or whatever), I assume he couldn't really do it from his current tiny majority with barely 61 Knesset seats, but would need to bring in either the "Zionist Union" (Herzog) or the fascist Avigdor Lieberman into his coalition – or both. Just in case anyone had illusions about Herzog representing a positive alternative, he's openly and literally embraced Netanyahu in condemning the deal.

9) One must wonder if the Republicans and AIPAC really want to "win" this fight, aside from those for whom destroying Obama supersedes any other goal. With the Middle East

already in flames with so many victims trying to escape, this president's chances (and probably the next one's) of pulling off any measure of political-military success in Iraq or Syria – which depend on at least tactical cooperation with Iran and coordination with Russia – would be almost nil. Is this what the Republican candidates seriously want to inherit? Do even the craziest-talking among them want to be taking on Iran, ISIS and maybe the Syrian regime at the same time, with no allies?

As Uri Savir reports "a senior member of AIPAC's political leadership" saying

on condition of anonymity: "We have decided to go all-out on the issue, despite this being a partisan cause...Secretly, some of us pray not to succeed in this battle." ("AIPAC Chooses Sides: Picks Bibi Over Own Supporters, U.S. Jews," *al-Monitor.com*, posted August 2, 2015)

In short, for so many reasons it's hard to contemplate an actual 2/3 congressional vote to kill the deal. It's just that in this crazy-ass country, you can never know for sure.

August 25

[New Politics](#)

Capitalism vs. Democracy in Europe

26 August 2015, by **Michael Löwy**

The history of the 20th century seems to confirm this opinion: very often, when the power of the ruling classes seemed to be threatened by the people, democracy was pushed aside as a luxury that one couldn't afford, and replaced by fascism—Europe in the 1920s and '30s—or military dictatorship: Latin America in the 1960s and '70s. Fortunately enough, this is not the case of Europe today, but we have, particularly during the last decades with the triumph of neoliberalism, a democracy of low intensity, a democracy without social content, which has become an empty shell. Sure enough, we still have elections, but there seems to be only one party, the U.M.P., United Market Party, with two variants which have only limited differences: the right-wing neoliberal version, and the left-center social-liberal one.

Mario Draghi, head of the European Central Bank, and Mario Monti, former European Commissioner—both former employees of Goldman Sachs. The decline of democracy is particularly visible in the oligarchic functioning of the European Union, where the European Parliament has very little influence, while power is

firmly in the hands of non-elected bodies, such as the European Commission, or the Central European Bank. According to Giandomenico Majone, Professor at the European Institute of Florence, and one of the semi-official theoreticians of the Union, Europe needs "non-majoritarian institutions," i.e. "public institutions that are, on purpose, not responsible neither towards electors nor elected officials," the only way to protect us against "the tyranny of the majority." In such institutions "qualities such as expertise, professional discretion and coherence (...) are much more important than the direct democratic responsibility." [1] One could hardly imagine a more blatant apology for the oligarchic and antidemocratic nature of the Union.

With the present economic crisis, democracy has descended to its lowest levels. In a recent editorial, the French Journal *Le Figaro* wrote that the present situation is an exceptional one, and this explains why democratic procedures cannot be always respected; when normal times return, we can re-establish democratic legitimacy. We have therefore a sort of economic/political "state of exception"

in the sense of Carl Schmitt. But who is the sovereign that has the right to proclaim, according to Schmitt, the state of exception?

The Sovereignty of Finance Capital

For some time after 1789 and before the proclamation of the French Republic in 1792, the King had the constitutional right of Veto. Whatever the resolutions of the National Assembly, whatever the desires and aspirations of the French people, the last word belonged to His Majesty. In Europe today, the King is not a Bourbon or Habsburg, the King is Financial Capital. All the present European governments—except the Greek one!—are functionaries of this absolutist, intolerant, and anti-democratic Monarch. Whether right-wing, "extreme-center," or pseudo-leftist; whether conservative, democratic-Christian, or social-democratic, they fanatically serve her Majesty's right of Veto.

The absolute and total sovereign today in Europe is, therefore, the global financial market. Financial markets

dictate to each country the wages and pensions, cuts in social expenses, privatizations, the rate of unemployment. Some time ago, they directly nominate the heads of government (Papademos in Greece and Mario Monti in Italy), picking so-called "experts" who are faithful servants of the financial markets.

Let us have a closer look at some of these all-powerful "experts." Where do they come from? Mario Draghi, head of the Central European Bank, is a former manager of Goldman Sachs; Mario Monti, former European Commissioner, is also a former adviser to Goldman Sachs. Monti and Papademos are members of the Trilateral Commission, a very select club of politicians and bankers that discuss what to do next. The President of the European Trilateral is Peter Sutherland, former European Commissioner, and former manager at Goldman Sachs; the vice-president of the Trilateral, Vladimir Dlouhy, former Czech Minister of Economy, is now adviser to Goldman Sachs for Eastern Europe.

In other words, the "experts" in charge of saving Europe from the crisis used to work for one of the banks directly responsible for the sub-prime crisis in the United States. This doesn't mean that there is a conspiracy to deliver Europe to Goldman Sachs; it only illustrates the oligarchic nature of the "experts" elite ruling the Union.

The governments of Europe are indifferent to public protest, strikes, and mass demonstrations, and don't

care about the opinion or the feelings of the population; they are attentive—extremely attentive—only to the opinion and the feelings of the financial markets, and their employees, the ratings agencies. In the European pseudo-democracy, to consult the people by a referendum is a dangerous heresy—worse, a crime against the Holy Market. The Greek referendum was not only about fundamental economic and social issues, it was also and above all about democracy.

The 61.3 per cent Greek NO was an attempt to challenge the Royal Veto of finance. This could have been a first step towards the transformation of Europe, from capitalist Monarchy into a democratic Republic. But the present European oligarchic institutions have little tolerance for democracy. They immediately punished the Greek people for their insolent attempt to refuse the austericide. Catastroika is back in Greece with a vengeance, imposing a brutal program of economically recessive, socially unjust, and humanly unsustainable measures. The German right-wing fabricated this monster, and forced it on the Greek people with the complicity of Greece false "friends" (Hollande, Renzi, etc).

Finding Scapegoats

While the crisis gets worse and public outrage grows, there is an increasing temptation, for many governments, to

distract public attention towards a scapegoat: the immigrants. Thus undocumented foreigners, non-communitarian immigrants, Muslims, and Roma (Gypsies) are being presented as the main threat to the country. This of course opens great opportunities for racist, xenophobic, semi-fascist, or outright fascist parties, which are growing and are already, in several countries, part of the government—a very serious threat to democracy in Europe.

The only hope is the growing aspiration for another Europe, beyond savage competition, brutal austerity policies, and eternal debts to be paid. Another Europe is possible, a democratic, ecological, and social one. But it will not be achieved without a common struggle of the European populations, beyond ethnic borders and the narrow limits of the nation-State.

In other words, our hope for the future is popular indignation, and the social movements, which have been on the rise, particularly among youth and women, in several countries. For the social movements, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the struggle for democracy is a struggle against neoliberalism, and, in the last analysis, against capitalism itself, an inherently antidemocratic system, as Max Weber already pointed out a hundred years ago.

August 11, 2015

[Against the Current](#)

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Between peace and war

25 August 2015, by Christian Kutzin and Olena Varakina

The Donbass, a zone disputed by both parties, has known since the cease-fire a very uneasy calm. When you enter the "zone of counter-terrorist operations" (ATO - this is how Kiev

describes the military operations against the separatists) you realize the bitterness of the clashes. More than 6,000 dead - without knowing the losses of the pro-Russian separatists

and of the Russian soldiers who came to lend a helping hand from the end of August - bear witness to the intensity of the fighting. Yet even in the part controlled by Kiev (about 60 per cent

of Donbass), the traces of battle are undeniable. Life has resumed its course, but everyone knows that war can resume quickly. And clashes do resume regularly: shortly after our departure from the "front line" near Slovyansk, separatists started shooting again...

In fact, since nothing has been settled politically, the chances of prolonging this situation of "neither war nor peace" appear pretty slim. After the loss of Crimea, Kiev cannot bring itself to accept that of Donetsk and Luhansk, the two cities in the hands of pro-Russian separatists. The separatists, who want to seize the port of Mariupol, should, unless there are unexpected developments, go on the offensive quickly. Because according to them, their "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk are not viable without access to the sea...

There is something that is absolutely obvious: without the Russian intervention at the end of August 2014, when the separatists were being routed, the military conflict would have been over a long time ago.

Today the game is very uneven. The separatists have far more powerful weapons than the Ukrainian forces. Faced with the Russian war machine, which is running at full blast to provide the necessary support for the separatists, it is clear that what has allowed Kyiv to avoid a total disaster it is the spirit of the combatants, among others the volunteers, without whom the war would have been lost long ago. The Maidan generation, which brought down former President Yanukovich, remobilized as soon as the pro-Russian separatists started taking over several towns and cities in the Donbass. The morale of the volunteers on the front line remains very high, even though their armament is derisory faced with the separatists.

As Oleg Zontov, mayor of Slovyansk, the main city recaptured by Kiev from the separatists, said to us: "Here we aspire above all to peace, but everyone is afraid that the separatists are trying to recapture the town and this time they are seeking to control the whole of the Donbass. Which they have so far failed to do. European countries do not understand that what happens here concerns the whole of Europe, because Moscow now wants to forcibly redraw new frontiers."

The errors of the Kiev authorities after the fall of Yanukovich - such as the decision adopted the day after the departure of the ousted president to ban Russian as the second official language, whereas it is the language spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of the Donbass - have largely favoured the projects of the separatist oligarchs.

We do not see today the bases for an agreement. The Ukrainian government, which is facing a more than difficult economic situation, is advancing only slowly along the path of democratic reforms. The situation is even more complex because at present there is no progressive party in Ukraine capable of bringing together a large number of Ukrainians on the basis of an anti-capitalist platform, or even one that is just clearly anti-oligarchic. Ukraine is sorely lacking in trade unions that are really independent of the very powerful economic lobbies in this country.

Democratization will be real only when the Ukrainian state is able to put an end to the power of the oligarchs, who have up to now acted to prevent any reform that goes in the direction of greater social justice. These oligarchs naturally contribute to the corruption that, as in Russia, is found at all levels of society. There is a beginning of a struggle against the

oligarchs in Ukraine, but for now Kiev has not yet managed to take a decisive step in dismantling the oligarchic power that has controlled everything since the independence of Ukraine in 1991. There is enormous resistance to any attempt at reform.

Maidan was a great spontaneous popular movement, whatever may be said about it, but it was then partially taken over by those who have only one goal: to prevent the end of oligarchic power. Nevertheless more and more Ukrainians aspire to do away with the oligarchs and with corruption in order to see the country take the road of democratic reforms. For now, with a Russia that is doing everything it can to make it impossible for there to be democratic change in Ukraine, it is hard to be optimistic in the short term.

It is unfortunately likely that the trials and tribulations are not over for Ukraine and its people, the vast majority of whom want to live in peace and with dignity, "like everyone else". In Slovyansk, although the majority of the population watches Russian television, whose lying propaganda is very effective and very professional, people have lived already under the rule of the separatists. They do not want to recommence this experience, which was terrible for them, even though they repeat Russian propaganda about the Kiev authorities. At the same time, they live from day to day, without plans for the future: "Why renovate my home? Tomorrow I might have to flee from the war..." says a friend who is putting us up.

On April 22, back in Lviv, a major city in western Ukraine, we met the mayor, Andriy Sadovyi, leader of Samopomich ("Self-help"), a formation that created a surprise in the parliamentary elections in October 2014, obtaining over 11 per cent of the vote [