



IV488 - September 2015

IV488 - September 2015 PDF

30 September 2015, by **robm**

IVP 488 September 2015 PDF magazine available to download

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An upsurge of solidarity - Refugees, welcome! Something new in Germany...

30 September 2015, by **Manuel Kellner**

This is a process that is being expressed in the depths of society. Football clubs organize international teams made up of refugees and integrate them into leagues at different levels. Thousands of people outside the established structures of associations and political organizations come together spontaneously to organize aid to the refugees. They act shoulder to shoulder with members of anti-racist associations, with antifascists [1] and the radical left. Many young people - including many young migrants and those belonging to the "second generation" - are engaged in a very concrete way in this solidarity movement, focused on practical assistance to the refugees.

In the programmes of the public television channels as well as in those of the big private channels, there are an increasing number of reports,

debates and all kinds of programmes in favour of the refugees and of integration. And always, it is the enthusiasm for the integration of refugees that is most important. The exchanges revolve around a number of questions: how can we do even better to alleviate the plight of the refugees; how should we behave in order to live together with them; how could the German government impose, within the European Union (EU), the generalization of a generous welcome, immediate and effective assistance and integration of the refugees. "Refugees, welcome": this slogan, until further notice, has become dominant in the public debate in Germany.

There is a real contrast, a genuine contrast between the xenophobic and anti-Muslim protests of PEGIDA [2] and the wave of violent actions organized by neo-Nazis against the

accommodation centres, as well as against immigrants. These mobilizations are too often supported by "angry citizens" (*Wutbürger*) who come with their whole family to shout their hatred. And then we hear threats to kill politicians who organize reception centres and accommodation for the refugees.

The movement today in reaction against this is also situated in opposition to what happened in the first half of the 1990s. Then, violent demonstrations and physical attacks against refugees from the war in Yugoslavia were carried out under cover of an official ideology that found its expression in the slogan, *Das Boot ist voll* ("the boat is full"), which led to a change in the German constitution in 1993. The right of asylum was then reduced to the strict minimum.

So there is at the present time an

extreme polarization of attitudes in the German population. For the moment, it is the feelings of solidarity that are dominant. Imagine the Nazis, the supporters of the far right, those fired up by nationalist agitation, who see on their TV screens this "welcome" (*Willkommen*) multitude and the official ideology of the "culture of welcome" (*Willkommenskultur*)! This is supported by the employers' organizations, which insist on the opportunities for "the German economy" that are represented by hundreds of thousands of people who will sell their often well-qualified labour power (which is especially true for refugees from Syria).

Already, the refugees passing through Orbán's Hungary shout: "Germany! We want to go to Germany! We want mama Merkel!" And these refugees see the flowers that people give them in German railway stations; they hear the applause, they learn that Germany is collecting billions of euros to give a better welcome to refugees ... Come! Everyone come! There will be many more, since they are being showered with flowers and given billions of euros! This is a real nightmare for the Nazis, the nationalists, the "Western" preachers of racial hatred.

For Merkel's government and for her prestige, this is a considerable triumph. Yesterday, Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble were being represented in cartoons with Hitler moustaches and the spiked helmets of the Wehrmacht for their ultra-harsh attitude against the people of Greece. Now they are celebrated as the embodiment of humanitarian and humanist principles, as a good example standing up "against the Hungarians, the Slovaks, the Danes and other brutes".

I am not one of those who like to spit in the soup to spoil the appetite of those who are eating. We should welcome the turn of "public opinion" in Germany today. This is a chance for the radical left, which can cooperate with all these people who are taking action on the basis of solidarity, and enter into a dialogue with them. However, we should make a sober analysis of what is happening.

In his budget statement, Schäuble

has just combined billions of euros for the reception and integration of refugees with instructions to all ministries to cut their spending. This is the dogma of iron fiscal discipline, the cult of "zero deficit". This means that the policy of austerity will resume with a vengeance, which will lead to the backlash, the reaction. Once assistance to the refugees is associated with the worsening of the social situation of the poor and those on low incomes, feelings are likely to turn against it, possibly on a large scale.

To counter this will require the feelings of solidarity to be broadened out to social relations as a whole, demanding a fair distribution of wealth in order to reduce inequalities and demand the right to a decent life for all.

The German left is not quite up to the challenge. Admittedly, during the debate in the Bundestag (the Federal Parliament of Germany), Gregor Gysi (Die Linke) rightly raised the question of the causes of this forced exodus. And he established the relationship with the options of the dominant powers, which organize participation in wars of intervention and make the arms industry one of the main contributors to Germany's exports. Angela Merkel carefully avoided answering him directly.

But Gysi did not link the question of solidarity with the refugees with that of solidarity with the peoples who are crushed by dictatorships, or with class solidarity in the struggle against big business in Germany, whose concrete interests condemn a growing part of the population to a life that is increasingly distant from the ideal of the "German paradise" which attracts so many people who would like to take refuge here. Yet only a very small minority of them will succeed in doing so.

It must also be said that the left wing of the Die Linke and the German radical left as a whole is not well placed to answer the question of the reasons for the forced exodus, especially as regards Syria. Indeed, Sahra Wagenknecht, co-president of Die Linke's fraction in the Bundestag, managed to make a statement on the

subject of refugees from Syria - who have made up the majority of refugees in Germany since 2014 - without mentioning the dictatorship of Assad and the devastating war it is waging against its own population. But for them - because of their "campism" - it is the United States, the European Union and "the West" as a whole that are responsible for the Syrian catastrophe.

This is not the way that the German radical left will be able to enter into dialogue with the Syrian refugees belonging to or sympathizing with the democratic opposition against the Assad regime. Especially since this radical left (with a few exceptions) has never been in solidarity with the Syrian revolution, which in its early days had nothing in common with the Islamic counter-revolution.

Another important issue is that of differentiating between "good refugees" and "bad refugees". For example, refugees from Syria, even though they do not correspond to the restrictive criteria for the right of asylum in Germany since 1993, can expect to acquire the status of recognized refugees, because public opinion and official policy recognize the bloody and unbearable situation of war and terror in Syria as the reason for people "fleeing".

But refugees from the Balkans are described simply as refugees or rather as "economic" migrants (*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*) who are coming to Western Europe and Germany because they are "merely" poor. It is true that at present, in the German media, the situation of Roma who are discriminated against or Albanians threatened by blood revenge is often emphasized. But the official policy of the grand coalition government of Christian conservatives (CDU-CSU) and the SPD (Social Democrats) aims at defining their countries of origin as "safe" (*sichere Herkunftsländer*), the better to forcibly repatriate refugees from the countries in question.

To this we must answer that the "economic" or rather social reasons for the exodus are legitimate, in the same way as exile because of political repression or war and civil war. We

live in a world that creates glaring inequalities and poverty for at least two billion people. Only by confronting this directly and integrating the refugees, and not by isolating itself by

lethal borders and camouflaging itself in a fortress, can the working-class majority of the dominant industrialized countries have a chance

to emancipate itself, to be free from exploitation and oppression.

This article was originally written for [Viento Sur](#)

Turkey resumes its war against the Kurds

29 September 2015, by **Phil Hearse, Sarah Parker**

PH: Since July the Turkish president Recep Erdoğan has ordered his air force to launch a huge assault on Kurdish fighters in Iraq, resulting according to some reports to up to 200 deaths. Repression against the Kurdish population inside Turkey has been intensified. What lies behind this turn?

SP: Since 2013 there had been a de facto ceasefire, and indeed the war had been only intermittent since the late 90s, but the ceasefire was broken by Erdoğan and his Islamist AKP (‘Justice and Development’) party because of the outcome of the June general elections.

Erdoğan had been hoping to get an overall majority to amend the constitution to allow a more ‘presidentialist’ form of rule, giving him more power, but this was prevented by the rise of the HDP – the People’s Democratic Party – which got 14% of the vote and 80 MPs. The HDP is an alliance based on supporters of Kurdish rights, leftist groups, women’s organisations and other oppressed groups in Turkey such as Alevis, Armenians, and groups fighting for LGBTQ rights.

The HDP’s 14% was an amazing result – for the first time a pro-Kurdish party got over the 10% barrier for parliamentary representation. The very high 10% threshold was deliberately designed to keep out pro-Kurdish and leftist parties.

Erdoğan was hoping not just for the AKP to return to power, but also a big majority to ensure greater presidential power, so he would have to pay even

less attention to political opposition and civil society in general.

To try to reverse the defeat suffered by the AKP in June, a new election has been called for November and the AKP wants to relaunch strident Turkish nationalism to try to paint the HDP as linked to ‘terrorism’ to politically isolate it. This is not just on a propaganda basis – it includes organised pogrom-style attacks in many places, and more than 100 attacks on HDP buildings, presumably intended both to spread fear and impede election mobilisations.

Also it’s possible that anti-terror legislation will be used directly against the HDP to harass its leaders and potentially to declare the HDP illegal. This is a high risk strategy by Erdoğan because clearly a big majority of the Turkish population want peace. Also the HDP continues to campaign for peace, insisting that AKP return to the negotiating table, and working continually to build the peace movement.

The immediate excuse for re-launching the air war against ‘terrorists’ was the bombing of a left wing youth delegation at a press conference in the town of Suruç in July this year, on the Syrian border, in which 33 people were killed and more than 100 injured.

People mainly blamed ISIS since the group of young socialists had been planning to cross into Kobani to spend a few days assisting with rebuilding work. But many observers believe Turkish intelligence agencies were involved, creating the public outrage to enable the AKP to launch the air

attacks on ‘terrorism’.

In early September there were ten days of clashes in the city of Cizre in which more than 30 people were killed. The government used tanks and snipers to attack the population. Clashes have also taken place in Diyarbakir and other cities in Turkish Kurdistan. What explains this?

Cizre is a town with a very militant history [3]. It’s right down in the south east corner of Kurdistan Turkey on the Syrian border where the Kurdish movement has been strong in the past, and just over the border from Derik, one of the centres of resistance in Rojava (‘West’, i.e. Western Kurdistan/Syrian Kurdistan). What seems to have happened is a kind of urban uprising, especially led by the youth but not only them, women are also very important, against the return to war and the continuing repression.

Despite the drawn out peace process and ceasefire, repression has continued against the Kurdish population, especially the arrest of thousands of political activists, students, Kurdish language rights activists, local government representatives and so on. Thousands of political prisoners are kept in general in very harsh conditions.

The local people obviously decided to resist the coming assault and you can see from film footage and photos of the events that this was a real mass mobilisation.

The response by the Turkish military was ferocious: the destruction looks like something out of Gaza or Syria.

One particularly horrible aspect of it was army snipers shooting down men, women and children who went out during the curfew to look for food or water.

A similar kind of conflict happened in the biggest Kurdish city in south east Turkey, Diyarbakir. It's a bit early to say what this means in terms of the tactics of the Kurdish resistance; but the magazine Business Insider (owned by Google) claims there is a turn to challenging the Turkish state through an urban-based struggle, especially led by the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), a kind of youth militia linked to the PKK.

Business Insider also claims that the Turkish government is panicked by this turn of events and doesn't know how to deal with it. Mass destruction in the cities would play very badly internationally.[4]. This claim is probably roughly right - as the article states, previous serious fighting has been mainly in the countryside, so that is presumably what the army were trained to confront, not urban fighting. The Turkish army and police seem to be taking quite heavy losses in the retaliatory actions by the PKK (in response to the Suruc massacre and killings of Kurdish civilians or guerrillas) at the moment, and there is certainly a question over how far the generals are willing to engage in a renewed war, or how far the soldiers are motivated or prepared to fight.

The PKK leadership have said that so far their forces are only engaged in self-defence and retaliation for specific atrocities, and have by no means fully engaged in war yet, and that they still want peace, not war; the war has been restarted by the AKP.

At the end of last year the Kurds were being hailed internationally as the one force that had stood up to ISIS, and successfully resisted them, in northern Iraq. Even American Secretary of State, John Kerry praised them: and it seems likely there was some co-ordination between the Syrian-Kurdish YPG (Peoples Protection Units), closely linked to the PKK, and American air forces bombing ISIS in the battle to defend Kobani. But at the end of July,

Turkey hosted a special NATO conference which gave the green light for Erdoğan to launch his bombing offensive against the Kurds. What changed?

It's hard to know American thinking from the outside, but I guess they are playing a cynical game and moved in response to pressure from Turkey. On the one hand, the US probably doesn't want ISIS to get too out of hand, and wants to be able to keep as much Kurdish goodwill as possible so as to retain Kurdistan as a base in the otherwise mostly hostile Middle East; but on the other hand Turkey is a NATO member, who they seem reluctant to restrain.

At one level there is a practical deal. The NATO conference gave the go-ahead for Turkey to attack 'terrorists' in Syria and Iraq, with the strong implication that this meant mainly so-called Islamic State. Of course it meant mainly the PKK and its allies in the YPG, and the Americans must have known that. In return the United States military have been given the right to use the Turkish base of Incirlik for their own attacks on ISIS, something that Turkey had previously refused to allow.

Actually John Kerry didn't praise the YPG, he congratulated the 'peshmergas'. PKK and YPG don't refer to themselves as peshmergas and this is more often used in relation to the fighters of Massoud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party. This is a reflection of the preference for Barzani as a client, over any sort of real self-rule by the emerging Kurdish entity.

Barzani shares control of the Kurdish enclave in Iraq with the leaders of the PUK, Gorran, (an offshoot of the PUK which has campaigned on a reform platform) and a couple of Islamist parties. He is Britain and America's favourite Kurdish leader, and his fighters have incidentally shown themselves absolutely useless in fighting ISIS. Peshmerga is a term also used for the fighters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. The YPG were the main defenders of Kobani, and many of the fighters were women, who are increasingly to the fore in the Kurdish revolutionary process.

Towards the end, a small number of PUK and KDP fighters equipped with heavy weapons needed to combat tanks were reluctantly allowed through Turkey and into Kobani as reinforcements, after a massive public campaign. Kobani was a battle that took months and saw heavy Kurdish casualties while the Turkish troops a few miles away sat on their hands and did nothing to stop the flow of ISIS personnel and supplies into the area - indeed there is considerable evidence that they facilitated ISIS movements.

At present there is still a blockade by Turkey against the movement of building equipment and medical supplies into Kobani, so things still have to be smuggled in or brought in on the 120 mile journey over poor roads from Iraq. One of the main demands from Rojava is for the opening of a humanitarian corridor through Turkey into Kobani.

A recent press release from the authorities working on the rebuilding of Rojava said that so far no promises have been made good from the reconstruction conference held under the auspices of the EU a few weeks ago, so clearly more pressure is needed. People in Europe need to realise that Kobani is still relying heavily on the efforts of the local people and the solidarity movement, and will be under threat of one sort or another for the foreseeable future.

The YPG and PKK were also responsible for rescuing several thousand Yazidis from from ISIS when they attacked Shengal in summer 2014, so NATO agreeing to the onslaught against the Kurdish resistance in Turkey and in their camps in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan southwest of Turkey, in the name of the fight against 'terrorism' is utterly cynical.

Among the NATO powers only the German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, raised objections to the assault on the Kurds. The British government of course still classifies the PKK as a terrorist organisation - no change there, and indeed a young Kurdish woman called Shilan has been in jail in Britain for some months and is awaiting trial on PKK related charges, allegedly

because she went to Germany and was heading for Syria in order to join the PKK to fight ISIS (!) [5]

The Americans also carried out some airstrikes in support of the defence of Kobani and of the YPG / PKK push to link up the Kurdish 'cantons' of Kobani and Jazireh (contiguous with the Syria-Iraqi Kurdistan border). Both these areas are in Syria but are also on the Turkish border, south of areas of Kurdistan Turkey where the Kurdish movement is strong like Cizre, so this area is strategically important to the Turkish state. It is hard to know why the US did this; perhaps it began partly as a response to the global movement in solidarity with Kobani - they would have looked stupid if they had let Kobani fall when everyone knew they had planes in the area and were supposedly in an all-out war against ISIS.

Their further support for the Kurdish push to link the cantons and defend them against ISIS must be done either, again, to reduce ISIS strength in the area, or to increase the potential for building up the Kurdish entity, or in connexion with their plans for the management of Syria per se - it is hard to know which factors are most important.

It may also be that there is something deeper going on here. Isis provides an excuse for constant American intervention in Iraq and the surrounding area. I think they see Isis as sometimes a 'useful' enemy and maybe they want a kind of controlled chaos. Probably at least the Americans don't want ISIS to get too much out of control and are prepared from time to time to make tactical alliances even with the YPG.

It is important to note that the linking of the cantons of Rojava and the declaration by something like 15 Kurdish areas in Turkey of autonomous self-government are connected - both represent an attempt by the Kurdish movement to take new steps on the road to emancipation. It's in this context that we should understand the Turkish demand to create a 'buffer zone' in northern Syria - it's a plan to create a zone under Turkish/Western control and prevent the consolidation of a self-

governing Kurdish strip on its border.

So now in return for Western support for its aerial onslaught on the PKK leadership in Kandil, the AKP leadership is forced to curb its hostility to the US attacking Isis from Turkish territory?

Yes. You will remember Turkey refused the Americans use of their base at Incirlik during the Gulf war and refused to allow a northern land route to attack Iraq.

The Americans have been negotiating with the Turkish government on the issue of using Turkish bases to attack ISIS for about a year. It's completely improbable that the American intelligence agencies don't know about the links between Erdoğan's government and ISIS. Certainly for a couple of years the Turkish government has been allowing fighters and equipment to go over its land borders to ISIS.

There is also evidence of links (MIT documents found on ISIS corpses and so on) between Turkish intelligence agencies and ISIS. So it's a big change for them to allow the US to use bases in Turkey to attack ISIS. But obviously they hope this will be outweighed by damage to the PKK leadership.

However there is definitely some tension between Turkey and the US over control of North Syria. We should also not ignore concerns such as access to oil, gas, and the sea . [6] Chauvinism and the caliphate aside, there is clearly tension amongst the regional powers around control of northern Syria - an autonomous largely Kurdish zone from Iraqi Kurdistan to Afrin would come very near to cutting Turkey off from the Mediterranean sea, and would also mean that oil or gas could be exported from Iraq or further east without going through Turkey.

This would be a strategic disaster for the Turkish state. The same could be true if the western powers were able to neutralise the self-organisation in Rojava and the PKK in Turkey, and to run a puppet Kurdish state through their favoured clients, the Barzani clan.

So it is easy to see why there is a lot of tension over who controls Northern Syria, whether or not Assad is able to cling on in the west around Latakia for any length of time. Incidentally, some commentators think that Britain is closer to Turkey and Barzani even than the US is, because of its historic role in the area, and its involvement in shady oil dealings. The recent investigative article by Nafeez Ahmed is a good way into this subject . [7]

So Erdoğan has been prepared to tear up the peace process with the PKK in order to create an atmosphere of crisis and build up Turkish nationalism, presumably in the hope now that the November elections will get him the majority he wants, and marginalise the HDP. But what was it that led the AKP's electoral setback. How important was the Gezi Park movement in 2013-14?

You have to see the two interlinked sides of the AKP government. It's a corrupt, bourgeois, neo-liberal government, but also stridently Islamist, linked to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and similar groups throughout the region. Protests against Erdoğan grew because of both aspects of the government.

The Gezi Park movement was a battle against part of the gentrification of Istanbul, but supporting protests and strikes took place across Turkey protesting a wide range of concerns, at the core of which were issues of freedom of the press, of expression, assembly, and the government's encroachment on Turkey's secularism. Alongside the left and popular organisations, the environmental movement was part of the Gezi protests. And of course many young people are just fed up with the Islamist threat to their freedoms - to dress how they want, to listen to the music they want, to drink in bars etc.

The gentrification aimed at privatising public spaces and destroying poor communities for luxury developments shows the uneven distribution of the wealth generated by Turkey's economic boom in the last 10 years. Yes there is a significant and affluent middle class, but there is also mass

poverty and resentment. An interesting aspect of the Gezi Park movement, like most protests in Turkey, was the massive involvement of youth - the Turkish left has a much younger profile than the left in many European countries.

The corruption and authoritarianism was highlighted by the Soma mining disaster in 2014. Three hundred and eleven miners were killed at a hugely unsafe mine whose owners had links with the government. Outrage was directed at the government because the AKP government forced through privatization, deregulation and wage reductions in order to keep Turkey's mines profitable and attractive to Western capital. As part of this strategy, costs are reduced by loosening safety procedures, creating 'flexible' work conditions, lowering the standards for training, and subcontracting unskilled or even unregistered under-age workers.

When Erdoğan visited the mine he had to take refuge from relatives protestors shouting 'murderer' and 'thief'. In the meanwhile one of Erdoğan's aides kicked a demonstrator on the ground, a graphic symbol of the attitude of the government to the masses.

But the other, Islamist, side of the AKP government is also important. When the Caliphate last existed in the form

of the Ottoman Empire, its headquarters was Istanbul. I think Erdoğan wants to be the leader of the region's Sunni Muslims, creating in effect a new Caliphate.

To do that of course he has to get rid of the secular traditions of the Turkish state embodied in the ideology of Kemalism, an authoritarian bourgeois nationalist ideology, after Kemal Atatürk and the Young Turk movement that created the modern Turkish state in 1923-4. Erdoğan has been trying to get rid of traditional 'Kemalist' figures in the leadership of the army, the police and the judiciary.

To what extent the AKP have been successful in purging the top ranks of the state apparatus remains to be seen. The Turkish army is very powerful, and it seems there is little appetite in its top ranks for a new war against the Kurds. You can never rule out the possibility of a military coup.

Overall the Kurdish question remains a central one for the Turkish ruling class and for the future of the AKP government. The Kurdish leadership has pushed the peace process very hard, even in the face of setbacks and disappointments, but the Turkish government has done very little - other than some minor concessions on language and broadcasting - to resolve Kurdish national demands.

This is another major reason for the HDP success in the election - the AKP lost a lot of conservative Kurdish votes because of failure to deliver in terms of resolving the Kurdish question, Erdoğan's real attitude being summed up by his notorious prediction "Kobani will fall!".

There has never been any real sign that the AKP intended to make significant concessions, not even a guarantee that with peace would come the release of the prisoners or the reintegration of the Kurdish leadership from the mountains into civil society.

While even mainstream media is expressing some concern at Erdoğan's policies, there is no sign of any diplomatic reaction from the British state, in other words they probably intend essentially to keep supporting Turkey politically. Much alternative media in Turkey gets shut down, especially in the east in Kurdistan, and even in Europe pro-Kurdish websites are hacked and harassed a lot at the moment, so we need to be actively seeking out information and joining the various solidarity campaigns and demonstrations where we can - the joint Kurdish youth and Campaign Against Arms Trade demonstrations at the arms fair in London in September, where Turkey was the guest of honour, was a good example of the work that can be done.

Catalonia vs. the Spanish State, or the failure of the federalist alternative

29 September 2015, by Jaime Pastor

In contrast to these biased interpretations, it seems to me more appropriate to concentrate on the response of the Spanish elites, not only the traditional wing, but also that wing which seemed to be willing to recognize the Catalan "difference" at certain key historical moments. Thus I will refer to some relevant figures that were more open, before access to the

government or parliament of the Spanish state very quickly led to disappointment of the expectations generated. In this way, with this brief journey into the past, perhaps we can better understand why there has been growing frustration in Catalonia with the permanent blockage encountered by a federalizing reformism and why new social sectors now want to go

beyond this: in summary, support for a specific constituent process, not subordinated to that which could be opened in the future in the framework of the Spanish state, and why independence appears as the consequence of the fact that the other road has been closed.

From Azaña y Jiménez de Asúa to the “transition”

Starting with the Second Republic, it should be remembered that prior to its advent a significant part of the opposition to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera had favoured recognizing the specificity of Catalonia. This was true of Manuel Azaña, who on his visit to Barcelona on March 27, 1930, stated: “And I have to say also that if some day in Catalonia another will dominates and you resolve to sail alone, it would be fair and our duty would be to leave you in peace, with the least damage to all, and wish you good luck, until, with the wound healed, we could at least establish relations as good neighbours”. Later, on July 17, 1931, he repeated this willingness: “Our motto, friends and colleagues, cannot be more than freedom for all Hispanics, and if anybody does not want to be in the common homestead, so be it” [8].

A position that Luis Araquistain, leader of the PSOE, shared in 1930: “It is not a question of Catalonia and the rest of Spain having the same will to government, but rather the harmonious coexistence of two or more different wills. It would be absurd for non-Catalan Spain to be governed according to the will of Catalonia, but it is no less absurd than the wishes that Catalonia, even if independent, which it is not, would be subject to the will of the Kingdom of Spain” [9]. Even so, the Pact of San Sebastian, which brought together the majority of republican forces, was not to realize a federal option and Catalan nationalists had to be content with the promise that a draft statute of autonomy would be negotiated in a future Cortes.

The subsequent history is already more or less well-known: the municipal elections of April 12, 1931 saw the triumph of a new political force created just a few months previously, the Esquerra Republicana, and two days later, after Lluís Companys was proclaimed mayor of Barcelona, came the proclamation of

the Catalan State under the regime of a Catalan Republic “that freely and cordially longs for and requests from the other peoples of Spain their collaboration in the creation of a confederation of Iberian peoples and is willing to do what is necessary to free them from the Bourbon monarchy” [10].

This federalist advance very soon collided with the reticence of the new republican government, parliament and Azaña himself not only in relation to the new Statute, but also the attempts to give the Second Republic a federal nature, as Joaquín Maurín recalls. In the Constitution the formula of the “integral state” proposed by the socialist Luis Jiménez de Asúa, a follower of Hugo Preuss, was adopted and thus temporarily restrained nationalist pressure. However, in October 1934 and July 1936 new pressures on the constitutional framework came from Catalonia: the first ended up being punished being forcibly repressed by the new right wing government in Madrid, while the second opened a process in which a social revolution instituted a new popular sovereignty, eventually also defeated with the suspension of autonomy after the events of May 1937.

In relation to the experience during this entire period the reflections that Jiménez de Asúa made later from exile are of interest. Arguing with Basque and Catalan and still claiming that the “integral state” was the most suitable solution, the illustrious constitutionalist recalled in 1946 that in a lecture he had given a few years before on the path to the Third Republic he argued that “if the Basques, the Gallegos or Catalans wished to secede from Spain and accredited this resolve in a serious and majoritarian plebiscite, we should not prevent it, as liberals, witnessing with pain but with dignity such mutilations of the Spanish state. To move one soldier or guard to oppose, by means of force, the willingness of these countries would be stupidity and injustice”. Then he added: “I think we need to abandon silence and say once and for all how the organization of the Spanish State should be addressed and whether the Third Republic

should be federal or not. Nor should we silence the hypothesis that one or more of these regions, which it would be more just to call “countries”, should separate from the Spanish core and become independent nations” [11].

It is not difficult to observe in these new proposals a recognition that the Second Republic did not resolve the issues concerning these “countries” and, therefore, that a future Third Republic would have to go beyond the formula of “integral State” for these peoples, even accepting their right to independence. A reflection which unfortunately would not be addressed within the PSOE and the Spanish left in general.

Afterwards and for several decades, the Francoist dictatorship exacerbated the repression of any form of expression of the national identities of these peoples and that is why the majority of the left-wing forces assumed in their programs the defence of the right to self-determination of the peoples and the federal option, although in the case of the PSOE and the PCE accompanied by a growing ambiguity while approaching the “asymmetric transaction” with the reformers of the Franco regime.

In the “transition” we soon witnessed a “consensus” on article 2 and Title VIII of the Constitution (turning a deaf ear to proposals such as those of Francisco Letamendia or Lluís Xirinachs) that allowed for the development of a state based on autonomous regions- with asymmetries but with the federal option explicitly prohibited in article 145 - intended to neutralize new “peripheral” nationalist pressures, especially in Catalonia and the Basque country. Both “Operation Tarradellas” and the Basque economic arrangement allowed a pact with the Catalan and, although with higher tensions (compounded by the persistence of ETA), Basque elites providing some degree of political stability to the new regime, as verified in the periods of PSOE or PP government without an absolute majority. However, at the same time the process of construction of new political subjects advanced in these

autonomous communities that would clash with the recentralizing trends from 2010 onwards, in the context of a systemic crisis and the crisis of the EU, strengthened under the PP government in recent times, as we have seen with the recent reform of the Constitutional Court.

In the Catalan case, the lived experience from 2003, with the start of the process of drafting the "Nou Estatut" and the promise of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero to respect what was agreed upon from the Generalitat, would end up failing, after the trimmings of the Spanish parliament and the recourse by the PP and several Autonomous Communities, with a ruling of the Constitutional Court in 2010 that would confirm to a broad sector of Catalan society the impossibility of taking a federalizing track in the framework of the current regime. Artur Mas - and the political elite he represents, even at the expense of losing support in significant sectors of the Catalan bourgeoisie, only interested in a "fiscal pact" - had to respond to this note of having reached a dead end, rather than the opposite, as claimed by many critics [12].

The lessons of history and the constituent challenge

Therefore, there seems to be a wide consensus that this judgment of July

2010 was the turning point for the opening of a new cycle within Catalonia in which the thesis that the only way to establish a relationship of equals between the Catalan and Spanish *demos* passes by the prior recognition of the former as a political subject able to decide if it wants to be independent and to develop its own constitution has become hegemonic "common sense".

In response to this aspiration we have seen the leadership of the PSOE resurrect a federal proposal. This, however, by ignoring the use of terms such as "nation" to refer to Catalonia (as we have seen again with the rapid rectification by Felipe Gonzalez) or "pluri-nationality", is not only tardy but confirms the criticism made by the late Miquel Caminal of this type of federalism: its "submission to the nationalism of the state", because it is still based on the primacy of a national identity over the others existing within that state. Compared to that type of federalism and together with Caminal, we proposed, in the 1990s, inside the United Left, another type of federalism, multinational and freely agreed between the different *demoi* -and at the same time willing to recuperate the best of the Spanish and Catalan republican, municipal and libertarian tradition - that would be a way out of the current blockage; but this option would require the prior recognition of the right to decide - including separation - something that continues to be rejected by the vast majority of the PSOE. Only the candidate for Izquierda Socialista in the recent party primaries, Jose Antonio Perez Tapias, has dared to

propose this alternative, without any support from within its ranks.

In the case of the leadership of Podemos we are seeing an evolution with positive aspects (recognition of pluri-nationality and the right to decide of the Catalan *demos*), but also a questioning of this exercise, and the possibility of a constitutional process itself, subordinated to waiting for an electoral victory of this formation in the general elections that could open a constituent process at the state level. However, it seems logical that such a promise, even if we grant such a hypothesis - today unlikely - meets with a reasonable distrust from the Catalan pro-sovereignty and pro-independence movement because of the lessons learned from the three historical moments already mentioned as well as the ambiguities of the discourse of Podemos leaders in this respect, opposing the social to the national question instead of searching for the best possible link between the two both inside and outside of Catalonia. However, the debate on the programme of this formation - and the "confluence" that eventually occurs, such as those already being forged not only in Catalonia but also in places like Galicia, the Valencian Country or the Balearics - means that the next presidential election could be a good occasion to define a clear position before a question which is at the centre of the political agenda at the state level and, therefore, cannot be forgotten within a project of "change" and the double rupture that has to be made with the regime and with austerity.

Climate: disaster is on its way!

28 September 2015, by **Fourth International Bureau**

The Earth has warmed by 0.8°C degrees over the last two centuries. This is sufficient to cause a rise in sea levels by almost two metres in the centuries to come. Nobody can stop it. Hundreds of millions of people will be

forced to move, millions of hectares of land for growing food will be lost, urban areas will need to be evacuated. The peoples of the South, who are the least responsible, will be the most affected.

Governments have ignored the warnings. Twenty-three years after the Rio Summit, annual emissions of global greenhouse gases are rising twice as fast as in the 1990s. Despite the economic crisis!

At this rate, the warming at the end of the century would not be 2°C but 6°C. This will lead to terrible disasters, which are totally unimaginable.

COP 21: Dust in the eyes of the people, gifts to the bosses

The urgency is intense because the measures we need to take have been put off for decades.

The “developed” countries must begin immediately to reduce emissions by at least 10% per year and completely eliminate them by 2050. The major emerging countries must quickly follow. Other countries still have a margin, but it is quickly being reduced.

If nothing changes, the quantity of oil, coal and natural gas that can still be burned without exceeding 2°C of global warming will be exhausted by 2030.

The 21st United Nations conference on the climate (COP21) will be held in Paris in December 2015. The political leaders are trying to hoodwink us by saying that, this time, they will conclude an “ambitious” agreement.

It is true that they might conclude an agreement to save face. But what is certain is that this agreement will be totally inadequate environmentally and very socially unfair.

Its content is determined in advance by the commitments of the major polluters: United States, European Union, China, Japan, Australia, and Canada. On this basis, the warming of the Earth will be at least 3.6 to 4°C by the end of the century.

These commitments were negotiated with the industrial and financial lobbies and are tailored to their interests. The multinationals are rubbing their hands at the prospect of new markets opening up: carbon markets, “green” technologies, forest compensation, capture-sequestration, adaptation to the effects of global warming and so on.

But a warming of 4°C means an increase in sea level of 10 metres in the long term as well as the more immediate impact: accelerated decline of biodiversity; more storms, cyclones, droughts, floods, heat waves; reduction of agricultural productivity and so on.

Saving capitalism or the climate?

The truth has been established for decades. The IPCC is an inter-governmental body; national governments are supposed to be committed to the main lines of its reports. Technical solutions exist, the financial means also. So why do governments not take the necessary steps? Why do they recommend false or dangerous “solutions” such as shale gas, agro-fuels, nuclear energy, geo-engineering and so on?

The answer is simple: because the governments are at the service of the multinationals and banks who are waging a war of competition for maximum profit, a war which prompts firms to produce still more (and therefore consume more resources), and more than 80% of the energy they use comes from coal, oil and natural gas.

To save the climate: 1) 4/5ths of known reserves of fossil fuels must remain underground; 2) the energy system based on these fossil sources (and on nuclear power) must be destroyed as quickly as possible, without compensation; 3) production which is harmful, unnecessary or based on planned obsolescence must be abandoned, in order to reduce the consumption of energy and other resources; 4) the despotic and unequal productivist/consumerist system must be replaced by a renewable system, one that is efficient, decentralized, social and democratic.

It is possible to stop the climate catastrophe while guaranteeing a dignified life for all. On one condition: taking anti-capitalist measures. Governments prefer to destroy the planet, endangering the lives of hundreds of millions of poor people, workers, peasants, women and young

people who are already victims of climate change, and threaten humanity with barbaric chaos while the arms dealers profit.

Capital considers nature and work as its property. There is no choice between climate emergency and social justice; it is one and the same struggle. Let us mobilize. Beyond the COP21, affirm our rights, develop our struggles, let us build our common actions, and build a planetary mass movement.

All to action, together on all fronts

The fossil multinationals need to extend their grip. Let's stop them. Mobilize against the infrastructure projects which are at their service: the new airports, new pipelines, new motorways, and the new madness of shale gas. Denounce the tax and other benefits offered to maritime, air and road transport companies.

The “developed” powers which are mainly responsible for global warming then turn their backs on the refugees created by the crises that their policy of domination and aggravated arming cause. Reject the walls and camps of fortress Europe, demand that climate migrants be given the right of asylum.

Agribusiness and the timber industry are responsible for 40% of greenhouse gas emissions. Mobilize against GMOS, support local organic smallholder agriculture and food sovereignty. Build networks and associations of producers-consumers. Support the rights of indigenous peoples to their resources and the struggles of women who produce 80% of the food in the countries of the South.

We are witnessing a biodiversity catastrophe. The sixth extinction as it is known: the biggest extinction of species since the demise of the dinosaurs. Between 40 and 50 percent of all species on the planet could be extinct by the mid-century. A quarter of all mammal species are currently at risk of extinction against a

background (natural) extinction rate of just one every 700 years. Organise to protect biodiversity.

The right of everyone to a decent standard of housing, to clean water, to transport, to heating and light, is good for the climate and for employment. Organise to ensure that water, transport and the insulation and renovation of housing are provided in the public sector, under the control of producers and workers, and that all are free at the point of use.

The productivist and consumerist madness in furniture, textiles, electronics, packaging etc. have contributed much to global warming. Reject products which are disposable, have planned obsolescence, are non-repairable or non-recyclable. Organize to support the workers of these sectors, particularly in countries where wages are low.

Workers should not bear the costs of the transition. Workers occupied in wasteful, harmful, polluting, industries should mobilize for collective

conversion without loss of salary, to socially useful and environmentally responsible functions.

The right to free time is good for the climate, for health and for employment. Let's mobilize for everyone to work less and less flexibly by the reduction of working time, without loss of salary, with compensatory recruitment and reduction of rhythms of work.

The fossil multinationals and the banks are blocking the transition. Demand the disinvestment of these sectors. Expel the private sector from energy and finance, without indemnities or buyouts. This is the indispensable condition to enable the community has to organize the transition quickly and rationally. Energy is a gift of nature, it must belong to nobody. Let us mobilize for a public energy service, decentralized, under the control of workers and users.

Ecosocialism or

barbarism

The climate crisis gives a great topicality to the alternative "socialism or barbarism". A true revolution is necessary. We must change everything! Not only to distribute in an egalitarian manner the fruit of our work, but also to decide what we produce and how we produce - free from hype and waste- and call into question the roles that patriarchal capitalism gives men and women.

In short, it is a shift of civilization, of transition to a new society, eco-socialist, eco-feminist, based on solidarity and respect for the environment. A society where the major management decisions, the priorities of production and consumption will no longer be taken by a handful of exploiters, bureaucrats or pseudo-experts, guided by profit but by all. This change will come not through elections, but through our struggles. All together, we can impose it, if we want to!

21 September 2015

Tsipras' Pyrrhic victory and the struggle ahead

27 September 2015, by DEA

To ratify the new austerity program that SYRIZA was elected to reverse, Tsipras needed the support of pro-austerity parties, including the center-right New Democracy and the center-left PASOK, which led the governments that agreed to previous Memorandums. In the final vote last month, nearly 40 SYRIZA members of parliament opposed Tsipras' capitulation to the blackmailers. When Tsipras resigned to trigger new elections, this parliamentary opposition became the core of a new left alliance, named Popular Unity, which scrambled to put together a campaign for the vote held just four weeks later. Popular Unity fell just

short of the 3 percent of the vote needed to qualify for seats in parliament.

The Internationalist Workers Left (DEA, by its initials in Greek) was co-founding organization of SYRIZA and a main voice in the Left Platform within SYRIZA. Now, it is participating in the new left challenge of Popular Unity. This statement published after the election responds to the outcome and looks at the tasks for the left ahead.

Socialist Worker (USA)

Statement

1. The elections of September 20 were

an initiative of Alexis Tsipras, who aimed to achieve two goals:

a) To confirm the balance of political forces and reestablish the viability of the SYRIZA-led governmental before the workers and popular classes realize through their own bitter experience the actual content of the agreement that was signed with the creditors on July 13.

In this effort, the leadership of SYRIZA was fully supported by the European leaders. That was made clear by the emblematic statement of German Chancellor Angela Merkel that the elections are "part of the solution and

not a part of the crisis." SYRIZA leaders also had the support of the vast majority of the mass media in Greece, which played a decisive role in organizing and promoting a pre-electoral public discussion where there was almost complete silence on the issue of the new Memorandum—which is the main issue of the political struggle!

b) The second goal of Alexis Tsipras was the purging of the left wing of his party, even if the price that he had to pay for that was the organizational disintegration of SYRIZA. In this goal, Tsipras was again supported fully by the bourgeois mass media, which slandered the Left Platform ruthlessly, while hiding the extent of the wave of resignations and withdrawals of a huge number of activists who had built SYRIZA all those years—among them, the secretary of the party, half of the elected members of the Political Secretariat, a big part of the members of the Central Committee, and leading cadre from lots of local and working-place branches.

SYRIZA, as a united political formation of the radical left, has today been replaced by a party completely built around its leader, based on some ambiguous and unstated "relationship" between the prime minister and his followers.

2. The main precondition for the success of the SYRIZA leadership's strategy was the spreading disappointment and weariness among the people who were active in the social movements, including SYRIZA's base of political support.

That was the point and the goal of the "There Was No Alternative" argument to justify the new Memorandum. This message was repeated constantly, like a mantra, by leading members of SYRIZA, along with the five-party coalition—including SYRIZA, New Democracy, PASOK, the Independent Greeks and Potami—that was built in parliament around the consensus to ratify the new shameful Memorandum signed on July 13.

The result of this policy was unprecedented abstention from the elections on September 20. There were 800,000 less voters from January

2015. The "Americanization" of political life [meaning a high abstention rate, with a significant part of the electorate feeling alienated from the existing political parties and indifferent to politics—translator's note] is now a visible threat. Tragically, this threat is a result—and a tool—of the actions of a government that claims to represent...the radical left.

If we add to this the fact that the grotesque Union of Centrists, led by Vasilis Leventis [a trash TV personality who uses his television station to attack politicians with ugly and offensive language, and who for more than 20 years was an object of derision, winning just a few thousand votes at a time—translator's note], we must be alarmed by another looming danger: the disappointment produced by SYRIZA could translate into a level of political apathy or cynicism never experienced in history in Greece.

The background of this retreat of the hopes and expectations of the people who were active in the social movements and the left is the retreat of the mass struggle, after the period of 2010-12 and an increase in illusions that we can challenge austerity through electoral means only.

Against this backdrop, the complete reversal of the political message of the referendum—when the massive "no" vote of the working class on July 5 was turned into a shameless "yes" on July 6 after the conference of the leaders of mainstream political parties, including SYRIZA, and the signing of the new Memorandum by Alexis Tsipras a week later—marked a change in the political mood and—at least temporarily—in mass consciousness. A large part of the population, seeing that the anti-austerity project of SYRIZA was collapsing, started to believe that the overthrow of the Memorandum is impossible. It has started to accept that trying to implement Memorandum policies "with a human face" is the only realistic alternative.

It was this retreat, along with the recent memory of the ferocity of the politics of New Democracy and PASOK while in control of the government,

that produced the political and electoral victory of Alexis Tsipras on September 20.

3. This is a Pyrrhic victory. The government of Tsipras will be obliged to immediately implement the anti-worker, anti-popular "reforms" of the new Memorandum, starting in October. The dissolution of the Social Security system, an unprecedented tax assault on the lower classes and a massive wave of privatizations is coming. The lies about seeking equivalent measures that would protect the poor from the consequences of the policies dictated by the Memorandum were helpful during the election campaign before the vote, but they are now about to end.

At this point, the leading group around Alexis Tsipras will face reality—they will have to face the content of the agreement they have signed. That is why—despite all their celebrations about their ability to form a "stable" government with the Independent Greeks as a junior partner—they have already paved the way for a future alliance with PASOK and the scenarios for an even broader government of "national unity" involving New Democracy are not off the table.

Facing this prospect, our only possible response is the struggle from below: Strikes, demonstrations, occupations and more to defend workers' rights and social rights. In order to crack the image of the SYRIZA government's popular legitimacy created by the electoral result on September 20, these struggles must be decisively supported by activists of the left.

Recent experience shows us that in order for such struggles to prevail, they will need a political expression. They must coalesce around a political current that aims to organize a challenge to austerity. In this, the section of the left that resisted and stood against the maneuvers of Tsipras has very special tasks.

4. A big part of this responsibility lies on the shoulders of Popular Unity—the united front political formation created by a large part of the left wing of SYRIZA and by

organizations and activists of the anti-capitalist left.

Popular Unity was defeated in the September 20 election. It won 2,9 percent of the vote. By only a small number of votes, it failed to reach the 3 percent threshold to have representatives in parliament.

There are objective reasons for our defeat. We had only a month's time to create a new political formation and simultaneously organize an electoral campaign on a national level, with no funds at all to begin with. The chances of a failure were always big from the beginning.

But there were important subjective, political mistakes as well. Faced with the pressure from our political opponents, who argued that obedience to the European leadership is obligatory, we overemphasized support for an exit from the eurozone. At some point, this necessary part of our overall argument was singled out and raised above a more general program of organizing a united class movement against austerity and an anti-capitalist program towards socialist emancipation. That was a gift to Tsipras and the mass media, who looked for every opportunity to slander us as "drachma left."

Despite all this, Popular Unity received 152,000 voters, and it has already rallied an organized layer of

thousands of activists and experienced veterans of the working-class movement and the left. This gives us the strength, despite losing the first battle, to engage in the war that is coming.

Of course, for this to happen, we need to resolve, in an effective and democratic way, all the organizational, political and programmatic questions about Popular Unity that were naturally left aside during the brief period before the elections.

5. The Communist Party raised its percentage marginally, from 5.47 percent in January 2015 to 5.59 percent this time. But the fact that this happened in a situation where SYRIZA was in crisis and split, and after Tsipras had just signed a new Memorandum of harsh austerity, shows that there is no cause for celebration. The politics of the leadership of the KKE failed to capitalize a rare opportunity.

During the pre-election period, the KKE aimed its attacks almost exclusively against Popular Unity, in the hopes of claiming all votes of left-wing opposition to SYRIZA for itself. This tactic leaves all the promises on the front page of the party's newspaper about initiatives to form some sort of popular alliance in doubt.

6. The smaller anti-capitalist alliance

ANTARSYA also raised its percentage of the vote marginally, from 0.64 percent in January to 0.85 percent this time. In its statement after the elections, the New Left Current (NAR), one of the main components of ANTARSYA, set as its goal "a broad militant front to overthrow the coming storm of anti-worker measures...the commitment to joint action from all the parts of the militant left, including the Communist Party and Popular Unity."

The problem is that this statement was issued a day after the election and not three weeks before it. In the electoral battle of September 2015, the "forces of the militant left" failed to provide a common response, which was necessary.

7. The Nazi Golden Dawn came in third place, winning 6.95 percent of the vote. The increase of its percentage happened because of the level of abstention: In reality, it lost 9,000 votes since January 2015. But even the fact that it has stabilized its electoral support –just a few days after its leader publicly took "political responsibility" for the murder of Pavlos Fyssas"–shows the danger. Our struggle to reverse austerity, our fight against the Memorandum, is the only way to smash not only the capitalist greed, but also the fascist threat.

[Socialist Worker](#)

First Thoughts on the Greek Election

27 September 2015, by **Panagiotis Sotiris**

This is in sharp contrast to the July referendum, when millions massively rejected troika-imposed austerity and the social devastation that came with it.

Tsipras's cynical gamble was that he could turn the election into a debate on what party (and prime minister) will implement the memorandum that had already been approved by Syriza and the systemic parties on August 14.

His strategy was to present the memorandum as **something inescapable** and inevitable. He avoided much mention of the agreement, presenting the only possible choices as being between him and Vangelis Meimarakis, the leader of the center-right New Democracy party.

In the end, voters opted to give a second chance to Syriza rather than

the other systemic pro-memoranda parties. This was not a vote of hope; it was a vote for the "lesser evil."

The fact that the Independent Greeks managed to enter parliament offered Tsipras the opportunity to form another coalition government with them.

As for the other systemic pro-memoranda parties, New Democracy

did not manage to challenge Syriza effectively, especially since it is still held responsible for being part of ruling pro-memoranda austerity coalitions since 2011. Pasok managed to improve on its January performance, but the fact that the Independent Greeks managed to enter parliament meant that Syriza was no longer in need of their backing. The River, an openly neoliberal party (the basic representative of the “extreme center” in Greek politics) lost one-third of its support.

At the same time, the dramatic increase in abstention, with 773,000 less voters than in the January election, is an expression of the political crisis and in particular the widespread sense of defeat among Greek workers.

Another expression of this disillusionment with the political scene was the 3.4 percent vote in favor of the Center Union. That party’s leader, Vasilis Leventis, is well-known for offering his “political analyses” on a second-rate TV channel in the 1990s. His work was viewed as a form of comedy, and no more seriously than that, but now the Center Union has emerged as one of the main outlets of an “anti-political” protest vote.

At the same time, the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn, whose leader cynically acknowledged political responsibility for the murder of anti-fascist artist [Pavlos Fyssas](#), increased their percentage — though because of reduced participation, the party actually received slightly fewer votes than in January.

Popular Unity, of course, did not fare well on Sunday. With 2.86 percent it did not manage to gain parliamentary representation. This is an obvious political failure, especially considering the fact that it started as a mass split in Syriza and was one of the main political forces that insisted on the relevance of the “no” vote. At the same time, Antarsya managed to have

an increase both in votes and percentage, reaching 0.85 percent.

What explains Popular Unity’s performance? Here are just a few quick thoughts, since the discussion of the result has just started.

Popular Unity underestimated that a great part of the [\[defeated and betrayed\]](#) “people of the No” voted not to signal continued resistance but within the limits of a “nothing can really change” mentality, opting to accept Tsipras’s call for a “second chance” and let Syriza rather than New Democracy oversee the new memorandum.

Popular Unity thought that the split in the party would have also meant a proportional split in the electoral following of Syriza. But in reality, the relations of representation proved to be more complex. The fact that there was a delay and backtracks regarding the exit from Syriza never helped things either.

Popular Unity also failed to effectively appeal to the anger of a youth with no future and to the silent feeling of despair and disappointment that led many voters to abstention or choices such as the Center Union.

We did not manage to turn Popular Unity into the necessary new front, the kind of front that would engage seriously in debate and in action about the problems inherited from Syriza. We seemed more like a variation of a Syriza that would have been faithful to its principles, rather than a **new front** coming organically from the movement and the dynamics of social antagonism. The lack of self-criticism regarding the participation of Left Platform members in the Syriza government also contributed to this image.

We failed during the campaign to insist on what perhaps was our strongest point, namely the fact that we had an alternative narrative

regarding the annulment of debt and exit from the eurozone. People wanted to hear a complete program and a road map for the exit from the eurozone, not simply anti-austerity and anti-memoranda rhetoric.

Popular Unity failed to open up to all forms of radicalism emerging out of the crisis of Syriza and also from the experiences of the movement. Moreover, the actual problems of communication between different sensitivities and varieties of left radicalism, both inside and outside Syriza, remained, including the fact that the Left Platform leadership was more suspicious than it should have been of other tendencies and failed to realize the need for an open appeal to all potential Popular Unity participants. Moreover, the formation failed to offer enough guarantees that it would be open and democratic, free of the bureaucratic logic that plagued Syriza.

However, the elections are over. Ahead of us are the implementation of the third memorandum and a new round of aggressive austerity and neoliberal reforms. We are facing the challenge of rebuilding the movement and also the confidence in the ability of the movement to win.

At the same time, Popular Unity and the entire radical left (which also includes Antarsya, people that left Syriza but remained out of Popular Unity, critical voices from the milieu of the Communist Party, and people from social movements) must go through the necessary (and necessarily painful) process of self-criticism and rereading of the conjuncture in an attempt to reinvent the radical left as a counter-hegemonic project.

This will be a difficult task, but it’s nothing new: left politics is all about building a boat while you’re already at sea in rough waters.

[Jacobin](#)

Ten years on: Katrina, militarisation and climate change

25 September 2015, by **Ben Hayes and Nick Buxton**

As images from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are replayed around the world, they are still as shocking as they were ten years ago. Many of us watched in disbelief as we saw how the world's richest and most powerful state seemed unable, then unwilling, to rescue its own citizens - sending in trigger-happy troops who shot at the hurricane's victims instead. Coming so soon after the Iraq war, the hapless Bush administration appeared unable to respond to any crisis without resort to the military. As the waters receded, America's deep-seated racism and inequality was laid bare for the whole world to see.

Could it happen again today? To an important extent, the US government's response to Hurricane Katrina has become a textbook example of 'how-not-to-do-it' for crisis managers around the world. Embarrassed by their failure, the US government carried out a significant reorganisation of the maligned Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). When Hurricane Sandy caused carnage in 2012, their response - while still wanting in places - was more widely praised.

But the structural inequality and institutional racism that underpinned the Bush administration's response is still there, a fact that President Obama noted on his visit to New Orleans this week. Moreover, the already bloated military and security complex that reflected these power relations has expanded enormously since Katrina - and is now using the spectre of climate change to grab yet more public resources.

Two years after Katrina, in 2007, the Pentagon released its first major report on climate change, warning in no uncertain terms of an "age of consequences" in which, amongst

other things, "altruism and generosity would likely be blunted." This was followed up a year later by an EU security report that talked of climate change as a "threat multiplier" that "threatens to overburden states and regions which are already fragile and conflict prone." It warned that this would lead to "political and security risks that directly affect European interests". Over the next few years, the national security strategies of the countries across the global north would be rewritten to offer the same self-interested and dystopian vision.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis and the so-called Arab Spring, the dystopian thinking of powerful elites has had to face up to increasingly 'complex emergencies' as the reliance of modern societies on global supply lines, industrial food production, transnational infrastructure and high-tech communications have exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, by ensuring that disaster in one place now reverberates far beyond the initial point of contact. Climate change, the narrative goes, will add more fuel to the fire.

Former UK Government Chief Scientist John Beddington has already warned of a potential "perfect storm" of converging food, water and energy crises by 2030, which could see states struggle to control delivery of basic goods and services. Doomsday scenarios are very much the order of the day. For some commentators, this is little more than 'collapse porn', a malign and apathy-producing catastrophism that fails to take into account the capacity of modern societies to adapt and become more resilient.

However, in one sense, the accuracy of the predictions doesn't really

matter. On the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina we only have to look at how the humanitarian crisis on Europe's doorstep and in its borderlands is unfolding. In Calais, we see a humanitarian emergency being treated as a security issue as the British government has pledged £22 million pounds on fences, police and dogs to keep out refugees fleeing war and torture. Both Hungary and Bulgaria announced this week that they were deploying troops, so-called "border hunters", to prevent refugees entering the country from the former Yugoslavia.

Further afield in Brazil, there were reports this summer of authorities mobilising troops to defend water infrastructure amid an ongoing drought in the megacity of São Paulo. Absent credible plans to conserve water and tackle some of the root causes of water scarcity such as deforestation, journalists reported that approximately 70 soldiers were involved in exercises to prepare the utility for an uprising, with 30 men with machine guns stationed in the facility's canteen.

And we can already see how the national security planners are factoring protests against inequality and social injustice into the new crisis management paradigms: by trying to predict complex emergencies and social unrest. Today, the UK's National Risk Register, for example, lists "public disorder" and "disruptive industrial action" as among the most severe and likely security threats facing the country. Crucially, by casting these issues as security threats rather than social justice issues, a very different medicine is proscribed. Moreover, the authorities have greatly increased their powers to deal with these so-called 'threats'. Staying with the UK, the Civil

Contingencies Act 2004 permits ministers to introduce "emergency regulations" without recourse to parliament and "give directions or orders" of virtually unlimited scope, including the destruction of property, prohibiting assemblies, banning travel and outlawing "other specified activities". Again, this is the shape of emergency planning the world over.

Dystopian preparations by the state are reflected in the corporate arena. Where we see a future climate crisis, many companies see only opportunity: oil firms looking forward to melting ice caps delivering new accessible fossil fuels; security firms touting the latest technologies to secure borders from "climate refugees"; or investment fund managers speculating on weather-related food prices - to name but a few. In 2012, Raytheon, one of the world's largest defence contractors, announced "expanded business opportunities" arising from "security concerns and their possible consequences," due to the "effects of

climate change" in the form of "storms, droughts, and floods". The rest of the defence sector has been quick to follow.

The implications of a militarised and profit-making approach to climate adaptation and crisis-management are very disturbing - and need to be taken more seriously by anyone concerned with environmental justice, civil liberties and democracy.

Ultimately, a security-led approach to climate change and complex emergencies not only fails to address the fundamental causes of these crises - it will often exacerbate them. Worldwide the increased focus on food security is already driving increased land grabbing. The diversion of resources into military spending and strategies is preventing much needed investment in crisis-prevention and tackling the root causes of human insecurity. Given that climate change will impact disproportionately on the

poorest, a militarisation of our response merely compounds a fundamental injustice - that those least responsible for climate change will be most affected.

In this sense, Hurricane Katrina was a watershed moment and a warning to us all as it laid bare the way in which democratic states would become more preoccupied with the threat posed by their own citizens - instead of taking the bold steps needed to protect current and future populations. Transformed by 9/11, it is this vision of "Homeland Security" that is shaping future responses to emergency - and transforming climate change from a social justice issue to a national security one. We the people have to combine our actions to end worsening climate change with a transformation of the institutions that seek to respond to its impacts.

August 28

[Open Democracy](#)

Elections, Politics and Tamil Nationalism: Hopeless Impasse and Strivings of the People

24 September 2015, by Swasthika Arulingam and Ahilan Kadirgamar

Changing political space

The 2015 parliamentary elections have signified two important changes, both in national politics and the Tamil nationalist political terrain. One, on the national front, aggressive authoritarian Sinhala Buddhist politics has been rejected for the second time, opening democratic possibilities. Two, aggressive exclusivist Tamil nationalist politics of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPFF) has been rejected. These two changes constitute a political opening to address the "national question";

broadly considered to be the problem of minorities in relation to a majoritarian state over the last six decades.

The Rajapaksa regime - for almost a decade starting from late 2005 - shifted the political discourse in the country away from the national consensus on power sharing created through the devolution debate during the previous decade. The centre stage given to Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, continuing militarisation and the promotion of infrastructure development as the solution to the country's problems were put to the test in the presidential elections of January 2015 and the recent

parliamentary elections. The successive and deepening defeats of the politics of the Rajapaksa regime signifies a major shift in the national political terrain.

In the Tamil constituencies and particularly in the North, a major opening was created in January, after the Tamil voters along with other minorities joined sections of the Sinhala constituency and voted out Rajapaksa. The TNA leader Sampanthan was then invited to participate in the National Executive Committee. However, the extreme Tamil nationalist forces were relentless in their attacks on the TNA leadership and the new regime in

Colombo. They further mislead the Tamil community, claiming it was only pressure from pro-LTTE sections of the Tamil diaspora, the Western governments and Tamil Nadu that will bring a lasting solution to Tamil grievances. In this way, the political space to work with the Central Government was constrained.

The despicable culture of branding persons as 'traitors' and eventually assassinating them practiced by the LTTE, now resurfaced in attempts at character assassination of those who wished to engage the South. They attacked Sumanthiran and Sampanthan for attending the Independence Day celebrations. The effigies of Sumanthiran and Sampanthan were burned a number of times, both here and abroad. Ironically, one such effigy burning took place during an awareness march for the disappeared. The purveyors of these attacks on the TNA leadership and to block any efforts to work with the new Government in the South were led by the TNPF, the Tamil Civil Society Forum (TCSF), the pro-LTTE sections of the diaspora, sections of the NPC including Ananthi and Chief Minister Wigneswaran and even Suresh Premachandran a TNA Parliamentarian.

The NPC led by Chief Minister Wigneswaran passed the Genocide Resolution; which served no other purpose than to alienate the South. Indeed, the extreme Tamil nationalists have proven to be the best friends of extremist elements in the South; both need each other to polarise communities and reinforce their nationalist social bases. Wigneswaran was making increasingly virulent statements both in Jaffna and during his visits to India and US, but it was when he finally betrayed the TNA at the height of the parliamentary election campaign that his extremist political stance supporting the TNPF became all too clear. The TNPF campaign suffered a thumping defeat where they polled even less than the UPFA in Jaffna. This resounding defeat for aggressive divisive politics with all the undertones of separatism signals an important shift within the Tamil nationalist space for a negotiated political solution.

Political solution beyond the homeland

Tamil nationalist politics continues to reiterate the idea of a homeland in the North and East. Yet in recent decades and even the post war years, many people in this homeland dream of migrating to Western countries. Most young men and women in Jaffna for example are either expected to marry and go abroad or find employment outside the country. Those youth who cannot migrate to Western countries are seeking employment in the Middle East and the Free Trade Zones in the South. Dubious agents have established networks luring women into exploitative work with dreams of better lifestyles.

In the North and East, people now lack hope for a meaningful future. There is a major divergence between the ideological claims of Tamil nationalist politics and the social and economic realities of the war devastated Tamil population. Given this dilemma of Tamil politics, how do the recent elections and its outcome relate to the contradiction between political demands and social life?

The new government emerging in January 2015, took a few but significant measures to respond to some demands of the Tamil political leadership. Hence both the military governors in the North and the East were replaced, and in Jaffna and Sampur nearly two thousand acres of land held by the military were released for resettlement. These moves have created space to negotiate a political solution.

The contours of a political solution will have to address such questions as the degree of the devolution of powers; mechanisms to share power at the centre including a second chamber such as a senate; the structure of state as to whether it be federal, unitary or neither; and the unit of devolution, particularly the demarcation of the Province. These political demands about autonomy and the state also relate to demilitarisation, ending the climate of fear and guaranteeing

freedom of association; all of which will give some confidence to the people about a secure future in the North and East.

The problem, however, is that the economic and social crisis coming out of both the devastation of war and the failure of post war reconstruction may remain unaddressed even with a political solution. We argue that it is this crisis characterised by falling incomes, lack of employment, widespread indebtedness, deteriorating social and educational institutions, and rising social violence, which are the central causes for the hopelessness of the people. Here, Tamil politics has the important task of providing leadership and hope to a broken society. A political solution is necessary to change the mind set of all communities and for a more robust democracy in the country, but the process of uplifting the people requires a deeper vision and committed mobilisation of society.

NPC and the limitations of devolution

While a mounting crisis of society consumes the North, the NPC which emerged with considerable international pressure has been a complete failure. Until the end of 2014, there was the excuse of the Rajapaksa regime undermining the workings of the NPC. However, its lack of initiatives and, in fact, a tendency to even block positive measures by the Central Government and the donor agencies needs critical scrutiny. The NPC and its Chief Minister have been taking the inflexible view that all donor assistance should come directly to the NPC and bypass the Central Government; this blocks donor assistance where protocols require disbursing funds to the Central Government. In reality, the sad state of the NPC is the lack of capacity to develop project proposals much less a blue print for the economic development of the North.

Chief Minister Wigneswaran was brought for his experience of working

with the state as a former Supreme Court Judge and that he would bridge the North-South divide. However, he has spent his time in the NPC making increasingly polarising speeches and passing rhetorical resolutions instead of statutes that could have turned the wheels of administration. Even after the overthrow of the Rajapaksa regime, and a civilian Governor interested in solving provincial problems was appointed, the NPC failed to address urgent issues. For instance, the position taken by the NPC on the Chunnakam water pollution issue amounted to grasping photo ops at citizens' protests and then making irresponsible dismissive statements on the extent of the problem. The NPC lacked leadership in the aftermath of the rape and murder of Vidhya; they could not initiate a reflective discourse about sexual violence within the community and watched on as violence was unleashed on the courts and over a hundred youth were arrested. The possibility of progress with the greater devolution of power is undermined by such an incompetent NPC.

The TNA's election manifesto of 2015 and its position on a political solution should be read critically given the inaction of the NPC. The TNA states: "Devolution of power on the basis of shared sovereignty shall be over land, law and order, enforcement of the law so as to ensure the safety and security of the Tamil People, socio-economic development including inter-alia health, education, higher and vocational education, agriculture, fisheries, industries, livestock development, cultural affairs, mustering of resources, both domestic and foreign and fiscal powers." However, some of these powers were in fact granted in part through the 2013 Provincial Council elections. Yet, the NPC has done next to nothing other than peddle a discourse of victimhood. Such inaction is alienating the marginalised sections of society needing relief.

What did the NPC do in terms of advocacy to raise concerns of encroaching Indian trawlers and southern fishing boats during the last three years? The NPC members have hardly met the various elected fisher co-operative leaders much less work

with them. The Northern Province had a robust co-operative structure before the war and many of the co-operatives are attempting to reorganise themselves. However, lack of capital, trained human resources and technological assistance severely handicapped them. Why hasn't the NPC, for which co-operatives are a fully devolved subject, not taken any initiatives to revitalise the co-operatives?

Tamil nationalism and its blinders

There are inherent limitations to forms of politics given their class basis. For example, the UNP and SLFP will not resolve the class question or even reduce the class inequalities in our society. Yet depending on the particular bourgeois democratic character of the UNP and SLFP regime there might be more room to engage them on some of the concerns of the working classes. Similarly, Tamil nationalist politics disregards many of the social differences and forms of oppression, and it is the role of dissent to challenge such blindness. For example the issue of Tamil-Muslim relations, class and caste oppression, gendered forms of exploitation and regional inequalities, rarely surface in Tamil nationalist political discourse. Yet, these social concerns are at the core of the social and economic crisis facing Tamil society. Indeed, it is the rural folk in the Vanni, the oppressed castes involved in Palmyrah work, the fisher-folk on the periphery and single women with dependents that face the brunt of the post-war crisis, and not the urban Jaffna Tamil middle class with strong links to the Tamil diaspora.

Tamil political parties rarely engage women in politics, though more than half the northern population is female. Furthermore, only a few women would have stepped up even if the opportunity was given to contest elections. This is because Tamil cultural politics discourages women from taking leadership positions and perpetuates the dependency of women on men through various means. For instance marriages are negotiated with dowry even today. In fact, one of

the main concerns of single mothers with daughters who came before the recent Presidential Commission on Enforced Disappearances was that they did not know how to raise dowry for their daughters. Furthermore, state lands are mostly given to the male in the family. With increasing break up of families in the post war context, women are left to fend for themselves and their children without property. Such economic dependence is also one reason for the continuing cycles of domestic violence against female spouses.

Tamil nationalist politics constantly reiterates how the Tamil community is losing its traditional customs and values in the post war period. It also talks about systemic cultural deterioration introduced by alien forces through modern communication technologies, drugs and alcohol. These factors often blamed for all evils in society today including the rise in sexual violence against women. However, Tamil women often suffer violence within their own family. These are the consequences of a cultural politics repressing women, where the space for self-criticism is denied by Tamil nationalism.

Over the last five years, there has been considerable advocacy for the release of lands acquired by the state and the resettlement of Tamil communities. Resettlement is often discussed in relation to planned colonisation of Sinhalese farmers by the Government. No doubt Sinhalese were settled into the North and East under the Mahaweli development scheme. This discussion however ignores, the eviction of Muslims from the North in 1990 and the "colonisation" of Tamils by the LTTE in Muslim lands. Tamil Nationalist discourse makes claims over the Eastern Province, without considering the almost equal ratio of Tamil and Muslim populations. Are Tamil nationalist majoritarian claims over the Eastern province and the Muslim population no different from Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism?

Tamil nationalism claims it will build a society where all persons will have equal access to social and economic benefits. It overlooks centuries of caste stratification within the Tamil

community. Even during displacement in temporary shelters, caste became a concern as to who lived next to the upper castes. The youth from the North who migrate to Colombo for studies and work, find ways to retain this hierarchy. An oppressed caste student is often excluded from lunch groups and social gatherings. Inter-caste marriages are seen as a despicable crime and the couple will be excluded from their communities. Most of the social investment in the post-war years have been in caste-based temples leading to the reconsolidation of caste structure. However, Tamil nationalist discourse dismisses caste as a minor problem, allowing caste oppression to fester.

The problematic nature of the concept of nationhood put forward by Tamil nationalism ignores forms of discrimination, inequalities and oppression within the community. It often places its demands without giving space for dissent and self-criticism to correct the wrongs. These prejudices are too deep rooted within the Tamil community to be wished away by merely embellishing nationalistic policy documents with phrases of equality for women, creating a casteless society and non-discrimination against the Muslim community. It will require a fundamental rethinking of politics including the central elements of Tamil nationalism.

The way forward

The LTTE decimated Tamil politics through assassinations and a climate of fear, and the Tamil political parties are yet to recover. These political parties lack organic relationships with their constituencies as well as a broad second rung leadership necessary to mobilise the people and address their immediate concerns. In this context, backward cultural politics which represses women and perpetuates caste oppression are filling this

political vacuum. Tamil nationalist politics has been either complicit with or shied from taking on such backwardness within the Tamil community, and has reduced the predicament of the Tamil community to victimhood.

The war has also left deep wounds which have to be addressed through processes of accountability and truth-seeking. However, advancing such processes of accountability require openness and self-criticism among all communities and cannot be approached from a position of victimhood and covering up for the LTTE. The process of accountability, truth-seeking and reconciliation will also require mature political leadership, rather than buckling in the face of aggressive campaigns. In the months ahead, the TNA leadership has the major challenge of finding a political solution and engaging in a credible process of truth-seeking and accountability.

Many issues facing marginal sections of the Tamil community such as access to land, livelihoods and decent education are common issues confronting other marginalised communities in the country. For instance ownership and access to land is not only an issue in the North, but also in the Up-country and deprived Districts such as Moneragala. Uneven development which characterises Jaffna town and the Vanni is a problem in other parts of the country, and the TNA needs to be cognisant of the charge of Jaffna-centrism within Tamil nationalist politics. Will the TNA recognise the need for joint struggles for the welfare of all peoples in the country? And will it have the political maturity to not continue the exclusivist political path which narrow Tamil nationalists have been demanding? Any campaign taken forward by Tamil politics should be mindful of larger possibilities of solidarity with progressive forces, even if majoritarian forces attempt to ethnicise and polarise the country

It is fitting to return to V. Karalasingham's profound words in his seminal essay, 'The Way Out for the Tamil Speaking People', originally published in the Young Socialist in 1962.

We have come against a strange paradox. The Tamil speaking people have been led in the last decade by an apparently resolute leadership guided by the best intentions receiving not merely the widest support of the people but also their enthusiastic cooperation and yet the Tamil speaking people find themselves at the lowest ebb in their history. Despite all their efforts the people have suffered one defeat after another, one humiliation after another. How is one to explain the yawning gulf between the strivings of the people and the virtually hopeless impasse in which they find themselves?

The fundamental flaw in the political strategy of the Federal Party is their conception that the fight for the rights of the Tamil speaking people is the responsibility solely of the Tamil speaking people themselves and that it is only the Tamils who can wage this fight and that they must do this as Tamils.

This warning of Karalasingham over fifty years ago is just as valid today. Will Tamil politics eschew its exclusivism and begin working with the Muslims, the Up-Country Tamils and the progressive Sinhala forces? Will Tamil politics begin to address the inequalities and oppression within its fold, whether it be of caste, gender, class or regional differences? All this may require questioning the Tamil nationalist trajectory of politics. The much needed alternative politics should draw on the strivings of the people and strengthen dissent, engage the legacy of the war through processes of accountability and self-criticism, move on a political solution and address the social crisis in the post-war North and East.

Racist Terror, Then and Now

23 September 2015, by **Martin Oppenheimer**

In the June 17, 2015 Charleston, South Carolina church shooting, the 21-year-old assassin Dylan Roof apparently melded these fears into one, common among many klansmen and neo-Nazis (an overlapping category) as well as segments of the Republican Party, that the entire white race is in danger of being diminished if not extinguished by racial minorities. This view extends to some anti-immigration groups.

“Lynching,” often with the participation or collusion of police and occasionally even the armed forces, resulted in the deaths at minimum of 4,000 Blacks in 12 Southern states from 1877 to 1950, according to the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama.

These events include “pogroms” in which whites invaded and destroyed Black neighborhoods as well as “border wars” when whites resist Blacks “invading” so-called “white” areas to integrate housing or to utilize “white” public facilities. [The term “pogrom” is borrowed from the history of anti-Jewish riots in Tsarist Russia. —ATC]

Charles M. Blow, in his *N.Y. Times* Op-Ed column, attacked the sloppy use of the term “lynch mobs” by politicians and others who have compared protesters against police killings to “lynch mobs.” Recall that during the confirmation hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas for the U.S. Supreme Court, he termed the charges of sexual harassment made against him an attempted “legal lynching.” Blow, in trying to overcome this dishonesty, cites a recent historical survey of actual (not metaphorical) “lynchings” stating that 4,743 persons including not a few whites (and probably some Native Americans and Asians) were “lynched” between 1882 and 1968.

Defining Lynching?

But what exactly qualifies as a “lynching”? These studies, where the numbers run to more than 4,000, are both based on a rather legalistic definition: “There must be legal evidence that a person was killed. That person must have met death illegally. A group of three or more persons must have participated in the killing. The group must have acted under the pretext of service to justice, race or tradition.”

There are several problems with this. Three or more is an arbitrary number, and of course three people are hardly a “mob.” The definition excludes many racist murders committed by one or two persons, as in the case of 14-year-old Emmett Till, murdered in Mississippi in 1955 after a woman accused Till of whistling at her. Her husband and a friend kidnapped him, shot him, and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River. What of Herbert Lee, an NAACP activist shot to death by a Mississippi state legislator acting alone, in 1961? Dylan Roof, the Charleston church shooter also seemingly acted as a “lone-wolf.” There have been countless others.

Second, this definition does not address the many “disappeared,” where there is no “legal evidence” of a murder. During the hunt for the three missing Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers after they were killed in June, 1964, other bodies, missing for weeks or even years, were found.

In her new book *Racial Reckoning*, Oberlin College history professor Renee Romano provides the histories of 38 murders in the South from 1951 to 1968 chosen from among least 200; an Arkansas research center counted 53 in Mississippi alone from 1955-1970. Many of Romano’s cases

are familiar: In the case of Emmett Till, an all-white jury acquitted the two killers who were in effect acting as vigilantes “defending white womanhood.” No arrests were made in Herbert Lee’s shooting even though there were witnesses, one of whom, an African-American, was himself killed to keep him quiet.

Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot by an Alabama State Trooper in Marion, Alabama on February 26, 1965 following a civil rights march. The trooper was not even reprimanded. This shooting is depicted (with a slight change in locale) in the film *Selma*. Also depicted in the film is the September, 1963 Birmingham, Alabama church bombing that killed four girls aged 11-14. That case and many others were reopened years later, as Romano recounts, due to campaigns initiated by members of the families of the deceased and other civil rights veterans as well as by a tiny handful of local white prosecutors.

Although most white-on-Black racially motivated killings took place in the states of the former Confederacy, there were racist murders in many other states over the years. Nor were Blacks the only victims. After 11 Italian-Americans had been acquitted of a murder in New Orleans in 1891, a mob broke into the jail and lynched them. It is estimated that between 1885 and 1915 some 50 Italian-Americans in states from Louisiana to New York were murdered because of their ethnicity.

Almost needless to say, numerous whites aligned with the civil rights movement or with integrated labor organizing were also targeted because they challenged the racist status quo. Others became victims of 1919’s “red scare.” In November of that year there was a shootout between “patriotic” townspeople and members of the I.W.W., the infamous Centralia,

Washington, massacre. A number of the “wobblies” were arrested. A mob led by American Legionnaires later broke into the jail, seized Wesley Everest, an I.W.W. “agitator” and war veteran, emasculated him and hung him from a railroad bridge. Others of the arrested were tried the following spring and seven were found guilty of second degree murder of four Legionnaires during the shootout. [13]

Race Riots, Mob Murders, Vigilantes

“Lynch mobs” do not always lynch in the literal sense. A typical “pogrom” took place following a union meeting of Black sharecroppers in Elaine, Arkansas on September 30, 1919. The meeting (protected by armed guards) was attacked by 500-1,000 armed whites. By the time it was over on October 2, more than 200 Blacks and 2 whites had been killed and numerous Black-owned homes and businesses destroyed. Union members were arrested and two were sentenced to death. All convictions were reversed by 1925.

Another pogrom took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma in May, 1921, triggered by rumors that a white woman had been attacked by an African-American man. A white mob invaded the Black neighborhood of Greenwood; despite a defense by armed Blacks, some 1,500 Black-owned homes and a prosperous Black business district were destroyed and 10,000 left homeless. Some 300 died. The pogrom was finally halted only after martial law was declared. Another pogrom, the Detroit “race riot” of June, 1943 was set off when a white sailor’s girlfriend was allegedly insulted by a Black man. A white mob looted and burned Black-owned stores; 25 Blacks and 9 whites were killed, 17 of the Blacks by police.

In all these cases a lot more was going on than the headlines revealed. In 1919, “red summer,” there was a widespread fear of “bolshevism,” and unionization by Blacks clearly challenged the ruling order. In Tulsa, there was tension over returning Black war veterans endangering white

jobs in a time of unemployment. The area was rife with Ku Klux Klan activity. In Detroit, in the midst of World War II, increased housing for Black workers in industry resulted in panic among whites at this challenge to their “turf.”

By contrast, most civil rights era murders were not committed in the course of a pogrom or by lynch mobs, i.e. crowds mobilized by some incident such as an arrest of an alleged violator of racial tradition, then breaking into the jail and “taking the law in their own hands” by hanging him or her in open view of hundreds or thousands.

Targeting Churches, Activists, Civilians

Typically, the murders of the 1950s, 1960s, and later were committed by individuals or small groups of organized vigilantes, often klansmen and their friends acting “under the pretext of service to justice, race or tradition,” and often with the passive or active participation of local sheriffs or police (many of whom were klan members themselves). Vigilantes act when there is a perception that the normal course of law cannot or will not protect the traditional ways of the community, which in the South meant segregation in all of its dimensions. There are also numerous cases where Blacks were randomly shot down by passing motorists without any apparent motive except bigotry, which is itself often the product of fear.

The Charleston Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church murders have once again reminded us of the vulnerability of African-American churches. They have been targeted by klansmen and other racists for, literally, centuries. The 1963 Birmingham church bombing was perhaps the most notorious of many attacks. The Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner were murdered after they had been investigating the arson of the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Nor did church arson cease after the 1960s: there was a rash of attacks in the late 1990s so intense that President Bill Clinton formed a National Church Arson Task Force, which identified 225 attacks on Black churches between 1995-1998 alone. A number of church fires came in the wake of Charleston and the resulting Confederate flag controversy. Some have been declared to be arson.

Assassinations

Police were involved in a number of shootings of Black men, almost all unarmed, “in the line of duty” during the civil rights era. One of the most notorious cases in the North was the assassination of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by Chicago police on December 4, 1969. Hampton, 21, was the leader of the Panthers in Illinois.

The two Panthers were shot while asleep in their apartment. Information concerning their activities and whereabouts was transmitted to Chicago police by J. Edgar Hoover’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), devised by the FBI not only to spy on civil rights and peace organizations, but actively to disrupt and destroy some of them.

A federal grand jury cleared the police, but later the families of the two victims won a major civil suit against several levels of officialdom for their illegal actions and their complicity in the murders. [14]

In the past several years, as readers are well aware, a series of Black and Hispanic men and women have been killed by police (including in a few instances, minority police), leading to the development of the Black Lives Matter movement. Conservative pundits, ever seeking ways to deny that racism exists and for ways to blame the victim, have countered with the statistics of Black on Black homicide, which are indeed grim. According to FBI figures, in the single year 2013, 2,491 Black Americans (almost all men) were murdered, 90% by other Black men, while 3,005 whites were killed, 83% by other whites. [15]

Obviously, since African-Americans constitute only around 14% of the U.S. population, their homicide rate is far in excess of that of whites. Nevertheless, that's a lot of white-on-white homicide. Where's the hand-wringing by conservatives here? Where's the scolding about moral failings? (An examination of the reasons for these homicides and the disparity between Black and white homicides is beyond the scope of this essay.)

Although homicides other than by police are fairly accurately tabulated, we actually do not know how many "ARDs" (Arrest Related Deaths) there are. The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that its ARD data cover only 28-49% of deaths, depending on different ways of collecting data. [16] *The Wall Street Journal* (December 12, 2014) found that "hundreds of homicides by law enforcement agencies" were missing from FBI figures. Many deaths are simply not reported. Some police departments don't supply data to the FBI. As for officially-recorded ARDs, about two-thirds are classified as homicides. The others include illnesses, suicides, and real or alleged accidents such as that of Freddie Gray last April in Baltimore.

Between 1999 and 2011, conservatives are quick to point out, official data show 2,151 whites versus "merely" 1,130 Blacks were killed by "legal intervention," meaning police, sheriffs, deputies, security guards, etc, demonstrating supposedly that the police are not racist. [17]

In fact, although more whites were killed in total, Blacks aged 20-24 were killed in vastly disproportionate numbers, about 7 times the average for all races. Native Americans aged 25-34 were next, at about 6½ times the average, with Blacks aged 25-34 at nearly 6 times the average. Latinos are also killed in disproportionate numbers. The numbers of official deaths holds pretty steady year by year, although given the increase in population, it could be argued that the rate of police homicides is declining.

Killing Driven by Fear

These figures bring us back to the major factor underlying the history of African-American deaths at the hands of whites: fear. Police shooters commonly defend their actions by saying they feared for their lives, even when the victims were unarmed and running or driving away.

How can we account for this? One excuse has been that the police are poorly trained and use force unnecessarily. [18] No doubt this is a factor. However, media coverage has overlooked another issue.

There is a lot of research on "the police personality" going back many years, although controversy remains. [19] Many police share certain traits with many of the working class (both white and Black) from which they are disproportionately recruited, especially a tendency towards a rigid black/white, good/evil moralistic view of the world, and a punitive attitude towards those who violate conventional values.

This attitude becomes cemented by the fact that police have "more contact with the seamy side of life than most people." Research indicates that officers (including Blacks) evidence more prejudice when they work in African-American neighborhoods than when they work in mixed or white (and less poor) areas of a city. Their politics on the average tend to be conservative, partly because liberals select themselves out of the recruitment pool.

One result is the continued stereotyping of the Black male as potentially dangerous no matter in what situation—as when even a Black Harvard professor attempting to enter his own home is viewed as a possible criminal and arrested, as happened to Henry Louis Gates in July 2009. Gates is relatively short and walks with a cane, and was hardly a threat. It is unlikely that attitudes deeply rooted in family upbringing and reinforced by "continual exposure to the very worst in life" as a cop can be changed to any

significant degree.

The good news is that since the publicity over Ferguson, and with the help of increasing numbers of smart-phone camera users, police killings that used to be hidden are now in the open. Today each case of a police shooting is much more likely to see the light of day, even though the police are nearly always (so far) exonerated.

As the Black Lives Matter movement continues to gain traction, reforms in police practices such as police body cameras, and banning shooting at moving cars or at people running away, are taking place. Nevertheless, lest such reforms languish, pressure by community groups and their progressive allies cannot be allowed to diminish. And parents may still probably want to have "that talk" with their African-American youngsters.

The Persisting Ultra-Right

The Charleston church murders put the spotlight on the continued presence of ultra-right-wing, racist organizations, which for the most part are also anti-immigrant. Even the various klans of the South survive. Dylan Roof seems to have had some connection to the Council of Conservative Citizens, an outgrowth of the segregationist (white) Citizens' Councils.

Several Republican figures, mostly from the South, quickly distanced themselves from their former support for the Council. Nevertheless, years of research by "watch-dog" groups indicate that "the political right is arrayed along a continuum," rather than being sharply distinct from the "ultras." [20]

This continuum shares the fear that the white-dominated status quo is in danger. "Mainstream" conservatives find their ideological home in a set of think tanks and policy planning organizations that provide their talking points. These groups, such as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Pioneer Fund, are in turn supported

by dozens of corporations.

Black Lives Matter and other grassroots anti-racist organizations understand, in a general way, that the murders of African-Americans over the years (and the ideologies behind them)

are rooted in a system of oppression that requires repressive institutions and practices to survive. This system includes the “prison-industrial complex,” discriminatory policing, surveillance of progressive organizations and individuals, and

biased media coverage. This culture of oppression has been tolerated by too many people much too long.

*This article appears in the September-October issue of **Against the Current**.*

‘People are becoming conscious of the futility of the politics of racism’

21 September 2015, by Vickramabahu Karunarathne

How do you view the results of the parliamentary elections?

The elections have demonstrated once again that people have moved sharply away from fascist, communal forces represented by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This trend could be seen in the presidential elections in January this year. There is a positive gain from this election to show that more and more people are becoming conscious of the futility of the politics of racism. The elections have also reinforced the need for strengthening liberal, democratic forces in the country.

What is your take on the vote share of the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) which is, according to my calculations, around 40 per cent? Does this mean that a substantial section of the voters in this country supports Rajapaksa, who was the UPFA’s candidate for the post of Prime Minister?

Let me go by the number of votes polled by the UPFA, which is around 47 lakh. Of this figure, you have to remove at least 15 lakh, which, I believe, is the share of Maithripala Sirisena, the head of the UPFA. So, only about 30 lakh votes are Mahinda [Rajapaksa]’s. And, for this, I say, “hats off, Mahinda [Rajapaksa].” But, as I have said earlier, more and more people are moving away from him, which is the reality. However, what I feel is that had Maithripala acted

much earlier against Mahinda, it would have been better. This would have further eroded the appeal of Mahinda.

Was it not against the spirit of democracy for Maithripala Sirisena to say before the parliamentary elections that he would not make Mahinda Rajapaksa Prime Minister even if the UPFA were to get a majority?

No. Maithripala was compelled to take that position in order to defeat undemocratic, fascist forces which was the best way to do it. I strongly believe that Mahinda should be stopped from capturing power again. I say this as I know him well. He and I worked together at one point of time.

Is that so? When was that?

It was around 1990 that we worked together on issues regarding the working class. I had even taken him to Australia in 1992 when the Green Left movement wanted a leader of such a background to take part in its campaign.

Though he was then an extremely Left radical, he was silent on the national question, the Tamil question. I had sensed that he had all the parameters of some kind of a fascist leader. I had found that he could be a dangerous leader. So, I had opposed him from the period [in April 2004] he became the Prime Minister. I have been opposed to him since then.

How do you view the performance

of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna?

There was certainly attraction [among people] towards the party. Leaders of the JVP talked in a sensible manner on many issues. But, in the final stages of the election campaign, their language was no different from others’, especially on the Tamil question. By then it had become a straight contest—either the UNP or Mahinda and the UPFA. So, the people preferred to support the UNP.

Were you approached by the UNP?

Yes. They even offered me a slot in the national list. But I did not take it. For ideological reasons, especially their economic policies, I cannot join them. We contested in five electoral districts on our own. We did not get any seat and we got only 300 votes, but our campaign against Mahinda was very successful. Our main goal was to defeat him. Leaving aside our differences with the UNP or others on economic issues, we are willing to work along with others to safeguard democracy or on social issues.

What should the new government do to address the Tamil question?

First, the 13th Constitutional Amendment should be implemented fully. When we say the 13th Amendment should be implemented, this also means the devolution of powers on police and land to the administration of the provincial

council. Second, the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) should be carried out.

As for investigation into any crime, there should be a credible domestic investigation mechanism which is acceptable to the international community. We have enough resources, enough people to carry out this task. Then, the merger of the North and the East.

Is that possible?

Why not? When you can create

Greater Colombo, citing commonality as the reason, why not the merger of the North and the East? History and commonality demand it.

What is your stand on federalism?

I am not sure whether the TNA [Tamil National Alliance] has understood the concept fully. But, the bottom line is greater autonomy to provinces. This can be done under the framework of a unitary state. Look how India is managing its affairs. It is not a federal country but more powers have been given to States.

What should be done to improve the lot of the people in the plantations?

At present, there are three or four Pradeshiya Sabhas covering each plantation. This is why they are not able to tackle effectively the private managements of the plantations, which do not take these local bodies seriously. So, each plantation should be made into one urban local body, say municipal council. This will facilitate better development of the area.

[Frontline](#)

Sexist rampage against resistance to memoranda: The case of the President of the Greek Parliament

18 September 2015, by Sonia Mitrailia

The former President of the Greek Parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou, is both an emblematic figure and the main victim of this truly violent campaign. It is clearly no coincidence that the vigour, vulgarity and violence of this campaign have considerably increased since she created the Committee for the Truth on the Greek Public Debt, and since she has become the figurehead of the intransigent opposition to the submission of the Tsipras government to the will of Greece's creditors.

Taking a closer look, we see that every day for the last seven months, all the declarations made by the President of the Greek parliament are presented as delirious by the mainstream media. Headlines like 'Yesterday's Delirium from Zoe', frequently replaced, in big gutter press headlines, by things like, 'Can't Zoe's bloke shut her up?' With the 20 September election campaign in full swing the main private television channels have introduced a daily special "what they say" column in their principal news programme, which shows what the social media

are saying about Zoe. It is filled with cartoons, it is often obscene and illustrated with unfairly retouched photos and nasty drawings from doubtful sources.

There is much worse. Even the MPs do not shy from calling the President of the Greek Parliament a "sexually frustrated orang-utan" or appeal to her husband who is a captain in the merchant navy "to quickly come ashore and calm her down". The President of the Greek Parliament branded a newspaper headline in the parliamentary chamber, that called for her husband to "shut her up".

We could continue a long list of these verbal and sexist attacks suffered by the President of the Greek Parliament. The case of Zoe Konstantopoulou is important because it is emblematic of a violent sexist offensive by various powers (political, apparatus, media, mafia ...) against the rebellious women who continue to claim their rights and the rights of the oppressed. [21] From the moment Zoe K. stepped up to become an important figure of the

opposition to the Memoranda that have ruined Greece, she was denigrated, vilified, humiliated, slandered ... in short, demonized by those that are on the Troika bandwagon. The attacks against her are so persistent, organized, coordinated and systematic that they can only be perceived as a real strategy of warfare aimed at her political elimination from the public arena.

This is a modern-day witch hunt!

It would be wrong to attribute this "extremely sexist phenomenon" to phallogocentric or random individual behavior or anachronistic mentalities, as is claimed by the feminist politics section of the (old) Syriza in a statement entitled "The sexist attacks against Konstantopoulou are anachronistic stereotypes". This is a modern-day witch hunt!

What does the witch hunt that

developed at the dawn of capitalism have in common with the current violent sexist phenomenon, which can easily turn into a contemporary witch hunt? Witch hunts appeared in Europe around the turn of the 16th century, when capitalism made its first appearance. [22] It was characterised by the systematic diabolical presentation of women as witches in a period of crisis, similar to the current debt crisis, in which women take a front line part in revolts and resistance.

Today, as in those times, we are living in a period when production and reproduction relations are being reorganised in a way that is unfavourable to women. Those that have political powers, positions and visibility are totally unaware of this phenomenon.

At the time of the witch hunts women were excluded from the guilds, education and the common lands. They were isolated and locked inside the houses and bedrooms. Today they are run out of the public eye and pressed into the free service of those tasks that the welfare state has abandoned under the pressure of neoliberal austerity policies. The enormous savings made by the state is used to pay the national debt.

It is no coincidence that well known feminine stereotypes such as "A woman's place is in her home" appeared at the time of witch hunts. Women who were not afraid to publicly say what they thought, who were sure of themselves, were criticised and said to be tiresome aggressive women who brewed trouble and disturbed the public peace. To be a woman involved in

public affairs was a crime that deserved to be punished at the stake.

You may well think this is reminiscent of our present day austerity policies and authoritarianism, and you would be right. In today's Greece of human and social disasters, all those who rush to the defence of the torturers and their inhuman policies (media, political parties, the establishment, corrupt politicians, occult circles of power, employers' unions and even Mafiosi) play the most diabolical sexist cards to the limit, as never before, to smash the action of women who lead the struggles against austerity policies and the debt system, who defend migrants, refugees, the environment and the many victims of the currently applied barbarous policies.

This is the standard practice for establishing Mafia law, the law of the boss, the law of the pimp, sexual slavery and sex-trafficking. Fear is the tool, violence and torture are the means to wipe out the heart, soul, dignity and self-esteem of women to gain the unconditional control of their bodies to be sacrificed on the altar of maximum profits of the prostitution system.

That said, one can only be critical of the attitude of an institution such as the Tsipras Government's General Secretariat for gender equality, created to protect all women who are victims of sexist aggression, that remained totally unmoved by the sexist lynching that the President of the Greek Parliament has been subjected to. This negative impression becomes worse when one considers that the victim is a highly visible public figure, a leader of the Syriza party of which the Prime Minister and

the General Secretary are also members. This silence is surprising, and edifying, when we learn that the same General Secretary, who is so silent about the sexist attacks on the President of the Greek Parliament, rushed into action to condemn a daily newspaper that made sexist attacks on the Romanian Delia Velculescu, who is the current chief representative of the 'Troika' that is imposing its dictatorship on Greece.

We have dwelt on this question because it is emblematic of the neoliberal period in which we are living. We think that to effectively defend our rights as a gender a new radical feminist movement must be conceived, that will grow out of the difficult struggles that women must fight against the social realities of this early 21st century, against the debt system and patriarchal fundamentalisms of all kinds. It is high time to create a new feminist movement that casts aside the present feminist trend that only deals with the political aspects of gender identity and refuses to acknowledge the connection between commonplace abuse suffered by women and class struggle as well as other forms of inequality and discrimination.

Conclusion

The sexism that is currently rampant in Greece is a fearsome weapon to divide struggles and to wipe out all forms of resistance. This is not only a women's struggle, but a struggle that must involve us all, far beyond Greek borders.

Translated by Mike Krolikowski, Christine Pagnouille.

Jill Stein Campaign Needs Support Now

17 September 2015, by Howie Hawkins

Sanders supporters are going to need a Plan B when in all probability he loses the Democratic nomination. The way to make sure an alternative is

ready in 2016 is to take action now in 2015.

Matching Funds

The Stein campaign is now raising funds in order to qualify for presidential primary matching funds. When qualified, all donations of between \$5 and \$250 from an individual will be matched dollar for dollar. In other words, an individual's total donations up to \$250 will be doubled by the matching funds system.

In order to qualify, the Stein campaign must raise at least \$5,000 in qualified contributions in at least 20 states. The Federal Election Commission's Presidential Election Campaign Fund will distribute up to a maximum of about \$25 million in matching funds to any one candidate, provided the campaign does not spend more than about \$50 million on its primary campaign. These spending limits are why Bernie Sanders is not using public funding for his primary campaign. He began his campaign with a goal of raising \$50 million by the end of 2015.

In 2012, Stein campaign met the matching funds qualifying threshold toward the end of the campaign. This time, the goal is to qualify a year ahead of the election. Donations up to \$250 will be matched until the Green primary season ends at the Green National Convention in Houston, Texas, August 4-7, 2016. As of Labor Day weekend, the Stein campaign was qualified in four states and more than half way to the qualifying threshold in another 10 states. Weekly state-by-state updates of the matching funds campaign are here.

Ballot Access

The Stein campaign needs donations and matching funds now because now is the time to support state Green Party ballot access petitioning. The Green Party currently qualifies for the ballot in 22 states (including D.C.). See the map here.

In previous presidential elections, the Greens have qualified the party on between 25 (Cobb 2004) and 44 (Nader 2000) state ballots. Stein was on 37 ballots in 2012, which covered

85% of the nation's voters. But in every year, the Green ballot access drive began in the Spring of the year of the election and consumed the campaign's resources through Labor Day. For the 2016 cycle, the Stein campaign and the Green Party have resolved to do as much of the ballot access drive as possible in 2015 and early 2016. The Stein campaign aspires to qualify in all 50 states and D.C. and is supporting state party ballot access drives.

People who want to help with ballot access petition drives can volunteer with the Stein campaign, the Green Party's Ballot Access Committee, and/or their state Green Party.

Plan B for Sanders Supporters

Socialists committed to independent political action are not likely to persuade many progressives enthused by the Sanders' candidacy to drop Sanders for the Stein campaign before the Democratic primaries are held. But after the 13-state March 1 Super Tuesday primary dominated by southern states, in all likelihood Bernie Sanders' campaign will have reached the end of its rope. Sanders' supporters will then need a Plan B. If Jill Stein is on enough ballots at that time to be considered a credible alternative, the question for progressives will then be, Hillary or Jill?

If ballot access is a necessary condition for credibility, progressive positions on the issues are another condition. Stein should be attractive to Sanders supporters on the issues because she shares and goes beyond Sanders' progressive positions on economic policy and climate action. She also foregrounds and goes far beyond Sanders on racial justice, civil liberties, and anti-imperialism. See her platform summary here.

Green Party Nomination

Process

The national and state Green parties will remain impartial until the Green National Convention in August 2016 in order to ensure a fair nominating process that has legitimacy. Four other candidates are seeking the Green nomination. None of them have raised funds and hired staff. None of them are seeking to qualify for presidential primary matching funds or support state party ballot access drives with resources and volunteers. Stein has broad good will across the Green Party for running in 2012 the most effective Green presidential campaign since Nader in 2000. The other candidates will serve to raise perspectives that will help the party have a full debate on program and strategy going forward. You can read about all the Green candidates here.

It is safe to say, however, that Stein is the presumptive nominee. No major issue or debate divides the candidates or the Green Party as the Greens were divided in 2004, when David Cobb upset Ralph Nader for the nomination. The party was divided in 2004 over a "safe states" strategy of accommodating the Democratic Kerry ticket in battleground states vs. the Ralph Nader/Peter Camejo ticket's commitment to political independence and vigorous campaigns in every state.

Having survived the post-2000 backlash by liberal Democrats against Nader and having learned hard lessons from the self-defeating and demoralizing safe states strategy in 2004, the Greens' commitment to independent political action is today stronger than it has ever been. Very few Greens have been attracted to Sanders' Democratic primary campaign. The Greens are focused on their own campaigns in 2015 and 2016.

Goals for Independent Left Politics in 2016

No one is under any illusion that Jill Stein can win the presidential election

in 2016. The goals of her campaign are practical.

One goal is to give voice to progressive movements and positions in the 2016 presidential election. She hopes to shape the policy debate by denying the Democratic nominee the ability to take progressive votes for granted. She wants to help movement activists see that independent politics is a more powerful approach than dependent politics on Democratic "allies." Without the threat of taking votes away, movement demands are ignored by the Democrats who think they have progressive votes securely in their pocket.

Because Stein will be on the ballot in the battleground states like Florida, Virginia, and Ohio, she will get a platform from which to speak when she is attacked by Democrats as a "spoiler." That will give her the opportunity to respond that neither major party candidate has real solutions to the problems we face and to lay out her progressive alternatives.

The Stein campaign is also engaged in efforts to open up the presidential debates. In 2012, Stein and her Vice Presidential running mate, Cheri Honkala, were arrested for attempting to enter with credentials to view presidential debate site at Hofstra University. They were shackled to chairs for eight hours incommunicado from the media and their lawyers and staff with 16 security officers watching them. After the debate and media were over and gone, they were released. Stein is a plaintiff in two pending lawsuits by coalitions of election reformers seeking to open the presidential debates to third party candidates. One lawsuit is against the Federal Election Commission and the other lawsuit is against the Commission on Presidential Debates, a private organization controlled by the Democratic and Republican parties that has set the terms of the presidential debates since 1988.

Ballot Lines for Local Independent

Political Action

Another goal of the Stein is to secure state ballot lines for the next election cycle. About 30 state ballot lines are within reach of the Stein presidential campaign. 19 states can secure ballot lines for the next election cycle with presidential votes of between 0.5% and 3%. 12 more states require 5%. One requires 10% and another 20%. The other 17 states and D.C. have requirements unrelated to the presidential vote.

Ballot lines are essential institutional infrastructure for an independent political insurgency. Without ballot status in many states, the obstacles to ballot access for local, state, and congressional candidates are very difficult if not completely insurmountable. The Greens want ballot lines so they can focus back to local elections and base building, which has always been the Greens' primary political strategy. About 130 Greens currently hold elected office and many more Greens are the stalwart organizers and activists in grassroots movements (as opposed to the funded, staff-run nonprofits that work in the Democratic Party orbit). Running for president and governor in many states has always been for the Greens mainly about securing ballot lines to enable local candidacies.

5% Vote in 2016 = \$10 Million Public Funding in 2020

5% of the vote nationally is another important threshold. If the Stein campaign reached it, the Green Party would qualify for general election public funding in 2020 that will be worth over \$10 million. The public funding for minor parties that qualify (5% to 25% in the previous election) is based on the ratio of the percentage received by the minor party to the average percentage received by the major parties. The minor party gets a grant that is that ratio's fraction of the major parties' grants. Until Congress passed and Obama signed a bill eliminating public funding for national conventions last year, 5% would have

also qualified the Green Party for about \$2 million for organizing their 2020 national convention, which could have been used to support state Green parties to get organized to elect their delegations and hold their primaries, caucuses, platform hearings, candidate debates, and so forth.

Because both major parties and their candidates have so much private money to run with these days, public funding for conventions is not needed by them, nor is public funding for presidential primary and general elections. Only independents like Jill Stein, Gary Johnson (Libertarian), and Buddy Roemer (Reform) used the presidential primary matching funds system in 2012. None of the Democratic or Republican candidates sought matching funds in 2012 and none have so far in 2015-16. Likewise, after Obama in 2008 became the first major party candidate to reject general election public funding, both major party candidates in 2012 refused to use it.

Now there are proposals in Congress to eliminate the Presidential Election Campaign Fund, which funds both the primary matching funds system and the grants to qualified candidates in the general election. These proposals come at a time when liberal campaign finance reform advocates have retreated from full public funding of all qualified candidates based on equal public grants, which was adopted by Maine in 1996 and Arizona in 1998. The reformers have since made their peace with privately financed elections as long as there is a public financing add on, especially since advocates for these partial public campaign finance reforms have received major funding from billionaires. So partial public funding based on matching funds or voucher systems is on the legislative agenda in state houses and Congress. This retreat by liberal reformers makes seeking to qualify the Green Party for the 2020 general election funding all the more a worthy goal. If a minor party like the Greens does not qualify for it in 2016, the Presidential Election Campaign Fund programs may not survive until 2020.

Is 5% a realistic goal? If the anti party establishment insurgencies of Sanders

in the Democrats and Trump in the Republicans fall short and the "Dynasty Election" scenario between a Clinton and a Bush prevails, 5% may not be beyond reach for Stein. All we can do is be prepared to take

advantage of that scenario, or many other plausible two-party choices that will disgust millions of voters. Being prepared means—now—donating to the Stein campaign and then petitioning for Green Party ballot

access when the drive comes to a state near you.

September 9, 2015

[Solidarity](#)

The Islamic State, or the main reason for the millions of refugees from Syria?

15 September 2015, by Joseph Daher

To be clear, the IS is an ultra reactionary and barbaric organization, killing and terrorizing whole populations of all religions and ethnicities. This ultra reactionary organization forced into exile hundreds of thousands of people, and probably even more than one million, between Iraq and Syria [23] This movement must be fought relentlessly, like other religious fundamentalist organizations of the region such as Al Qaeda and other jihadist and Salafist forces backed by Gulf monarchies or private networks of these countries, but before reaching the solution against such organizations, I would like to simply remind people of some facts about the reasons for the exile of millions of people from Syria.

Firstly, the establishment of the IS in Syria was in Autumn 2013 and millions of Syrians were displaced outside and inside the country before that .

On September 3, 2013, the UNHCR declared that the number of Syrians forced to flee as refugees in foreign countries since the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria in March 2011 had exceeded the threshold of two millions. This meant an average of about 5000 Syrians fleeing on daily basis to neighboring countries. Over 97% of Syrian refugees were hosted in countries located in the surrounding area. In addition, some 4.25 million people were displaced within Syria, according to statistics dating from August 27, 2013 published by the UN Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs. Taken together, these figures totaled more than six million displaced people.

The reasons that prompted millions of people to flee their homes was the Assad regime that killed, bombarded and repressed large parts of the Syrian population who had risen against its tyranny and barbarism. Here are some examples.

In October 2012, the entire Al Masaa Arbaeen's neighborhood in the city of Hama, whose inhabitants were seen as favorable to the opposition of the Damascus regime, was destroyed. 3256 buildings in total were completely destroyed.

In May 2013, the historic pedestrian bridge over the Euphrates in the city of Deir Zor was bombed by the Syrian regime. It allowed to access the city of Hasakeh. Its destruction deprived of access tens of thousands of people.

In July 2013, in the city of Homs, called the capital of the revolution at the beginning of the uprising, in which some 900,000 people were living at the beginning of 2011, 60-70% of Khaldiye district was destroyed, most the houses were uninhabitable, the neighborhoods of Old Homs were in ruin and destruction of the besieged neighborhoods of Homs was done in a systematic way, according to the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights. The city was under siege and bombardment of the regime's forces since February 2012.

From the end of summer 2012, the regime began to bomb certain neighborhoods of Aleppo.

The Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus has suffered a hard and strict siege imposed from summer 2013, with the prohibition of movement of persons and foodstuffs, to the neighborhoods that joined the uprising South of Damascus, by the Assad regime and Palestinians organizations linked to the latter, in particular the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC), controlled by Ahmad Jibril. There was between 15 000 and 20 000 people in the camp in November 2014, before 2011 Yarmouk had a total population of 250,000 people.

This is not to mention the massive use of rape by the security forces and militias of the regime against the female opponents and civilians and others or the chemical attacks of the regime against some regions such as in the countryside of Damascus region, Ghouta, in August 2013.

But what about after the establishment of the IS in October 2013 in Syria? Was this still the case? Yes absolutely, let's look at the facts for the first six months of 2015. The helicopters of the Assad regime dropped 10.423 barrels bombs on various regions of the country, while the regime forces killed almost 90% of the total civilians dead over the same period, seven times more than the IS.

In March 2015, human rights defense NGOs investigated the terrible atrocities of the regime: almost 13,000 Syrians have died under torture in its jails since the beginning of the uprising. Tens of thousands more are still languishing in the regime's prisons, and many are missing.

In May 2015, around hundred people, mostly civilians, were killed in a raid of the Syrian military aviation on a market in the city of Douma.

Barbarism has many faces in Syria and that of the Assad regime is the worst. The Assad regime and its allies (Iran, Russia and Hezbollah) are responsible in its vast majority of the more than 200 000 people killed in Syria and of the around 10 million of external and internal refugees since the uprising began in March 2011.

Conclusion

So what is the solution? The solution does not lie in the collaboration with authoritarian regimes like the Assad regime. The solution is of course to oppose the IS and other reactionary and jihadists forces, which as a reminder the Assad regime has encouraged their developments at the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria while killing and repressing democratic and progressive forces,

but also and especially the barbaric, criminal and authoritarian regime of Assad. The Assad regime is the main responsible of the disaster in Syria and of the exile of millions of Syrians. Both actors are barbaric and they feed themselves and are therefore to be overthrown to hope to build a democratic, secular and social society in Syria and elsewhere.

This requires the support of democratic and popular movements that oppose these two counter revolutionary forces and different forms of imperialism (United States and Russia) and sub-regional imperialisms (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey) that are all fighting against the interests of the people in struggle in the region. These activists still exist in Syria struggling every day, despite all the difficulties, against the Assad regime and the Islamic fundamentalist forces [24] For example, let's also consider the case of Iraq, the country in which the IS originated. In recent weeks a popular movement developed and expanded, which challenged the regime in Baghdad, backed by Iran. These massive demonstrations called for a secular state in opposition to a sectarian state, against the division between Sunni and Shi'a populations, for women's rights and equality, and clear condemnations of sectarian political parties. The demonstrators also accused the sectarian Iraqi

regime to be partly responsible by its policies for the development of the IS as we could read on some placards saying "the parliament and the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin" and "Daech was born out of your corruption".

Beyond the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, we do not forget the negative role of the imperialist Western states in this situation. The racist and security policies of the European Union (EU) on migration are also responsible for the daily dramas of refugees on the roads, land and sea, to Europe. The policies of the border closure pushed hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war and misery to use illegal and dangerous means to try to reach European countries. Just as we need to condemn the imperialist policies of the EU and the war caused by this latter responsible of political and economic problems that are also the sources of displacement of populations and therefore of creating more refugees.

It is with this understanding that we can get out of the nightmare of dictatorships and fundamentalisms of all kinds and especially enable millions of people to have a dignified and free life.

[Syriafreedomforever](#)

Jez we did! - A political earthquake

14 September 2015, by Socialist Resistance

The scale of Corbyn's victory in the first round, over his lacklustre opponents, [25] deals a crushing blow to the New Labour machine which tried time and again throughout the campaign to undermine his ideas and his record without success.

A diverse tide of support lies behind this remarkable development.

Young people, thrown on the scrap heap by the Tories through their

attacks on students and young workers, have unsurprisingly played a prominent part.

Disabled people, whose right to benefits are under massive attack, remember that Jeremy Corbyn has been alongside them in their campaigns against these cruel assaults.

Those who have stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people,

campaigning against Trident [26] and who see themselves as part of the peace movement know that Jeremy has been one of their most stalwart supporters.

Trade unionists opposing the Tories attacks on the right to strike are involved. The support of major trade unions such as UNITE, UNISON and CWU has been central. [27]

It is no accident that one of the first

visible signs of the strength of Corbyn's campaign was on the massive Peoples' Assembly march against austerity on June 20. [28]

Corbyn's natural allies include those who have acted in a myriad of different ways in solidarity with refugees. The government must do more to support those fleeing war - and climate change and poverty. [29]

The Corbyn surge reflects the same processes that led to the development of Syriza in Greece or the rapid growth of Podemos in the Spanish State or with the Bernie Sanders campaign in the US as well as the Green surge in Britain. It is an inchoate cry for a real alternative to austerity - and in the case of the Corbyn campaign with an anti-war dynamic also at its centre.

These developments have factors in common with the anti-globalisation movement that came before - but have overcome the antiparty view that characterized that phase of radicalization.

Possibly the biggest single factor was the Scottish referendum campaign, and the huge radicalisation to the left that took place, particularly amongst young people. It reflects the impact of the anti-austerity alliance between the Greens, the SNP and Plaid during the election campaign, followed by the impact of the SNP in Parliament since the where they have often provided the only real opposition to Cameron and Osborne.

It is a reaction against the cringing response of leading Labour figures after the election that the defeat was because Miliband had been too far to the left and the need now was to adopt a raft of Tory policies.

This was followed by the equally remarkable decision of Harriet Harman (acting leader of the Labour Party since the post-election resignation of Ed Miliband) to call for an abstention on the Budget, though it included the Welfare Bill which has brought real fear to the lives of over 13 million households with its outrageous two child cap (no benefits for the third and subsequent children in a family), withdrawal of housing

benefit from young people and so much more.

Corbyn's opponents argue that his ideas are crazy and that he is unelectable as Prime Minister. Corbyn's own growing majority, that of Green MP Caroline Lucas, and most clearly the massive success of the SNP last May, demonstrate that it is a myth that radical ideas can't win broad support.

It is the ideas Jeremy Corbyn promotes which reach out to those who don't vote because they haven't seen a difference between mainstream political parties and their cronyism and corruption. He has been able to win people away from UKIP who were abandoned by the Labour Party under Blair advocating answers that are essential to their lives on questions such as housing and education

The dynamic of his campaign shows what is possible if the arguments are made.

Socialist Resistance welcomes the fact that Corbyn is going to open up a major discussion on all areas of policy, including those one which we don't entirely agree with him. But a government he led opposing austerity and based on his programme would be immeasurably better for the vast majority of people - in this country and across the world - than those of the defeated candidates for the Labour leadership, let alone those of the Tories.

Corbyn puts forward ideas which seem common sense to many people and gives them hope that they can be part of creating something better. He doesn't talk at people or even to them but with them. To many thousands of people, on the contrary it is the idea that profit comes before people that is an unbelievable lie.

Many of his detailed policy papers, which have much in common with the ideas of Tony Benn rebadged for the 21st century, ask supporters to send their comments and addition. But more importantly perhaps, the emphasis is on collective action - on building a mass movement which can transform the situation - a process which has undoubtedly started

through this extraordinary summer.

Socialism as an idea and as an aspiration has a new legitimacy. Collective organisation in our communities and in our workplaces is strengthened both as an idea and a goal to defend what we have and demand what we need.

On a range of questions from Trident to transport, from migration to privatisation the left will be given space to put forward our point of view.

This also creates a better opportunity to discuss out on the left where we have differences, what vision for socialism and how best to get there.

We urge Corbyn to come out for electoral reform as a pledge of early move away from the undemocratic First Past the Post system, would open up a new constituency of support. We also think support for Scottish independence would be a positive move.

Powerful interests divided

Throughout the campaign there have been attempts to vilify Corbyn by powerful interests inside and outside the Labour Party. So far they have not succeeded in preventing his election.

Those inside the Labour Party seems to have had to revise their initial plan try to immediately unseat him if elected because of the strength of the movement surrounding him.

But of course that does not mean that there will be any softening in their objective.

The right inside the Labour Party remain determined to remove him well before 2020 so that one of their own can take them into the next General Election. It is not easy to see who they will unite around - as they were unable to do in this contest.

Powerful forces in the media and the state - a British state which thought Harold Wilson was working for Moscow and a threat - are not going to be accommodating to Jeremy Corbyn.

The battles to come

The tens of thousands who have flocked to Corbyn's campaign have done so because they want to change the way society is run. Many of them are already involved in campaigns against austerity and for social justice. Many are student activists and trade union campaigners. But there will be a new audience for both radical ideas and collective action born out of the Corbyn surge. Every campaign, every organisation working for positive change will need to ensure these people are involved and welcomed

The Labour Party which Corbyn now leads is not the Labour Party he joined. Labour Party democracy, a key axis of the left in the 1980s, was destroyed by the Blairites not only by the emblematic overturning of Clause Four but by the obliteration of other mechanisms for grass roots involvement in decision making.

Labour Party conference had become more like a rally for the media than a place where members determine policy for example. These changes

were essential to shift power from Labour Party members and to Labour supporters in the affiliated unions to the New Labour machine.

And of course throughout this campaign we have seen thousands – probably the overwhelming majority of them Corbyn supporters – excluded from voting because they apparently don't support "labour values". The definition of these so-called values has all too often been in the hands of people who support austerity-lite and have been pushing cuts and privatisation.

Since Blair succeeded in closing down Labour Party democracy we have supported projects to put forward a political alternative. We have been actively involved in Left Unity since it started to be created in early 2013 and remain fully committed to it.

Left Unity has welcomed Corbyn's campaign and noted that on many questions there are large overlaps between what Corbyn stands for and what Left Unity puts forward. It is possible that a transformed Labour Party could fill the space that Left Unity tries to occupy but that's not the situation at the minute even with

Corbyn at the helm.

Corbyn has talked about debating Clause Four again. This too would be a welcome opportunity to explore what we mean by socialism – a word he has been instrumental in repopularising.

Far more would need to be done to transform the Labour Party in a way that it could be part of the engine of such change. Genuine democracy and accountability at all levels would need to be introduced in a way that was not even achieved in the 1980s. Bans, prescriptions and exclusions would need to be overturned.

Saying never in politics is a dangerous thing – especially after a summer like this – but without these sort of changes the Labour Party for us, despite Corbyn's victory, remains a party of war and of privatisation.

We will stand full square with Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters building a mass movement to fight against austerity, war and racism and for internationalism. And in a civil war within the wider labour movement to unseat him we will be absolutely on his side.

London, 13 September 2015

An Open Letter to Bernie Sanders Supporters from Solidarity, a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization

12 September 2015, by Solidarity

Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination has taken off like a rocket, with huge rallies and an outpouring of enthusiasm for his condemnation of corporate greed, inequality, and rampant social injustice in the United States. Bernie openly says he's a socialist, and much of his program is flatly unacceptable to the ruling capitalist "one percent" and the Democratic Party leadership. What

he's saying about what's wrong with our system is catching fire, especially among young people and workers hit by the economic crisis. And after a problematic start he's taken important steps in reaching out to the Black Lives Matter movement and embracing the fight against racist police brutality, the militarization of "law enforcement," and the prison-industrial complex.

But there's a gaping hole in Sanders' program for economic and social justice: his platform does not talk about what's called "foreign policy" – war and peace, military spending, the vast global network of U.S. bases, the infamous Guantanamo detention center, Palestine and Israel, or the refugee crisis from the horrific wars in the Middle East. These are not abstractions, but life-and-death issues for millions of people – and

absolutely fundamental for the hopes of a “political revolution” and mass “grassroots movement” that Bernie Sanders calls for.

A sign breaks down discretionary spending—the Pentagon accounts for over half.

Let’s be crystal clear: building an economy that meets human needs and halts capital’s forced death march toward environmental catastrophe cannot be done without massive cuts in spending on the worldwide military machinery, around half of which the United States makes up all by itself. Some 54% of all U.S. government discretionary spending goes to the Pentagon’s war machine.

U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW), a coalition of some 165 trade union organizations launched in 2003 to oppose intervention in Iraq, is circulating the petition below. We urge everyone to add their signature.

“To Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and all other Progressives:”We call upon all those who seek our political support to speak out forcefully, with clarity and passion, for a new definition of national security that puts the welfare of our people and the planet ahead of the interests of the Pentagon brass, military contractors, multinational corporations and the military-industrial complex.” - U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW)

Solidarity, a socialist organization that’s committed to independent political action, does not endorse any Democrats or Republicans. We believe both parties serve the interests of big business and the profit system—period. We believe that we, the 99%, need our own political party

and our own independent movements to speak for the majority. That doesn’t blind us to the way Sanders’ campaign and his supporters are shaking up the political establishment and raising vital issues for our political future.

In fact, for a long time we have admired Bernie Sanders’ record as an independent and a socialist campaigning and ultimately winning election as mayor of Burlington, congressman, and then Senator from Vermont. We applaud his efforts in the Senate on behalf of the needs of veterans. As Senator Bernie Sanders’ website shows, during his time in the Senate Sanders has not been silent on critical issues of war and militarism—far from it.

So why the total silence on these issues on Sanders’ presidential campaign website? There is no reason to imagine that he has personally changed his views. Rather, we have to assume that the issues of the permanent war machine and U.S. military interventions are not what he wants to fight around in his campaign. Somehow, perhaps they are “divisive” and would divert attention from his calls for economic justice within the Democratic Party primary.

By choosing to run as a Democratic and not an independent, Sanders is now trapped in the framework of this capitalist party, which is heavily influenced by the military-industrial complex and a belief in the destiny of the US as the world’s number one imperialist power. Bernie’s silence forces us to assume that his policy, with a few variations, is fundamentally a continuation of that of Barack Obama and his Secretaries of State

Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. What few statements he has made, for example about “carefully” continuing drone warfare, don’t contradict this assumption.

Sanders’ silence is a betrayal of humanitarian principle, and is in total contradiction with the objective of building an economy that meets human needs. Bernie Sanders’ supporters should not accept this silence. Let Bernie know that opposition to the deadly excesses of the U.S. war machine is an integral part of the political revolution we all want.

We in Solidarity share your aspirations and commitment to the fight for radical change against the inhumanity of the 1%. But our side will never win if we continue to support the two political parties that have no intention of representing our interests because they are owned and controlled, bought and paid for by the 1%. What we need is a new, independent party that working people run in the interests of the 99%.

As supporters of independent politics, we urge you to check out the Green Party presidential campaign of Jill Stein. When Bernie Sanders’ campaign is over and done, Jill Stein and the Greens will still be there, running on a program for a Green New Deal that puts people and our planet ahead of profit. In the meantime, let’s keep talking—both among ourselves, and to those tens of millions of Americans who are looking for a way out of the mess that capitalism has made.

September 10, 2015

[Solidarity](#)

Numerous guilty actors for Aylan and the million of others...

11 September 2015, by Joseph Daher

The history of the family of Aylan reflects the tragedy of the Syrian people. Aylan's father, Abdullallah Kurdi, was first imprisoned and tortured by the Assad regime's security services. He had to sell his shop in Damascus to bribe members of the security services to let him out. It cost him about \$ 25,000. He then left Damascus to Aleppo, and leave it shortly after because of the constant bombing by the planes of the Assad regime. He then left with his family to his hometown of Kobani. This will unfortunately only be a short respite, as the Islamic State began its offensive on the city and pushed the Kurdi family out of the city, with hundreds of thousands of other individuals, this time to Turkey. There, he received no help from the Turkish government and following Canada's refusal to grant Abdullah Kurdi and his brother asylum where their sister lives, the family then decided to leave the country by buying for \$ 6000 4 places to be smuggled in a makeshift boat to reach the Greek Islands of Kos.

The history of the Kurdi family is the history of millions of families in Syria who have been forced to leave their country as a result primarily of the barbarism of the Assad regime that is still killing and bombarding continuously entire cities and regions in Syria since the beginning of the uprising more than 4 years ago. During the first six months of 2015, the helicopters of the Assad regime dropped 10.423 barrel bombs on different regions of the country, while the regime's forces have killed nearly 90% of the total civilians over the same period, 7 times more than the Islamic State.

The gradual emergence of reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda have also caused the forced departure of many populations because of their practices and their authoritarianism. More than half of the Syrian population is now displaced (inside or outside the country), while over 80% of the population in Syria lives around or below the poverty line. The unemployment rate is above 50%, while life expectancy has been reduced by 20 years. We must condemn all these counter revolutionary forces, old regimes and

Islamic fundamentalist movements alike, which are the main responsible for the forced displacement of millions of people, and bring our support to the revolutionaries in the region that struggle against them.

Without denying the responsibility of the smugglers in the successive tragedies that have affected people fleeing wars and oppression, it is nevertheless the racist and security policies of the European Union (EU) on migration that are also responsible for this situation. The policies of the border closure pushed hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war and misery to use illegal and dangerous means to try to reach European countries. The small fraction of refugees reaching Europe, the vast majority remaining in countries outside of the UE, have to met police violence: the "jungle" camp in Calais, France; Hungary's construction of a wall of four meters high on 175 kilometers with its border with Serbia, or the naval operations led by Frontex in the Aegean and the Mediterranean that have ended up in tragedies with thousands drowned. It should nevertheless be noted that despite their difficult situation, many of these refugees have organized themselves to resist and protest against police and security attacks of the EU, whether against the persecutions at the railway station of Budapest, in the camps of Calais and Greece, and at the Hungarian border. In Switzerland, refugees also protested against their living conditions and referrals.

Meanwhile, Islamophobic and racist propaganda of far right groups in Europe has continued to characterize all Syrian refugees and others as Islamist terrorists. For instance, Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party who warned that those fleeing were probably "extremists of the Islamic State or other jihadist groups." These groups are no different in their propaganda that the dictator Assad who wrote on twitter a few days ago: "Terrorism will not stop there, it will export itself through illegal immigration into Europe." If the far right does not characterize them as terrorists, they accuse them of threatening the "Christian" roots of Europe. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor

Orba, said that the massive influx of migrants threatens the "Christian roots" of Europe. The head of the fascist movement National Front, Marine Le Pen, for her part called for the complete closure of the borders.

The great amount of deaths that have accumulated on the roads or in the Mediterranean Sea did not change anything in the past. Will this be any different this time? Will the EU continue to build itself as a fortress? Will it continue its war against human rights, while continuing its imperialist policies, responsible of the political and economic problems that are the sources of displacement of populations and therefore creating more refugees? I think we should not rely on the European leaders, but build popular resistance from below.

The emotion aroused by these tragic events has resulted in protests in support of migrants and refugees across Europe, which singularly contrasted with responses of European leaders. More than 20,000 people demonstrated in Vienna, Austria, to welcome refugees, while demonstrations were held throughout Europe. Thousands of protesters rallied against racism in Germany. Large amounts of aid were collected in workplaces and in many communities in Britain to be taken to refugee camps in France. Without the support of local people in Greece, Macedonia and Serbia, refugees from Syria would not have been able to reach Budapest, where they faced police at the border and in railway stations.

This solidarity is welcome and should be greeted, but this is not enough. Against the xenophobic and security policies and excesses of the EU, we must organize ourselves and fight alongside migrants and refugees to require the opening of the borders, the free movement and the welcome with dignity of people fleeing wars, oppression and social misery. We must close the camps, stop the racist policies and above all challenge the capitalist system responsible for these disasters.

The words of the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg resonate today more than ever as an eternal truth: "Commonly a dead body is something silent and

noteworthy. But there are those who shout louder than the trumpets and

illuminate more than torches. Down with the infamous social system that generates such horrors! ”

[Syria Freedom Forever](#)

Canada: Getting rid of the Harper government - an imperative necessity

11 September 2015

Concentration of wealth in the hands of the 1%

The distribution of wealth is the central issue of the class struggle in the Canadian state. By increasingly regressive taxation, the multiplication of openings to tax avoidance for the richest, and the legal opening to the use of tax havens, the Harper government has followed a policy of radical enablement of the dominant classes to avoid the payment of taxes. The action of the Conservative Party is in the tradition inaugurated by the Liberal Party of Canada. The income gap is widening more and more.

The Conservative government, and the provincial governments in Canada who follow in its footsteps, follows austerity policies to make the subaltern classes pay the debt caused by the disengagement of the banks, large companies and other financial institutions of the level of the share of tax that they should pay to finish with the concentration of wealth and the resulting inequities. The financial oligarchy has imposed its orientations and the governments are at their service.

The Conservative government has attacked unemployment insurance. It has decreased unemployment insurance benefits and their accessibility. It is now attacking pension schemes.

Dismantling of public services

At the level of the civil service, the Conservative government has delivered massive redundancies in the various governmental departments and agencies. Even the research institutes have been affected, particularly those whose research would have allowed us to throw some light on the environmental consequences of governmental policies.

The Conservative government systematically pursues a policy of privatization and public disinvestment. Basing itself on the debt system - reduction of the tax contributions of the dominant class, government indebtedness with banks and financial institutions, and use of the debt to justify austerity policies and privatization of public services by pointing to their deterioration - this is the framework of the economic policy of the neo-liberal governments concerning the public sector.

A multiplication of policies against women and their struggle for liberation

The policies of the Conservatives against equality and fairness for women are a constant. The neo-liberal and neo-conservative state is more

and more clearly a patriarchal state. The attacks against public services are attacks against jobs often occupied by women. This government have also attacked pay equity in the public service. Not content to target women, the Harper government has targeted organizations for the defence of the rights of women which have had their funding cut. No surprise that it is among women that this government polls lowest.

A turn toward increasing exploitation of fossil fuels

As regards the environment, the Conservative Party is irresponsible and cavalier. It has rejected the Kyoto accords. It subsidizes the extraction of dirty oil in Alberta. It has stepped up efforts to promote the export of this oil by supporting the construction of pipelines on the entire American continent and by putting pressure on European governments to accept the import of oil from the tar sands.

It has not hesitated to use the worst parliamentary manipulation to attack the environmental laws with the aim of speeding up the establishment of infrastructure to exploit and transport oil from the Canadian west.

Opening of Canada

to the cult of free trade

Harper's Conservative government has maintained systematically the turn of the Canadian bourgeoisie toward free trade: NAFTA, multiple bilateral treaties with many countries of Latin America and Asia, negotiation of a free-trade treaty with Europe, negotiation of a Transpacific treaty. For neo-liberal governments and the Conservative government in particular, it is about giving free rein to the multinationals to attack the social state, to allow companies to question social and environmental protections. All the social advances won by hard struggles are threatened. For example, these agreements grant private companies the power to sue the Canadian government for public health measures which would erode their rate of profits.

Multiplication of attacks on democratic rights

The Harper Government has made a mockery of democratic rights and gives an increasingly limited character to democracy in the Canadian state. It has even attacked the parliamentary institution by introducing mammoth laws to push through its counter-reforms. It has abused gags to end debate. It despises the media and has sought to control and to hide information from the public. It has decreased grants for organizations for the defence of rights and freedoms - rights of women and indigenous peoples. With Bill C-51, "the government seeks to put in place a broad integrated system of information collection, investigations, arrests and preventive interventions which could even be contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." It is clear that the plan is to give to the Canadian state more repressive capabilities against the popular resistance to these antisocial and anti-environmental projects. The

government has not hesitated to assimilate environmentalists opposing the construction of pipelines to terrorists.

A warlike stance in the service of pillage and the military-industrial complex

The Harper government has engaged in a series of wars following the requests of the US government. It is engaged in a war against Islamic State under the pretext of combating terrorism. This war contributes to the dismantling of the existing international order and constitutes a threat to peace and security. It meets the wishes of the forces of neo-colonial re-conquest of the Middle East and its oil wealth. It meets the interests of the military-industrial complex who see in it business opportunities. It creates in the Canadian state a climate of obsession with security and restrictions of the democratic rights of any social and political opposition to this government. It allows the diversion of "colossal public resources to make war, promote military industry, and glorify the army and the military past of Canada, while years of "austerity measures" are imposed on education, health, public services, the promotion of the rights of women, the protection of the environment, international cooperation and so on." (Échec À la guerre)

Contempt for First Nations and the Quebec nation and a denial of their right to self-determination

The Conservative government

maintains the indigenous peoples in a colonial situation. Their living conditions are those of the peoples of the third world and this government refuses to tackle this situation and give them essential rights. It allows the oil companies to plunder their territories and to threaten their environment and their survival.

The Conservative government has not recognized Quebec as a nation with a right to independence and enjoying the right to self-determination. Recognition as a nation is granted only on the condition that the Quebec nation defines itself within the framework of the Canadian state. And this recognition has no legal impact. In short, it is pure manipulation. The policies of the Conservative government trample underfoot the French language, the provincial powers as defined in the constitution and the right of Quebec to make fundamental social and economic choices concerning its future. Thus the people of Quebec are denied the right to decide on the passage of pipelines across their territory. The strategy of Nation Building of the governments in Ottawa means the negation of the existence of oppressed nations in the Canadian state and of their right to self-determination.

Get rid of this government, the essential task ...

However, the Bloc Québécois and other nationalists have underestimated the importance of ending the Conservative government to justify sending a few MPs to Ottawa. This attitude is indicative of an irresponsibility which denies the task of the hour: use the federal election to get rid of this government and to demonstrate to the whole of the oligarchy that the popular majority in Canada and in Quebec wants to end the current offensive waged by a government in the service of the dominant class.

Source: the blog *Presse-toi À gauche*.

After the elections: Chauvinism, a receding force

9 September 2015, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

On the other hand it addresses corruption issues, taking the country on a fast track of economic development, safeguarding fundamental freedoms and protection of the rights of women and children. The MOU reflects the bourgeois consensus that exists in society regarding good governance. This can pave the way for constitutional reform that will not be satisfactory from the Left point of view, but which the new government can do without facing opposition.

Unfulfilled promises

There are several unfulfilled pledges in the transitional government's 100 day programme that this government can start to implement. Most important amongst these would be establishing the Constitutional Council with members drawn from both the government and opposition and also from civil society. This will be the first time the Constitutional Council, the body vested with the authority under the 19th Amendment to appoint the members of the various independent commissions, most notably those pertaining to the judiciary, police, public service, bribery and corruption commission, human rights commission and elections commission go into action. These institutions of state are expected to establish a system of checks and balances in limiting the powers of the elected politicians. Thus the officials will be relatively independent to interpret the laws and regulations and carry out state functions. During the Mahinda regime fascist power penetrated the state machinery where many ruling politicians and their supporters ended up behaving with the impunity associated Italian fascism. They could

pillage, rape and even commit murder with no action being taken against them.

President Sirisena's readiness at the beginning of his term of office to reduce his own powers in the national interest was an act within Asian democratic tradition that has few parallels in Lanka, and even internationally. Some liberals believe that his expression of Asiatic democratic tradition of consensus and commitment to good governance will ensure that more structures for checks and balances will be in place soon. Latter expect that these reforms would included making a renewed attempt to pass the 20th Amendment which is about having smaller electorates more accountable to voters, and passing the right to information law which would give the general public access to governmental documents. The lack of transparency in the governmental system was brought to light by many radical speakers during both the presidential and general election campaigns. These revealed massive corruption in government contracts that took place in the past without any transparency at all.

What is not discussed so far, are the changes in the area of governance connected with nationality and religious relations, and the devolution of power. however this was the key theme not only in the election campaign of the Tamil parties in the North and East of the country but also of all minority community leaders that joined various election campaigns. Although the winning party in NE, the TNA, is considered to be a social democratic party as claimed by its leaders Sambanthan and Sumanthiran, and generally accepted as none violent on account of its willingness to engage in dialogue and

trust-building with the rulers, it campaigned on a platform of greater autonomy and federalism for the North and East.

Issues of governance

This disturbed even the JVP and it got exposed again, as a chauvinist party. In contrast to other issues of governance, which relate to central government institutions, the issue of devolution of power is one on which there is much less consensus in the country. All say they are for equality, but only a few will accept autonomy for a distinct community. It is to be noted that those who got the largest numbers of votes in the defeated UPFA opposition were those who took stands against the devolution of power. However it came down almost to 25 lacks of votes compared to 58 lacks claimed by Wimal in last January.

Thus the issue of chauvinism continues to be alive in the country even though the inability of the UPFA to make it a winning formula at two successive elections suggests that it is receding as a force. It has been in existence since the 1950s when the SLFP was formed and utilized the power of language-based nationalism to trounce the UNP at the general elections of 1956. However Mahinda rule was primarily based on fascist use of racism and religious sectarianism with the general population being constantly exposed to a barrage of anti-minority propaganda. Clearly there is a need for the government to make use of this defeat given to the fascist forces to commence an immediate programme of public education on the issue of national problem. We have to give the

options for a political solution based on equality, autonomy and the right of self determination that would address the roots of the conflict. This could be

done alongside civil society organizations to prepare the ground for future reforms that are necessary to resolve the conflict in a sustainable

and mutually acceptable manner.

August 27

[Ceylon Today](#)

Mexico's Deepening Crises

8 September 2015, by Richard Roman and Edur Valasco Arregui

Impunity and state terrorism are not new in Mexico, but their sharp escalation is the other side of the coin of neoliberal restructuring. Popular resistance, which has slowed down Mexico's neoliberal transformation, must be crushed in order to fully implement the massive despoliation, dispossession and destruction of social rights being imposed on Mexico by its capitalist class and political elites as well as by foreign capital (Roman and Velasco, November 2014).

The multiple and intertwined crises of Mexico are producing ongoing and deepening implosions and explosions, combining to produce an ever more violent situation. The economic transition from Mexico's statist capitalist economy to an export-oriented "open" economy has not brought economic benefits for most of the population, but much greater inequality and impoverishment.

The "democratic transition" has brought little democracy and great disappointment. And the "war on drugs" has not diminished the production and export of drugs but increased violence and provided political cover for the government's escalation of repression.

The economic development of the north (based on the maquilas) as an integrated component of continental industrial production has created new jobs but with far fewer rights, lower wages and worse working conditions than even those that existed in the old industrial regions of central Mexico. Factories relocated from central Mexico as well as from the United

States and Canada to escape unions, reduce wages, and increase managerial despotism.

Though Mexico's "democratic transition" was fuelled by the democratic aspirations of the middle classes, working class and popular sectors, it has been largely captured by big business seeking more direct control of the Mexican state.

The transformation of the state, from the Bonapartist capitalist state that emerged from the Mexican revolution towards more direct capitalist domination, was well underway in the 1980s and would be intensified in the 1990s and first years of the new century. This transition to electoral competitiveness was a genuine defeat for the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and opened up a new political scene of constrained party competition in Mexico.

The very real electoral space and democratic dynamics that opened up were subordinated, however, to the dynamic of the neoliberal capitalist offensive. Capitalist domination was deepened while democratic processes were constrained and hollowed out. Conflicts within the dominant bloc of political elites, capitalists, and their respective bases, continue to be fought out with cronyism and corruption that undermine any sense of legitimacy.

Though bourgeois domination of the state has been firmly established, the new ruling bloc of big capital and the political elites have not been able to establish legitimacy through credible

elections, as shown by the frauds of 1988 and 2006, the electoral manipulations by the media duopoly in 2012, and the sharp decline of the vote for all three major parties in the June 2015 elections.

As well, all three major parties – the PRI, the rightwing National Action Party (PAN) and Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) – are undergoing especially sharp internal battles, and the maneuvering over presidential nominations for 2018 already under way.

Drug War Disaster

The war within the drug gang-state complex over control of routes, production, and profits was intensified by the "war against drugs" of president Calderón (2006-2012) and the growth of new and ambitious drug gangs allying with different sections and levels of a more decentralized state. This drug war, though providing useful cover for state repression, is threatening social stability and foreign investment.

In an assessment of the prospects for Mexico, the former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Carlos Pascual, stated:

"How long can Mexico sustain the anomaly between increasing FDI [Foreign Direct Investment] and rising insecurity? One investment banker drew this analogy: the relationship of risk to FDI is like a rubber band. You can keep stretching it, but at some point it will snap. Because it has not snapped today may not be a good

predictor of what will happen with a bit more strain.” (Pascual 2010)

Despite concern over the impact of insecurity on investments, the investments continue to pour into Mexico. Foreign investment in Mexico increased 25-fold between 1990 and 2014 [30]. Investments “in pursuit of cheap labor and mineral riches” by powerful U.S., German, Spanish, Canadian and Asian companies have averaged \$30 billion annually.

These corporations and their governments maintain a pact of silence on the role of the Mexican government and armed forces in the killings, disappearances and the massive violations of human rights, thus containing international pressures on Mexico.

The limited international pressure put on Mexico has led to the occasional and selective capture of drug gang bosses. But politicians and military officials continue with almost complete impunity for their links to the drug trade and organized crime as well as their involvement in state terrorism.

While in Colombia international pressure and street protests led to the dismissal of 11,000 police and criminal proceedings being brought against 63% of members of Congress for their relations to organized crime, in Mexico only a handful of politicians or senior military officials have been indicted for their relations to the criminal gangs.

Attempts to hold Mexico responsible for human rights abuses in front of the UN are silenced by Mexican lobbying and the support of powerful companies and their governments. Impunity is sustained not only by Mexico’s elites but by a tacit international accord of support for regimes that play by the neoliberal rules of the game.

While international capital colludes by its silence, the U.S. government plays a direct role in its involvement with the Mexican intelligence services and the Mexican army in repression through, among other programs, Plan Mérida. (These two paragraphs are based on Edgardo Buscaglia, Nov.

2014.)

The response of the Mexican regime to the dramatically increasing problems of public insecurity has been to move towards greater central control of police forces and to promote a re-concentration of the traditional drug cartels, attempting both to both decrease general public insecurity and reverse the partial balkanization that Mexico has gone through recently.

Unified state police forces have been created that now encompass 27 of Mexico’s 32 states, 73% of the population. As well an elite military group, the national gendarmerie, has been formed within the national police force. Over the last three years, there is a greater involvement of these unified state forces and of the federal forces in the fight for control of the most potent and profitable narcotics.

In clashes in the states of Jalisco and Michoacan in 2015, federal forces participated in direct combat with cartel forces armed with increasingly sophisticated and more powerful weaponry. [31]. The view of U.S. government officials, according to the journal Proceso, is that the new war scenario in certain regions, in particular Tamaulipas, is not a turf war between drug gangs but an alliance of more traditional Sinaloa, Juarez and Gulf cartels, to get rid of the latecomers in the business, latecomers that boomed during the PAN administrations (2000-2012).

This process of centralization of drug cartels would be tolerated by the Navy and the Army. [32]

Structural Crisis, Economic Volatility

These crises of legitimacy and public security take place amidst long-term structural problems in the economy as well as volatile conjunctural economic problems.

The Mexican economy suffers from two major structural obstacles: the fragility of public finances, and the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth between workers and

companies. Both elements inhibit any consistent growth of the domestic market and of the endogenous productivity of Mexico, leading to very mediocre rates of economic growth.

During the first three years of the government of Enrique Peña Nieto, the average rate of GDP growth has only been 2%, as compared to expectations that the structural reforms would propel the economy to grow at three times that rate. The growth of the economy during the Peña Nieto presidency has been below the already meager 2.3% average rate of the previous administration of Felipe Calderón between 2006 and 2012.

The dramatic fall in oil prices has led to a dramatic reduction in oil export revenues for Mexico “estimated at more than 50% by 2015, i.e. about 20 billion dollars [33].

As a result of reduced production “the daily production of PEMEX, the state-owned oil company, fell from 3.4 million barrels in 2004 to 2.4 million in 2014” and the fall in oil prices, the weight of PEMEX revenues in the GDP has fallen from 9.4% in 2003 to only 5.8% in 2014. [34]

This sharp decline in oil revenues “especially given their great weight accounting for one-third of public spending” is having a tremendous impact on the state’s room for financial maneuver. The tensions and conflicts within the dominant bloc, as well as between it and the mass of the population, are being sharpened by the resulting fiscal crisis.

As well, the relative slowdown in U.S. manufacturing industries has had an immediate negative impact on Mexican industrial production given the strong intra-industry ties between the two economies. [35] Mexico’s industrial slowdown has also been influenced by the impact on U.S. exports of the rise in the value of the dollar against currencies of other industrialized nations, declining growth rates of the economies of the Pacific, and the gloomy expectations pending the end of the expansionary policy of the Federal Reserve.

This incipient economic crisis (falling oil prices, falling peso, inflation) will

increase discontent and migration in the coming period and will likely lead to even deeper cutbacks.

Fragmented Resistance

Resistance to the neoliberal offensive is characterized by fragmentations that have deep historical roots but are also linked to the uneven development of Mexico today, with some areas undergoing brutal processes of primitive accumulation and others undergoing processes of modern industrial development and expansion.

The constantly increasing precarization of the labor force is based both on the expulsion of people from the countryside and the deliberate downgrading of the labor market. The displacement of campesinos from their rural areas and semi-proletarianized livelihoods often propels them to new loci of capitalist development – the factories of the north or the agro-industrial complexes as in San Quintin, Baja California – but also into many parts of the United States as service, agricultural and industrial workers.

Mexico's fragmented resistance has taken many forms. Its tempo of development has been uneven and there are significant tactical, strategic and political differences around many issues, including the role of elections.

The various movements have coalesced fleetingly at times, as in the protests in the fall and winter of 2014-2015, over the missing 43 teachers' college students of Ayotzinapa as well as state violence more generally. But these movements have not produced a common set of demands, tactics, and strategy.

This failure to develop a national strategy of resistance and transformation is linked both to the uneven regional patterns of exploitation and resistance, and differing approaches to the difficult relationship between the fight for desperately needed reforms and long-

term transformational goals.

As well, there are significant political differences within the Left around the place of electoral politics in class struggle, the role of armed versus nonviolent forms of struggle, and orientation to state power among others. These divergences and complexities make durable coalescence both much harder and much more necessary. But the weakness and fragmentation of the Left itself has rendered it largely incapable of providing the leadership for the convergence of protests around a common set of demands, tactics and strategy.

The main resistance in Mexico in the recent period, aside from the major urban-based student protests between 2012 and 2015, has come from rural and semi-rural areas fighting the new dispossessions and despoliation of land by mega-projects and by mining and oil companies – actions given a green light to escalate by the blitzkrieg of constitutional reforms carried out by the Peña Nieto government in 2013-2014.

There continues to be important resistance from miners and more recently the agro-industrial workers in San Quintán, Baja California, whose courageous and ongoing struggle has been supported by U.S. and Canadian unions. But the urban working class has been largely absent from recent struggles, except as citizen members of popular movements but not through working-class formations.

But Mexico is an urban and working-class country; 75% of Mexicans live in urban areas and most sell their labor power. The working class character of Mexico is growing as more and more industry locates there. Mexico is now the fourth leading world exporter of autos. The challenge to capitalist depredation has started in the countryside, but victory depends on the entry of the urban working class into the struggle. The sleeping giant in Mexico is the working class, so far contained by state repression and the remnants of the old state-linked union organizations but also disarticulated

by the massive relocation of industry from the center to the north. (Roman and Velasco, Spring 2014)

The long-term perspective must include a strategy of engaging and mobilizing the working class in ways that both link up to struggles in the rural and semi-rural areas, especially the explosive poor and indigenous states of southern Mexico, and also include immediate demands melded with transformational strategies. The urban working class has to play a key role in the struggles if they are to succeed.

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COP 21, a summit of falsehood

4 September 2015, by **Daniel Tanuro**

From initial warnings to absolute urgency

Since its creation, this body of a particular type (its assessments are written by scientists, but the “summaries for policy makers” are negotiated with the representatives of the states) has released five bulky reports. All have valid initial hypotheses: the average surface temperature of the Earth increases, this increase is due almost entirely to anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, and the most important of these is carbon dioxide from the combustion of fossil fuels. [36]

The IPCC has said it for more than twenty-five years: in the absence of a strong reduction of emissions, global warming will lead to an increase in sea levels, a multiplication of extreme weather events, a decline in agricultural productivity, a reduction of drinking water available, and a marked decline in biodiversity as well as health consequences. This is not the only environmental problem, but it is without doubt the central problem.

The five reports are only distinguished by the accuracy and the level of increased probability of the projections. In addition, with the time that has gone by since the creation of the IPCC, the projections can be compared to the observations and the conclusion is worrying: the reality is worse than what the models predicted [37].

Fossil fuels cover 80% of the energy needs of the planet. The energy issue is therefore at the centre of the challenge. As Naomi Klein notes in her latest book [38]: if policymakers had quickly taken the bull by the horns, they would have (maybe) been able to

steer a relatively gentle transition toward a system based exclusively on renewable sources and maximum efficiency in their use. But they have not done so, so that we are today faced with a situation of absolute urgency, where the threat can only be dealt with by extremely drastic measures - precisely what the policy makers wanted to avoid!

Framework Convention and Kyoto Protocol

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 had adopted, with great pomp, a convention (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change UNFCCC) by which the parties set the objective of avoiding a “dangerous disturbance” of the climate system, taking due account of the fact that not all countries have the same historic responsibility in global warming, nor the same capabilities to cope. By virtue of these principles of “common but differentiated responsibility”, and differentiated ability, the “developed” countries at the third Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP3) concluded the Kyoto Protocol by which they undertook to reduce their emissions by 5.2% between 2008 and 2012, compared to 1990.

The effort that the “developed” countries would have had to make was derisory, especially as it could be achieved by sleight-of-hand, whose two main aspects are the market in tradable emission rights (offered freely and in excess to enterprises) and the possibility for the countries of the North of replacing domestic reductions by the purchase of emission credits generated by so-called “clean” investment (the majority are not at all clean), or by forest management measures (to the

detriment of indigenous peoples) in the countries of the South [39]. Nevertheless, the USA refused to ratify the Protocol.

Kyoto was a deception. It played a decisive role in the failure of the COP in Copenhagen in 2009, which was supposed to adopt a global climate agreement. The South denounced the lack of concrete engagement from the North. Globally justified, this denunciation was, however, not free of ulterior motives, mainly (but not exclusively) among the major so-called “emerging” countries and the oil producers, anxious that fossil resources boost their economies as long as possible.

At the end of a turbulent general assembly, marked in particular by the muscular interventions of Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, the summit adopted a declaration prepared in the corridors under the leadership of the United States and China, the two largest emitters of greenhouse gases (although their historical responsibility for global warming remains very different).

Copenhagen and pot luck

Copenhagen was a failure, but the summit took an important methodological option since the parties chose to abandon a top-down solution based on the determination of the “carbon budget” still available globally and on its division according to the responsibilities and capacities of the country.

Establishing a “carbon budget” means agreeing that X amount of carbon can still be sent into the atmosphere to respect a maximum warming of Y degrees. This is the only methodology that is both scientifically rigorous and - potentially - just, from the point of

view of the differentiated responsibility. However, it makes the ecological constraint very clear and the assessment of responsibility is inescapable [40].

Since every government wished to have margins of manoeuvre, the COP decided that each country would communicate its climate action plan (in the jargon: "its nationally determined intentions of contributions") to the secretariat of the UNFCCC, and that the negotiations would be on this basis, i.e. according to the model of pot luck [41]

In addition, Copenhagen took the decision to create a Green Fund for the climate, by which the developed countries would contribute to the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change in developing countries. The COP in Cancun, the following year, fixed an annual amount of one hundred billion dollars from 2020 onwards, but the Fund (whose principal manager is the World Bank) does not yet contain a tenth of that sum - and the governments of the North are thinking more of loans than of donations.

Nearly twenty years after the Rio Summit, Cancun also put a figure on the central objective of the UNFCCC: it was in effect decided that the "dangerous" limit which should not be exceeded would be 2°C compared to the pre-industrial period (1.5 degrees if necessary "according to the development of science"). A positive decision at first glance, but there are two key caveats.

The first downside is political-scientific: the choice of 2°C as a threshold of danger is very questionable. This 2°C was popularized by a study by the economist Nordhaus, who chose this figure because it appeared to match a doubling of the atmospheric concentration in CO₂. From 1990 a report of the Stockholm Environment Institute considered it preferable not to exceed 1°C, but the 2°C maximum was imposed when the European Commission, in 1996, made it its goal [42]

For all that, things are far from

settled. At Cancun, more than a hundred countries - small island states and "less developed countries" - revived the call for the level of danger to be fixed at 1.5°C. It was decided to study the issue and to do this COP 18 (Doha) set up a "structured expert dialogue" (SED). Released in May 2015, the report of this dialogue was that a warming of 2°C is too dangerous and that 1.5°C would reduce the risks [43]. An example of these risks is provided by Anders Levermann, one of the "lead authors" of the chapter on "sea level rise" of the fourth IPCC report: he believes that any degree of temperature increase (we have already reached 0.8°C) will result in balance in an 2.3 meters rise in sea levels [44]

Aggregate data on the distribution of population according to altitude is lacking, but it is estimated that an increase of one meter will involve the displacement of several hundred million people. Imagine the consequences of a rise of 4.6 meters.

The second downside is methodological: nothing is planned so that the INDC should be corrected in order to effectively respect the limit. In fact, the system of pot luck allows the protagonists to flaunt themselves in front of the media saying "the situation is under control, we are acting so as not to exceed 2°C of global warming", while not doing what is necessary to reach the target.

And indeed, they do not do the necessary, to say the least! Global emissions increased by 1% annually in the 1980s, and continue to increase two times more quickly today. At this rate, if nothing changes, global warming could reach 6°C by the end of the century, or even 11°C beyond that [45].

Will the governments conclude a treaty during COP 21, in Paris in December? It is likely, but not certain. What is certain, however, is that system of pot luck gives full satisfaction to the multinational corporations who see in the climate challenge only the desirability of "new markets": markets in carbon, renewable sources, capture-sequestration, ownership of resources, adaptation (all involving an

acceleration of privatization, including water in particular). It gives them full satisfaction because this whole policy was established in consultation with the employers, as was seen for example last May, when Paris officially welcomed the "Business and Climate Summit" (see box below).

What is certain is that this potential treaty will be dust in the eyes. The tone is set by the agreement concluded in late 2014 by the two major polluters, China and the United States. In the best case, if the European Union respects its commitment (inadequate, and undermined by the sleight-of-hand mentioned above) to reduce its emissions by 40% by 2030, if the other developed countries align with the INDC of the United States (a goal for 2025 at just above what the USA would have had to achieve in 2012 in the context of Kyoto) and if the developing countries align with that of China (no absolute reduction in emissions before 2030), the most likely outcome will be an increase in temperature of 3.6°C by 2100. Almost as much in less than a century as since the end of the last Ice Age, twenty thousand years ago. An unspeakable disaster, unimaginable, terrible. More exactly: a crime, that COP21 has the function of concealing.

The COP of the multinationals

The fruit of the United Nations commitment to involve the business community in the negotiation, the Business and Climate summit organized in Paris in May 2015, was supported by various lobbies, including the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. The WBCSD has among its two hundred members some of the largest polluters on the planet (Shell, BP, Dow Chemicals, Petrobras, Chevron and so on). It is chaired by the boss of Unilever and was founded by Stephan Schmidheiny, the former CEO of Eternit.

Speaking before this gathering, French president François Hollande literally promised, not the moon, but the earth: "Companies are essential

because they are the ones who are going to translate, through the commitments that will be made, the changes that will be necessary: energy efficiency, the rise of renewable energy, the ability to transport with a mobility that is not energy consuming, energy storage, the method of construction of habitats, the organization of cities, and also participation in the transition process, the adaptation of the developing countries”.

Growth or climate, we must choose

The cause of this appalling situation lies not in the technical impossibility of emerging from reliance on fossil fuels, or in demographic pressure, but in the very nature of the capitalist economic system. “A capitalism without growth is a contradiction in terms”, said Schumpeter. Today, nobody can deny that this is the heart of the question. In effect, saving the climate involves emission reductions so drastic that they are not feasible without a significant decrease in energy consumption. And such a decrease in its turn is not possible without significantly diminishing the processing and transport of materials. In other words, without renouncing growth.

The progress of energy efficiency does not allow us to escape this physical constraint. Indeed, in addition to the fact that it too has physical limits, we find that this progress is more than offset by the “rebound effects” (the energy saved is used to produce something else, or the same thing in greater quantities). This is inevitable as long as productivist logic, entrepreneurial freedom and competition for markets remain the rule.

Technologies are not a solution. On this point, the last report of the IPCC gives a false picture of the reality. According to this report, in the conditions studied (i.e. with maintenance of growth), respect for the 2Å°C limit is only possible if the emissions of the global energy system became negative from 2070 (in other words: if the system captures more

CO2 than it emits). To achieve this result, the scenarios used all employ the massive use of the biomass with capture-sequestration. Indeed, the work compiled by Working Group 3 of the IPCC 1) does not provide evidence that this technology is safe and 2) provides no guarantee as to the social and environmental consequences of this technological choice [46]. However, these are potentially very formidable, by introducing competition into energy and non-energy cultivation, on the one hand, and by the impact on biodiversity, on the other.

In reality, in a general way, the many scenarios which claim to reconcile growth and the transition toward a carbon zero system by respecting the limit of 2Å°C are all biased by the non-taking into account of one or the other of these problems, and the mother of all these problems has a name: capitalism [47]. But “capitalism” and “growth” are taboo words, which the researchers of the IPCC refrain from using.

In an analysis of the text which serves as a basis for the negotiations for Paris, Pablo Solon drew attention to another crucial point, which returns to the same anti-capitalist conclusions by another, more specific, path: while they are decisive for staying under the bar of 2Å°C, the reduction commitments for the deadline of 2030 are non-existent [48]. Quite rightly, the ex-ambassador of Bolivia to the United Nations attributed this fact to the pot luck method. But the underlying question arises: why this silence in particular on the 2030 deadline?

The answer lies mainly in three elements, which have everything to do with the substantial funds benefiting climate change denial campaigns: capitalized fossil reserves, the depreciation of the energy system (based on the fossils at 80%) and the intertwining of these two levels of financial capital which run the world.

To save the climate, 1) the oil, gas and coal companies should stop operating four fifths of the fossil reserves of which they are owners, which form part of their assets and which determine their listing on the Stock

Exchange [49]; 2) the major part of the global energy system - almost a fifth of global GDP - should be scrapped before depreciation [50]; and 3) in both cases, this destruction of capital would result in a huge financial crisis, the bursting of a huge bubble.

Systemic crisis and social project

The COP 21 will be a summit of falsehood, of business and climate crime. A provisional summit, unfortunately: if he does not encounter resistance, the system will go much further in social and environmental destruction. That is to say that the expressions of “ecological crisis” or “anthropogenic climate change” are misleading. It is overall, in terms of systemic crisis, a historic impasse of capitalism, that it is appropriate to understand the situation. And it is in this framework that strategies must be invented. The anti-capitalist left is challenged to advance a project of a non-productivist society and to develop practices, demands, forms of organization enabling its implementation

A very broad mobilization is in progress which should see its first culmination in Paris, during COP 21, and continue beyond that. The organizers want to converge movements of all the exploited and oppressed. Peasant unions and indigenous peoples are in the front line of a battle based on practices of conquest of the common where women play a major role. Broad layers of youth are already involved in the struggles against major infrastructural projects in the service of fossil fuels. But the labour movement is lagging behind.

The unions are involved in the mobilization, certainly. But it is not only about that. It is about bringing the masses of workers to consider this fight as theirs, so as to contribute daily by their own action. It is a decisive challenge but difficult. It can be met only by a double movement of democratization of the unions and of anti-capitalist radicalization of their

program as well as their practices. Without this, the “just transition” demanded by the International Confederation of Trade Unions risks being only an accompaniment to the capitalist strategy and its consequences.

The convergence of movements underlines the need for a non-capitalist project of society adapted to the demands of our time. An eco-socialist project, which seeks the satisfaction of real human needs, democratically determined while respecting prudent ecological constraints. Although still imprecise,

this self-managed project, decentralized, feminist and internationalist, which renounces the fantasy of “domination over nature” and the obsession of “always more”, already lives in the struggles of emancipation. There is no more urgent task than to do make it grow.

Why Black Lives Matter Is Game Change

4 September 2015, by **Malik Miah**

“After the acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 in the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, three black women created #BlackLivesMatter to represent black people who were being terrorized by state-sanctioned violence, poverty and mass incarceration.

“It was a declaration.

“Let’s be clear: The reach of anti-black racism is not confined to the borders of North America. Black Lives Matter has become a transformative outlet for all black people from different historical, cultural, socioeconomic and political identities. It is a source of solidarity for the survivors of colonization, exploitation, capitalism and police brutality.” (Janaya Khan, “Black Lives Matter Has Become a Global Movement,” August 7, 2015, www.TheRoot.com)

The Black Lives Matter Convening took place July 24-26 at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio. Some 1500 activists and organizers attended. The gathering was uplifting and spirited. As many participants said, “it was ours.” The national conference also included representatives from Canada and the Caribbean.

That white-dominated (aka “mainstream”) media largely ignored the gathering was no surprise. That every 28 hours a Black man, woman or child is murdered by cops or vigilante law enforcement, that 25% of Black women live in poverty, and that the

life expectancy of Black transgender women is 35, is not newsworthy.

The defense of Black bodies (men, women and children) is about not simply police brutality and murder, but all the issues facing African Americans and Africans worldwide — the de facto second-class status of Black bodies. Racism is based on a system of profit over equality, of white supremacy over Black lives, and it is global.

The conference workshops and panels discussed these issues of broad economic and social impact. It included Black activists from earlier generations involved in fights for Black Power and militant Black Nationalism. The continuity showed that the Movement for Black Lives understands many of the lessons learned in struggle of those previous generations.

A Way Forward

Organizers and activists respect the establishment Black leadership (NAACP, Congressional Black Caucus). But these figures — whether Al Sharpton, John Lewis or Jesse Jackson — see the new generation as foot soldiers who will eventually recognize that “effective change” comes from using protests to leverage demands within mainstream electoral politics, and integrating into the capitalist system.

The new mostly young activists, however, know that electoral strategy

has not stopped state-sanctioned violence or protected Black bodies from discriminatory policies — and from being murdered.

Although I did not attend the Cleveland gathering, it reminds me of the meetings and conferences, some 40 years ago, that politically and ideologically moved the struggle away from Black electoral politics inside the Democratic Party toward challenging the power of the system itself.

Coming after the victory of the civil rights revolution that overturned legal segregation South and North, that generation identified with Malcolm X and his call for independent Black political action and self-organization. Legal equality did not equal full equality and self-determination.

The radical wing of the 1960s movement did frighten the ruling class. The groups were infiltrated by the FBI and cops, and leaders and activists not assimilated into the system were assassinated by armed police forces.

The COINTELPRO campaign launched by the FBI was effective; its “success” convinced many Black leaders that the strategy of mass civil disobedience must be replaced with mass electoralism.

The 1970s and ’80s led to an historic number of African Americans elected to city, state and federal offices, and finally Barack Obama as president in 2008. Yet it failed to stop the mass

incarceration of Black men, or police terror against Black bodies.

New Movement Dawning

The new movement's activists and organizers are not judgmental on matters of religious faith, political parties or ideology. The acid test is your activism, confidence, solidarity with other others and willingness to fight back. There is a real optimism that standing up and pushing back can win real reforms and change.

The Cleveland gathering thus marks a game changer and a way forward. It made clear that activists and organizers will use the tools of the internet and social media like Twitter and Facebook. But more significantly it applies the tools of mass civil disobedience, protests and public interventions.

The Movement organizers understand the underlying issue that Black bodies are treated as inferior to white bodies because of the racial construct that is the basis of white supremacy. (In the Old South of "traditional values," it was the so-called theory that "one drop" of blood makes you Black even if you have blue eyes and blond hair!)

The roots of white supremacist ideology are so deep in "American culture" that Confederate flags can still fly and monuments of pro-slavery "heroes" stand across the South and even the U.S. Capital.
Toward Full Consciousness

The evil of white supremacy and its impact is the main point of Ta-Nehisi Coates' new best-selling book *Between the World and Me*. Its focus on how Black bodies still suffer from that ideology is an excellent read, and has led many mainstream outlets to interview him since the eruption of Black protests against police terror.

Yet Coates doesn't outline even modest proposals to fight the racist system. The book is rooted in despair and pessimism about what the Black community can do to reverse the historic discrimination.

Coates states he is not an activist, just a writer. He describes what he feels based on facts and history. "In America," he says to his teenage son, "it is traditional to destroy the black body" it is heritage."

While not a guide to action, Coates' writings with their brilliance and pessimism nevertheless confirm what the Movement for Black Lives knows, and why this movement is optimistic that struggle is the road to fundamental change.

The reality is that Black awareness and pride is only the first step to full consciousness of racism and inequality, and of the need to join the struggle for change. The end game must be to replace the institutional racism of the capitalist state with one based on human needs before profits" socialism. It is the direction that Malcolm X in his final year of life (1964-5) was coming to, and that Martin Luther King, Jr was moving

toward before his assassination (1968).

I'm not saying that's what the leaders and activists of the Movement for Black Lives advocate. Some likely do, but their agreement that the battle against racism and protection of Black bodies must first start with self-organization and unity of African Americans "coming before unity with other ethnic groups" is crucial to building the Movement.

After the assassinations of Malcolm, King, Black Panther Party leaders and many others, an historic National Black Political Convention convened in Gary, Indiana in 1972. Although the forces gathered there divided over the issue of the Democratic Party, its example would help inspire a National Black Assembly and formation of the National Black Independent Political Party in 1980.

"The National Black Independent Political Party," its Charter stated, "aims to attain power to radically transform the present socio-economic order. . . [And] to achieve self-determination and social and political freedom for the masses of Black people. Therefore, our party will actively oppose racism, imperialism, sexual oppression, and capitalist exploitation."

The Cleveland Black Lives Matter Convening was a "game changer" because it made clear the Movement is long term. Whether its next step will add a call for a break with the two-party system, time and struggle will tell.

From Germany to Greece

3 September 2015, by Amien Essif

On May 18, Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank (ECB), unveiled his institution's new headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany before a group of about one hundred guests in what the Deutsche Welle [described](#) as a "low-key ceremony."

That same day, for every one guest at the grand opening, there were over one hundred people in the Frankfurt streets protesting the austerity politics the ECB helps enforce throughout Europe "most severely in Greece.

Organized by [Blockupy](#), an Occupy Wall Street-esque network of organizations that formed in Germany in 2012, the day of action included a blockade of the bank's new skyscraper, a march of over ten thousand people, and a protest in

front of a shopping mall where workers were on strike. It concluded with a [pitched battle](#) between blockaders and police, who tried to clear them out with water cannons; protesters set police cars and tire barricades on fire.

The day's events and photos [depicting](#) Europe's financial capital suffused with smoke and tear gas [called](#) into question the narrative that Germany is Greece's opposite, that it's a country where the euro has accomplished everything promised and has won over every layer of the population.

So what is the state of the German left, especially in relation to the anti-austerity struggles across Europe today? At the end of July journalist Amien Essif spoke with five activists from the German left to explore what it means for Germans to stand in solidarity with the Greek people, the connections between anti-austerity and antiracist struggles, and how to build a movement against the "Europe of capitalism and borders."

The participants are as follows:

â€¢ Sascha Stanicic, a member of [Socialist Alternative](#), a German Trotskyist organization associated with the Committee for a Workers' International and a sister organization to the US Socialist Alternative.

â€¢ Moritz Rieder, an activist from the Interventionist Left, an "undogmatic and emancipatory" organization and the principal group behind Blockupy.

â€¢ Daniel Morteza and Max Manzey, organizers with Die Linke.SDS, Die Linke's student organization.

â€¢ Andreas Hesse, a member of a radical group of German trade unionists that organizes solidarity trips to Greece for German workers.

Jacobin

dominance, which it has used to impose austerity on Greece. As it is portrayed in the media, the relationship between the German and Greek people is defined by economic disparity, making any display of German solidarity a matter of pity rather than common cause. Is this the state of things?

Sascha Stanicic

The German economy has benefited from the euro, but that doesn't mean that the German people or the German working class has benefitted. The competitive advantage Germany has through the euro also exists because of a policy of austerity and [low wages](#), precarization of labor, which was pushed through in Germany before other countries.

It is true that if you look at the period since the Great Recession, the German economy has come out of that quicker and the attacks here were not on the scale as in other countries. So many people would think we're lucky, and maybe the fact that the crisis did not have so much of an effect here has something to do with the policy of the government.

At the same time, I think that consciousness of people here towards Greece is not simple. There were opinion polls that said that for a majority of Germans, the main thing they are worried about in regard to the Greek crisis is the living conditions of the Greek people themselves.

So there's a sympathy and a worry about what it means for the Greek people, but at the same time, they think that if a "Grexit" [a Greek exit from the eurozone] occurs, then this will mean the German taxpayer has to pay, and unfortunately I think this idea is also supported, consciously or subconsciously, by many on the Left.

You have the situation where many of the leaders of [Die Linke](#) would say they are against the latest austerity package, that they are in solidarity with Syriza, and so on, but they would also say that a Grexit would be the worst possible thing for the German people, because it means then that the German taxpayer has to pay. While in

reality the so-called taxpayer has already paid through bailing out the banks by taking over the Greek debt into public hands.

I think this is a logic which we have to argue against because in my view, the only way forward for the Greek people is to break with the logic of austerity, to break with the logic of the euro and the EU, and to break with the basic capitalist logic.

But I think this is a problem which leads to confusion in consciousness here and which is a break with solidarity movements. In that sense, I would say there's no solidarity movement in the sense of the word. A movement would involve a broader layer of people.

If you like, Blockupy is a movement, but in a sense, it is a movement of left-wing activists. Different left-wing activists of different groups coming together, but there's no movement which would include broader layers of the working class of the youth. But I would say that there are possible starting points in the struggles which you refer to, which we've had.

Moritz Rieder

It's true that the majority of Germans are behind the politics of [German Chancellor Angela] Merkel and [German Finance Minister Wolfgang] Schäuble against Greece at the moment. But then, on the other hand, there are struggles going on here, like [strikes](#), struggles for refugees, etc. But those struggles are not happening in the frame of anti-austerity politics. We had something like preventive austerity here in the 2000s before the crisis, with cuts to social benefits by the Social Democrats.

So, many of the struggles that are going on here are not in the frame of struggles against crisis politics, austerity, etc. And that is of course a huge problem.

On the other hand, for us in the Blockupy movement, the current struggles in Europe are not simply about solidarity with the Greek people. To us it's more than that because what's going on there is not simply Germany against Greece, but

Germany, the largest economy in Europe, has translated its economic superiority into political

it's about a common struggle against a Europe of capital and borders.

Daniel Morteza

I would agree. I think the problem is that people in Germany, of course, know that wages are very low and didn't increase for many years, but don't have the mental connection to what's happening in Greece and the model of the German export "cheap production in Germany because of low wages" which has a lot to do with the [crisis](#) in Southern Europe.

This is something that many people don't know, and I think it's very abstract. The majority of the radical left knows about it, and I think it was a strength of Blockupy that we had all the serious parts of the radical and revolutionary left coming together and focusing on crisis and resistance against austerity politics, but I think for the normal population of workers, it's still too abstract and we have to better connect the struggles.

Max Manzey

It's hard to add to that. I just want to underline that especially in the last year there was a wave of strikes I hadn't seen in the whole time since I've been politically active "the [Post strike](#), the strikes at the [Deutsche Bahn](#), the [Charité clinic strike](#) in Berlin, the [strike in the kindergartens](#). There are many fights going on that are really important, and I totally agree that they are too little connected "with Blockupy, for example, it's like a symbolic movement against austerity measures. Blockupy hasn't been able to really be a point for workers to look toward.

But Blockupy mobilized three years in a row about twenty to thirty thousand people, especially young people. And that's not just the radical left, but it's a little bit more. It's not a movement "like a big spontaneous thing" but it's more than just a one-day demonstration. It has influence on discourse in Germany.

Andreas Hesse

The majority of workers have been relatively silenced by the ruling class and the federal government. They hope they will be spared the fate of

their Greek counterparts. So solidarity is not very pronounced.

Lately, it has increased a bit. For example, the chairman of the [DGB trade unions](#) was forced to issue a statement that the election of Syriza was not a threat but an opportunity for Europe. But this was merely a declaration, which wasn't followed by any action by the unions, because the German trade unions work together with the companies and the federal government to defend German jobs against international competition.

But the climate in the unions has become more open in the last year to internal discussion, especially after the election of Syriza.

In the past five years, the mass movements against austerity have occurred in places where the effects of capitalism were perhaps the most grave: in Spain, in Greece. There was Occupy Wall Street in the US, but it never attained the kind of momentum that brought Syriza to power. What strategies do you use to build a movement in a place where the image is that everything is okay?

Rieder

First of all, we started Blockupy as a transnational movement against the European negotiation of the crisis. And then we said okay, let's go to Frankfurt, let's go to where the European Central Bank is and have protests in the center of austerity politics and invite comrades from all over Europe and try to block Frankfurt for one day.

So to have sort of a metropolitan strike, block the ECB, to stop them from working for one day and then afterwards also going out in front of shopping malls. For example, we protested in front of Karstadt because the workers there were striking.

The idea was to have one day that just sort of interrupted the normal process of capitalist Frankfurt. This of course was mostly symbolic, but it's more than a demonstration with many people. It was an attempt to start a German movement against the crisis, but to make it European from the beginning.

So there has been international participation?

Yes, this year we had maybe two thousand people from other countries "especially from Italy, but also Slovenia, Denmark, Greece, Spain. There's the problem of traveling that far, but international groups have been involved in the coordination of the movement. So it's not just inviting them to come to the protest, but to organize it together. For example, most likely in October we will move to Brussels together as Blockupy.

Stanicic

I think it's no accident that when we talk about solidarity with Greece we talk about Blockupy, because Blockupy has been the only bigger mobilization that has occurred over the last few years. Blockupy, in my view, has achieved something important because it has made clear that there is resistance in the belly of the beast.

At the same time, I think that the way Blockupy works, it has a certain limit to reach out to those layers of working-class people who have moved into struggle on their own day-to-day issues. It is based on a certain idea of forms of resistance "blockades" rather than actual program and content.

The situation of union activists is that German trade unions have stood nominally in support of the Greek working class, but when it comes to using their political power, they haven't diverged much from the status quo. Can you explain, Mr Hesse, how you helped organize a more radical response within Germany's unions including IG Metall and ver.di, and how that has been received by union leadership?

Hesse

Three and a half years ago, we began to organize as colleagues from various unions in different cities who had developed our own perspective, and we decided to go down to Greece in solidarity, organize events, have discussions, get a picture of things. And we've invited Greek colleagues to Germany in order to give those

affected by the crisis a way to contradict the ruling-class propaganda. The effect is always greater when the person concerned can express the situation himself than if we would just try to make political statements.

I can give one example where we've had a good response from unions, but it has been an absolute exception. The IG Metall in Salzgitter has for years made the struggles in Greece a topic of their union training program. We've gotten support from them for our trips, and they've been involved when we've had visitors from Greece. But this is not typical of German unions.

Manzey

The main problem is that the unions in Germany are totally dominated by the [Social Democratic Party](#) (SPD), and the SPD, of course, has [bad positions](#) on austerity politics. So the question is: how is it possible to make a counter-hegemonic program inside of the unions?

I think it's a great example " traveling to Greece. But I think it's also a question how, for example, Die Linke as a party can get more influence inside of the unions to somehow question the dominance of the SPD. I think that is a big question, and there is a lot of work to do for the Left. Not just the party, but the radical left, some of whom are also connected to the unions.

There have been a few good steps " for example, the conferences of the [Rosa Luxemburg Foundation](#) , which were able to get some parts of the left wings of the unions together and organize. I think Greece was not a big topic there, but that is something where this kind of connection can grow.

A minority of Die Linke's parliamentary members [voted against](#) the second so-called bailout package in February, but Die Linke.SDS took a more firm position against the austerity measures that it imposed. Is there tension between the leadership in Die Linke and the student activists?

Morteza

Yeah, I think there is something like

that. SDS considers itself as part of the left wing of the party Die Linke. I think the right wing of Die Linke interpreted solidarity with Greece as unconditional solidarity with whatever the Syriza government does and did.

This we criticized as Die Linke.SDS. We said, of course we show solidarity with the left movement in Greece trying to fight austerity and to gather all critical parts of the population against austerity. But this is, of course, not an unconditional solidarity with the government in Greece, no matter which color it has, if it calls itself left-wing, anti-austerity or not.

Stanicic

I think this is a very important point for the future of any solidarity movements with the Greek working class. Now, with the [capitulation](#) of [former Greek Prime Minister Alexis] Tsipras and the Syriza government, I think it is important that we define our solidarity on the basis of politics and not on the basis of organizations.

The groups I am working with in Die Linke, we put forward a resolution to the last party congress saying we have to support a left government also when it breaks with the euro, because we think it is necessary to move on to socialist measures like the democratic nationalization of banks and enterprises, capital controls, a state monopoly of foreign trade, and democratic economic planning, and so on " and this makes it necessary to break with the euro given the present conditions. But this is not a position with which you will get a majority at this stage in Die Linke.

Manzey

I think the appearance of Syriza is very important for the [German left](#) , for the reformist left as well as the radical left, because for the reformist left " I think Sascha is totally right " the leadership of Die Linke for the most part sees the EU as a peace project, and they see the chance to reform the EU in favor of a social EU.

But now we're at the point where we can see that this is a project that won't work, and that the EU is a neoliberal militaristic project that is not

reformable even as there is a left-wing government in Greece. It's a big problem, and we have to discuss this inside of Die Linke and also inside of the radical left.

The other thing is Syriza became big in such a short time. It was not a revolutionary party that became really big in a short time from a small core to a really big mass party, but it was a [broader left project](#) in Greece, ranging from the reformist left to revolutionaries who were working in one party. So, somewhat similar to Die Linke in Germany, which grew in a short time with all the problems that have already been described.

But anyway, I think the left wing of Syriza will now be in the core of a new formation of the left, and it was a really big step for the whole left in Greece to have Syriza. So I think that it's important for the German left to look at it and learn from it.

Rieder

To me, as a radical leftist, the major point of reference within Greece is of course the social movements " the people on the streets fighting [austerity](#) . And it's also no surprise that you can't simply vote out austerity in that [relation of power](#) in Europe at the moment.

But on the other hand, Syriza has been interesting for us, of course, especially because the blackmailing [of Greece by its creditors] in the last months has shown how much of a farce European democracy is and how brutal the austerity is at the moment, and any alternative to it " even the attempt to think about alternatives " is brutally crushed.

I think that process has created some cracks in the hegemony of the Schäuble-Merkel regime, and that it's our task as radical leftists in Germany and all over Europe to deepen those cracks and see if we can open some splits.

In Germany and in France the far right has come to prominence in a way that hasn't been seen for a long time. In this context, the neoliberal politics of the European Union have been put forward as the humanitarian

alternative to the far right. This has made the struggle against neo-Nazism in Germany a priority for many activists, and some German activists I've talked to have said that it is a struggle which has exhausted the Left here and drained resources.

Do you believe that the development of groups like [Pegida](#) (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) has distracted the Left from the struggle against austerity?

Rieder

First of all, I think the fight against neo-Nazism is an absolute necessity here. I think the rise of nationalism, racism, and sexism in the last few years in Germany and in Europe is closely connected to the crisis. So to me it doesn't make much sense to pit those struggles against each other. Our task is to show, for example, how German nationalism and the politics against Greece are connected. Inherently connected.

Manzey

We had a pretty big movement at the beginning of the year against Pegida. There were one day more than one hundred thousand [protesters](#) against the Pegida movement on the street, all across Germany. And for a few months there were weekly demonstrations against Pegida.

And of course there were lots of left groups, including Die Linke, that mobilized for this, and there was also a question of resources. But I think that's not how movements work. If you have one hundred thousand people on the street at an antiracist demonstration and you have strikes and so on, then there's a field for left activists to argue with people, to mobilize for solidarity movements and actions for Greece. At the university where I'm active "Humboldt University" we built up a committee of students against Pegida, and we mobilized some of the students we met there to the Blockupy movement.

Morteza

I think it's dangerous if the left parties in Europe or in Germany lose their anti-establishment attitude and fail to

formulate a critique against the European system as it is now. If all the left parties in Europe fail to do so, I can understand how the right parties get stronger.

I think it's not automatic that if the Left fails then the Right gets stronger. This would be too simple. But in Eastern German states where Die Linke has totally lost its attitude against the establishment, you see that the right parties get stronger. Why? Because the left parties have no alternative. If the Left in the whole of Europe fails to be an anti-EU force, then I think it has failed on one of the big questions of our time.

Stanicic

It's also a question of how the Left acts within these antiracist and antifascist movements. It's a big problem that many on the Left would forget about all the political differences with the Social Democrats, even the conservatives, when fighting against racism. Suddenly it's as if we have something to defend together.

I think that is a big mistake. Because if we say that the basis for the growth of the far right is the lack of an alternative to the established pro-capitalist parties, if then, in the fight against the far right the Left presents itself as being in one common front with those who have to be fought, then the danger is there to push people in the direction of the far right.

So I think it is important to intervene politically in the antiracist movements by not restricting yourself to a moralistic antifascism or antiracism, but by actually also challenging the bourgeois parties, challenging social democracy, and explaining the link between the different issues.

Hesse

It's my belief that German politics in Europe is fostering the growth of right-wing politics in many different countries. The [growth of the] [National Front](#) in France is a result of anti-European sentiment in the working class which has been caused by the hegemony of German capital in Europe. Here in Germany, things are also moving to the right rather than

the left, as they did in Greece.

You've got to name capitalism as the cause behind the rise of fascism. We can't fight this as a moral problem, but only in relation to capitalism, its interests, the emergence and growth of fascist, nationalist, and reactionary forces "that must be explained. If we don't see the whole picture, if the struggle remains only on the moral level, then the protests will come to nothing.

Is there a consensus among those on the Left in Germany about what needs to be done in the Greek crisis?

[Everyone laughs]

Morteza

Transitional program . . .

Manzey

I think even in Die Linke there are many different positions on what has to be done in Greece. The main question is how to stop austerity, and I think we saw how it doesn't work: going into government and undergoing a long process in the European institutions to decide austerity measures. Obviously that doesn't work, and our focus should be on the movement from below and the organizations that are part of the resistance in Greece.

The second point is the question of power. Not just the left's power in parliament, but the power in society as a whole "about production and everything. If you want to build up an economy that is totally crushed, inside or outside of the EU, you need to control the production to grow. That is not possible under the austerity influence of the EU. I think that's also why a revolutionary perspective within Greece is completely necessary.

There are some examples where factories are under workers' control and hospitals and so on, but they are few. That is something the Left in Greece should build on, and we in Germany should look at it and build a solidarity movement and solidarity with the resistance in Greece, no matter if there is a left government or not.

Stanicic

I think there's no consensus. There's no consensus amongst the Left in Greece, and even amongst the left wing of the Left, there's no consensus. If you look at some of the spokespersons of Syriza's left, as well as some of the spokespersons of the Left in Die Linke, they have only gone so far as to say we should stop paying the debt, maybe we should nationalize the banks. But they would not explain that within the framework of a capitalist mode of production, a Grexit is no solution.

Hesse

I agree that the question of a Grexit is not the deciding question. When you break with the [European] institutions, you only have a real opportunity if you begin to break with capitalist property relations. But I think that's where the difficulty begins.

I cannot imagine an isolated socialist Greece. Greece is so weak that in the long term it wouldn't be able to withstand outside pressure. That is not a question of the Greek working class, but of the European working class, if you think about it. Even if Greece can perhaps be a pioneer in this direction, it will be crucial if other countries follow or not.

Rieder

In the Interventionist Left we have always claimed that capitalism is crisis, which means that the fight against austerity has to be an anticapitalist fight, of course. There's no social-democratic option.

But then within Blockupy there's little consensus about the way out of the crisis, since our network includes a wide variety of groups and parties. But I don't think that at the moment such a consensus is absolutely necessary in order to act together. One nice umbrella slogan has been, "They want capitalism without democracy, we want democracy without capitalism." So that has been an umbrella slogan to unite us.

What my difference is with some socialist or Trotskyist organizations is that I don't think that we need to have

a clear plan right now on, say, the five points of revolutionary strategy, because we are simply too weak for that.

So my approach would be to intervene into struggles, to try to radicalize struggles, to build up a movement and not focus so much on all those programmatical discussions. They are, of course, important, and there's the question of strategy, but I think there's a tendency within the German left to discuss words and programs way too much instead of intervening into struggles and trying to develop a new language as well.

I think there's a tendency within the German left to comment a lot on every move of Syriza, and I find that problematic because our task is quite clear: we're in Berlin, that's the center of capitalist Europe, that's the center of the blackmailing of Greece, so we need to start the fight here. That's not a question of solidarity with some wing of Syriza or not, but a question of our futures as well.

So that's also one reason why I find the framework of "solidarity" with Greece to be sort of misleading sometimes. It's rather a struggle against a certain vision of Europe and against a machinery of power, and that's a common struggle, be it here or in Greece. I think we should concentrate on developing the struggle here and not so much on commenting on every decision of Syriza.

Stanicic

We have a consensus on one thing: that the main task of the left is to fight here. But I would say that the fight should focus on the day-to-day struggles. And not only by organizing movements of those who are convinced already "the radical left" but by doing the things like the strike movements in the Charité hospital, where we have been involved a lot, and in the kindergarten strikes "building left opposition in the unions here to develop a perspective.

But as we were discussing Greece I think there is also a need to discuss strategies and program for Greece.

Manzey

It's also important to fight within the housing sector. We have here in Berlin a referendum going on about [social housing](#) that's also connected to the crisis and speculations on the housing market.

Still, I think it's right to also organize explicit solidarity actions. It's not just the fights for social things or solidarity. I think both are important, and I think after the Greek referendum, there were spontaneous mobilizations in many cities.

And not just these planned Blockupy demonstrations, but on July 15 in Berlin, for example, there was a [demonstration](#) with over one thousand people "and that was really spontaneous! Of course it was organized [by Blockupy], but not with four months of planning. That's not bad for this cause, and it's something that should continue.

Morteza

I think it's totally right to focus on the struggles here. Nobody would doubt that. But what bothers me is if we use this as a justification to end debates about Greece and to end debates about the limits of reformism and things like that.

I think if we are honest in our work "and we have to be honest" then we have to talk about the mistakes that were made. I mean I have nothing against German or French or Swedish comrades criticizing me, so they shouldn't be angry if we criticize them. I think this should be a consensus amongst international leftists in all of Europe. We have to discuss revolutionary strategy in all of Europe.

Within the left movement, we have the unique opportunity now to discuss the character of the European Union, to discuss the limits of reformism inside the eurozone or under the conditions of the treaties of Lisbon and Maastricht and all the things like that. And it would be totally fatal for the left in Germany not to participate and show concrete examples in Southern Europe now that the fight against austerity is always a fight for

After Syriza

2 September 2015, by **Stathis Kouvelakis**

For Tsipras, next month's election represents an attempt to secure a mandate for the deal Syriza has signed off on. Yet the former prime minister's approval rating [has dropped](#) from 61 percent to 29 percent in the last month. Almost 80 percent of voters say they're disappointed with Tsipras's performance during Syriza's time in office. And 70 percent think the bailout package the leadership approved will deliver more economic pain than the previous two austerity agreements.

It is to this discontent which [Popular Unity](#), a new formation of dissident Syriza members and other anti-austerity forces, hopes to give institutional expression.

In this recent interview ["conducted by Thomas Lemahieu for the French paper L'Humanité"](#) Stathis Kouvelakis, a member of Popular Unity's leadership, discusses the formation's anti-memorandum program, how to find allies outside of Europe, and what Popular Unity wishes to accomplish in the upcoming election.

Jacobin

When did Syriza reach the point of no return that led you to create a new party, Popular Unity?

When the agreement was signed on July 13. The fracture had already appeared earlier, when, in the space of a few days, the "no" from the referendum was transformed into a "yes," and when the Greek government went to negotiate in Brussels with a mandate that

effectively meant accepting the austerity framework.

But it was Alexis Tsipras [signing](#) the agreement that [started the process](#) leading to Syriza splitting ["indeed, we would more accurately speak of Syriza disintegrating. Then there were two votes in parliament on the agreement's two packages of preliminary measures, and then the one on the memorandum itself, which confirmed the split. The Tsipras government signed the memorandum without ever obtaining the approval of any of Syriza's internal structures, at any moment.](#)

Alexis Tsipras cannot cite a single text, a single decision authorizing him to do what he did; on the contrary, on the few occasions that the central committee did meet during Syriza's time in power, its decisions all had one same orientation: namely, that in no event would we sign a memorandum. "Anything but that!"

What happened was exactly the thing that had been totally ruled out on principle. While the coexistence of different currents and sensibilities in one same party was possible so long as it maintained the central objective of overturning the memorandums ["even if there were disagreements, including on the euro question"](#) it was not possible for supporters and opponents of signing the memorandum to coexist in the same party.

When Alexis Tsipras decided to accept a memorandum, he was himself deciding to dissolve his party!

Have you rallied all the Syriza MPs who spoke out against the new memorandum? Surely Popular Unity's twenty-five initial MPs aren't all of them?

In the vote there were thirty-two "against," and seventeen who voted "present" ["which in the Greek parliamentary system does not exactly amount to abstaining, but is very close to a "no."](#)

The ones we don't have yet are [Zoe Konstantopoulou](#) ["the president of the parliament, who still has her institutional functions, but who will soon join us, and three MPs of Syriza's Maoist KOE current, who we are in discussions with. Then there is Yanis Varoufakis, who won't come with us, since our positions are too far apart.](#)

It's important to remember that Popular Unity is not a party, but a front jointly mobilizing a dozen component parts. Some of them came out of Syriza, others were part of Syriza in the past, and still others come from the far left, like currents from the [Antarsya](#) coalition.

Fundamentally, Popular Unity is quite close to what Syriza was until 2013, before its currents merged into a single party. This is a formula that we are sticking to: we are a political front based on pluralism, respecting each other's differences, and placing a stress on self-organization.

Our goal is to ensure that the "no" vote expressed in the July 5 referendum, which was in the crushing majority among youth as well as among working-class and popular layers, is given political structure. We want to construct broad, open committees from below.

Of course, we are also expecting militants, individuals, and political figures to join us, too. You do not have to agree with all the points of our program, but the heart of the matter is the recognition that it is indispensable to break with the memorandums, and

that this implies a confrontation with the European Union – even if there may be points of divergence as to the means that ought to be used in such a confrontation.

But clearly, we have all drawn lessons from Syriza’s strategic failure, and we have an alternative approach to avoid ending up in the same capitulation.

Since Popular Unity is the third largest group in the Greek Parliament, the constitution gives it an “exploratory mandate” to try to form a government (i.e. before the next elections are formally called). How are you going to make use of this mandate, which lasts up until August 27?

We have been given these three days, and we will try and use them to demonstrate what our conception of politics is. We are guided by the principle that social forces should have their say, and our proposals work in this same direction: namely, the democratization of Greece’s institutions.

So firstly, [Panagiotis Lafazanis](#) will have discussions with representatives of the social forces most affected by the memorandum’s various different aspects, and who are in the front rank of the fight against the memorandum and its consequences. That is to say, representatives of the unions of employees and retired people particularly affected by the coming pensions cuts and the liquidation of our remaining social rights; citizen campaigns against privatizations; farmers, fishermen, etc.

The idea is to show that for us politics is not simply [about conclaves](#) with the representatives of political parties. Politics is something we do with social forces and mobilizations.

Secondly, we will make institutional proposals: as a democratic measure, we want to do away with the fifty-seat bonus that is given to the party who comes first in the vote, as Syriza itself had promised before the elections – one of its key policies, abandoned just like the rest. And we also propose to support the discussion that Zoe Konstantopoulou has tried to initiate in parliament with respect to German

war reparations, such that the parliament can continue its work to its proper completion.

You have been sharply critical of Alexis Tsipras’s decision to go to the polls again. Why is that?

What we criticize is the fact that the elections are being rushed! It is a classic way of trying to catch your opponents unaware, but Tsipras has done something that none of the system parties ever dared to do, namely to call elections in the middle of August: and in a country like Greece, that means a time when people are on holiday. And that’s when he chose to call the election. Which reduces the electoral campaign even further.

The purpose of this maneuver is more than obvious: he is going to the polls as soon as possible, before the concrete effects of the memorandum make themselves felt among the population.

What are the key elements of Popular Unity’s program?

The decisive point is rupture with the memorandum and austerity policies. We want to cancel the memorandums, just as Syriza had promised to do. We want to break with the budget surplus targets.

Our policy is based on immediately stopping the debt repayments: we will negotiate for the cancellation of the greater part of the debt, but on that basis! Greece cannot get back into shape so long as it is being bled dry to pay back this debt.

One of the Syriza government’s major errors was to continue paying back the debt: and with –7 billion taken out of the public coffers between January and June, they were left totally empty.

Moreover, we have no illusions as to the compatibility of this rupture program with the euro framework. So if the institutions are intransigent, with the ECB deciding to restrict access to liquidity, we will return to a national currency. The transition phase would present difficulties, certainly, but also important opportunities for relaunching the

economy, and for an economic policy working for social and environmental justice.

You referred to the institutions’ “intransigence.” Are all of you in Popular Unity agreed on exit from the euro?

Yes, we think that we have to prepare for [euro exit](#). That is absolutely clear!

Popular Unity’s program has now been finalized and it will be published shortly. Preparation for euro exit is a fundamental point. This question has several aspects. The first is clearly the recuperation of political sovereignty, in a context where a government is confronted by a Holy Alliance of all the neoliberal powers.

As we have seen, deprived of monetary levers, we were taken hostage by the ECB. Syriza suffered that ever since February 4. Secondly, it is a means of making it possible to restart the economy, guaranteeing the supply of liquidity. Furthermore, it is an extremely important lever with regard to the debt question: if we instead go for a national currency, the debt will become almost unpayable, since no one would accept the repayment of a debt redenominated in a national currency. That places us in a position of strength.

Finally, devaluation would make it possible to kickstart growth, indeed vigorously so: all countries that have found themselves in a situation of deep recession have only been able to restart the economy by making use of currency devaluation.

The choice is a simple one, really. Either we have currency devaluation, or else internal devaluation, meaning the structural adjustment plans imposed in order to reduce wages and pensions and drive down the cost of labor.

Certainly, currency devaluation does create certain problems, but also opportunities: it boosts domestic production, it allows for exports to be substituted for imports, and makes exports more competitive. Without doubt it creates problems for some things that have to be paid for in hard currency: petrol, energy, some

medications that have to be imported – although not all that much, since domestic production can provide a good part of that.

All that does open up temporary difficulties, in the transition phase. But as all the economists hostile to neoliberalism have shown – from Krugman to Stiglitz, and from Aglietta to Lordon – the debate is over. As they tell us, Greece’s best possible choice, and in reality the only viable one, is for it to return to a national currency; naturally, within the framework of a progressive policy to relaunch the economy, and which can also handle the problems that result from this. There will be inflationary pressures, but even in that context a left-wing government can protect wages.

Your program would have Greece leave the eurozone – but would it quit the European Union?

No, not necessarily. The question may well be posed, but not automatically so. After all, there are ten EU countries that are not in the euro. For us, that’s not a done and dusted question. What our program prescribes for, in the case that the confrontation does go further, is to go to a referendum.

The British government is preparing such a vote: its political orientation is entirely at odds with our own, but we don’t see why we couldn’t pose the question, too. But leaving the EU is not one of Popular Unity’s objectives.

Over recent months, neoliberal circles reacted to the Greek government’s efforts with phenomenal determination, and it seemed that they were prepared to totally destroy the country’s economy. If there were, for example, a devaluation, with the expected effects that would have on the debt, how would you protect yourselves from their attacks?

The conclusion we have drawn from the Syriza government’s experience – immediately being confronted with the blockade and the war unleashed by the European institutions – is that you have to show at least the same level of determination as they do.

That is precisely where the Syriza government let itself down: it did not take any self-defense measures. That is the context for our proposed return to a national currency.

This would also help us on the question of repaying the debt, because it puts us in a position of strength for making the creditors accept the cancellation of the greater part of the debt.

We want that kind of compromise: like what happened with all the other over-indebted countries. I’m thinking of Argentina, Ecuador, etc. We think that it is indispensable to take back monetary sovereignty – within the framework of a democratic reestablishment of popular sovereignty, and absolutely not in terms of turning in on ourselves in a nationalist sense. Our approach is profoundly internationalist.

We are not telling tall tales, like Syriza did: we are not saying that we will convince the other Europeans, and we have no illusions that Hollande or Renzi or whoever else in the EU is going to help us.

Rather, we are counting on the mobilization of the Greek people, European public awareness, and solidarity from social movements internationally. They are our true allies!

You don’t think you have any institutional allies in Europe?

No, not in Europe! We might find some elsewhere. That’s a whole different question.

In that regard, you seem to want to establish strong relations with other states, elsewhere around the planet, in order to cover Greece’s financing needs. But still today the Tsipras government say they did make attempts to do this, but that these initiatives didn’t lead anywhere. Is that not the case?

Firstly, I should say that not everything the Syriza government did was bad. It was the Syriza government’s mistaken strategy that made it possible for large sections of the Greek population to see the European Union for what it really is.

The referendum battle allowed for a powerful popular mobilization, a decisive advance in the terms of the debate, and that also owes to the Syriza government. All this did result in defeat; but we also need to have a clear view of the road that was taken.

So in the initiatives that the government did take, there were indeed openings toward certain other countries, but we got stuck halfway. It took a hesitant attitude toward Russia, in particular: some approaches were made, but at the crucial moment the Syriza government did not follow through.

At what moment?

During the critical turning point, the referendum. The agreement that Panagiotis Lafanazis had secured on the gas pipeline – he was energy minister at the time – was a highly favorable one. He had the political space to make this important move.

But truth be told, fundamentally the Russians did not know what the Greeks wanted. They were extremely distrustful, since they had the impression that Greece’s moves toward an opening were being used as a card in its negotiations with the European institutions, as a PR tool.

The photos with Putin served as a means of exerting pressure, but it all remained very superficial, and they could tell that it was not going to be followed up with concrete commitments. And they did not appreciate being toyed with.

So if Greece left the euro, would you find sufficient financing from outside the EU?

We don’t take a eurocentric view. In any case, Europe is not just the EU; Russia and Turkey are part of Europe, for example. Europe itself has to break out of its imperialist and neo-colonialist attitude toward the world’s other countries.

And of course we want to develop relations with the progressive governments of the South, and in particular the South American ones – that is a strategic choice of Popular Unity’s – as well as powers like the BRIC countries.

Of course, we would do so on terms favorable to the interests of the Greek people. Developing relations with Russia or with China is not exactly the same thing.

The Chinese interest is in trade and business. We don't want the privatizations that so attract the Chinese; but at the same time, they have made openings with regard to establishing a BRIC bank.

With Russia, it's a different matter, since it takes an essentially geopolitical view: for Russia, economic interests are subordinate to this geopolitical outlook.

It is also clear that having relations with Russia in no sense means thinking that Putin is politically or ideologically close to us. This is a question of international relations.

Another question on your program: how do you think you can stop the privatizations?

One of our key points is the nationalization of the four systemic banks. That's something very simple, and it was a strong element of Syriza's program.

In three of the four banks there is already a majority public stake, but its rights over the bank are muted and passive, under the recapitalization conditions imposed by the [European Stability Mechanism](#).

We are for insubordination against these rules, and therefore we want to take immediate control over these banks. In principle, this is simple – it would suffice to activate the existing public holding.

One of the most scandalous aspects of the third memorandum is the fact that a 25 billion will be devoted to recapitalizing the banks, and these 25 billion are the first funds resulting from the sell-off of Greek state assets!

This was criminal, and the Syriza government agreed to push it through. These 25 billion will exclusively be devoted to repaying the loans for the future recapitalization of the banks. We have to put an end to this scandal now, and nationalize the banks.

We are also in favor of the country's essential infrastructure coming back into public ownership, such as the electric grid, ports and telecommunications.

For us, economic recovery will come through public investment: no country in world history – and here I am not talking about countries in transition toward socialism – has been able to resume growth unless it had a public sector and public investment serving as locomotives.

We don't believe the claptrap about encouraging private investment in an asset-stripped country paying poverty wages. That's not how we'll get the Greek economy going again! And particularly not through this European finance, with its very tight conditions: that clearly hasn't allowed for any kind of economic recovery, during five years of crisis.

Everyone knows that the objective set for the privatizations – that is, raising the 50 billion that the lenders are demanding – is entirely unachievable, and that the country will not be able to live up to such commitments. So what is the point of such demands?

They serve the purpose of systematically bleeding the country dry. This is a true neo-colonization effort, liquidating the Greek state as a democratic and sovereign state.

The 50 billion privatization fund is directly controlled by the troika. The budgetary policy council is composed of seven members, four of them directly appointed by the four institutions: the IMF, the European Commission, the ECB, and the European Stability Mechanism.

In the event of budget overspend, they have the power to impose automatic, horizontal cuts. The national statistics institute is also under the institutions' control. The general secretariat of tax receipts is to become a completely independent authority, though in reality it is obviously under the heel of the institutions, and it can make decisions with the status of ministerial degrees.

Whatever the composition of the

government, today it no longer has any levers under its control. Which means that this third memorandum takes us an awful lot further than what went before.

How would you explain this dogged hostility to the first radical left government in Europe?

There was a very clear punitive dimension to all this. In breaking Syriza, they wanted to kill off any attempt at a break with austerity. At the same time, we ought to be clear that the current capitalist crisis is far from over, and that the ruling classes seem prepared to do everything necessary to deepen austerity policies.

Once again, Greece is serving as a laboratory: it was the guinea pig for the first stage of austerity, but now it is being forced to serve as the guinea pig for the second stage, the even more violent onslaught of austerity policies.

Syriza was the counter-attack against phase one of the austerity experiment, and Popular Unity is the political response to phase two.

You are now breaking into the Greek political landscape, but where would you set your ambitions for the coming elections?

If there is one aspect of Syriza that we are intent on preserving, it is that of speaking in a language that the population can understand; of aiming to build a majority around a simple but radical program that truly responds to the people's needs and urgent problems, and of being able to offer an applicable alternative.

That was a fundamental point of Syriza's – to do mass politics, not the politics of little groups, not sectarian politics or politics limited to protest.

It is very much possible that Alexis Tsipras and Syriza will win the current elections. But without going into alternative histories, we can say that it is possible that they won't get an absolute majority. If Popular Unity does succeed in making an electoral breakthrough, would you be able to govern together with Syriza?

The memorandums are like the god Moloch, they demand ever greater sacrifices. They already destroyed two governments, even before Syriza. They annihilated Pasok – a party much more solid and better implanted in Greek society than Syriza, transforming it into a groupuscule. They also destroyed New Democracy, in good measure.

The third memorandum will destroy Syriza, and indeed that is very much

already underway: in any case, the resignation of its general secretary in recent days was a striking symptom.

So anyone would be very much mistaken to think that the political instability in Greece is over. A new cycle is opening up with Popular Unity, allowing popular layers and social movements hostile to the memorandums to find political expression. From that point of view, our strategy is not all so different from

Podemos's.

We want to make a breakthrough, overturn the political landscape, and do fundamentally what Syriza had done between 2012 and 2015. I don't see why we will be any worse placed to do so than they were – we were also part of that "they," after all!

Translated by David Broder.

Jacobin

The campaign "you stink" shakes the sectarian regime in Lebanon

2 September 2015, by Joseph Daher

A new popular dynamic started with the campaign "you stink" that was triggered after a waste management crisis. Piles of garbage were accumulated in the streets of Beirut since early July, after the closure of a major garbage dump's site in the city of Naameh, a coastal town in the South, at that time.

Opened in emergency in 1998, this landfill of waste had to close ten years later and never exceed 2 million tons of garbage. Last July 17 2015, when the inhabitants of nearby villages blocked the road to the garbage trucks of the company Sukleen, the garbage dump had been enlarged four times and contained 18 million tons of waste. Since that day, the smell that was choking on a daily basis Naameh extended to the streets of Beirut. After ten days without garbage collection, it already accounted for 3000 tons of daily waste.

Subsequently the Lebanese national unity government composed of the forces of March 8 and 14, [51] transported some amounts of garbage heap in the poorest areas to temporarily relieve tensions in the capital Beirut and spared the more gentrified neighbourhoods. Until today, no solution has been found to the crisis of the accumulation of

waste, most of Lebanon's streets are now filled with garbage.

The bourgeois and sectarian ruling class also attempts to split the profits from the privatization of garbage pickups depending on sectarian and geographical lines. Especially the links between Averda, the company managing Sukleen and the powerful Hariri family. Close to the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, assassinated in 2005, Maysarah Sukkar established Averda a few months before getting his first contract in Lebanon. With a turnover of \$20000 dollars, he was then granted the multibillion waste market of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, without public bids. The contract was renewed several times in the general opacity.

Averda contract finally expired on July 17 2015. Without any political agreement found on a new space where to bury the waste, Sukleen trucks began dumping them in rivers, open spaces or in the port of Beirut.

The campaign "You stink" initially demanded an ecological solution to the waste crisis, but later as we will explain it the movement was radicalized to condemn the Lebanese sectarian and bourgeois regime as a whole.

At the first mobilization in the framework of this campaign Saturday August 22, more than 10,000 protesters demonstrated in the streets of Beirut. The demonstrators were challenging all the sectarian and bourgeois political parties of March 8 and 14 in the waste crisis and the corruption poisoning the country.

During these first protests, the repression of the army and the police was very violent. They tried to push the demonstrators off the roads leading to the city centre of Beirut, shooting live ammunition in the air and targeting protesters with tear gas and water cannons. The police also attacked the demonstrators with batons, wounding more than 75 persons.

Despite the fierce repression, new mobilisations were organised the next day as a challenge to the police, with about 20,000 people in the streets of Beirut. One could read on the walls of the luxurious downtown invested by the protesters, graffiti such as "Down with capitalism" and "Downtown Beirut belongs to the people", "No to homophobia, racism, sexism and classism" and "Revolution".

The various Lebanese media, all at the

service of the sectarian and bourgeois political parties, with the collaboration of security services and even some members of the campaign “you stink” that did not want a radicalization of the movement and the the challenging of the sectarian regime, tried to discredit the movement as a whole, by notably particularly characterizing young people from Beirut poor suburbs who had joined the movement as “infiltrators” “rioters” and “saboteurs” ... A false propaganda, which by using similar terms, reminded for many protesters the propaganda of the Assad regime in Syria against the peaceful demonstrators at the beginning of the revolution in 2011.

Mobilizations and sit-ins were held throughout the week despite the continuation of the repression that resulted in the hospitalization of more than 400 people.

Other demonstrations took place in other parts of the country, but particularly in the Akkar region, which is located in the North of Lebanon and is the poorest and the least provided in public services [52]. People mobilized under the slogan “Akkar is not a dustbin” after the government’s proposal to transport the waste in this region. In return and to try to convince the people of the region of this measure, the government decided to allocate \$ 100 million to the development of Akkar and 200 million already allocated were made available for road infrastructure and sewers.

A group of municipalities in the Akkar valley has also launched a campaign called “Tamartouna bifadlikoum” (You have buried us by your largesse) who refuses the barter principle of disposing of Lebanon’s waste in Akkar and to guarantee in return the development of the region.

In the same region of Akkar, the

residents of the village of Eرسال to prevent the creation of a garbage dump area in the locality launched a petition.

The trade unions of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (known as the CGTL) called to join the movement following the events of August 22 and 23 August, but because of their weaknesses and their submissions to sectarian and bourgeois Lebanese political parties, their calls are in many ways just rhetorical.

On Saturday August 29, a new massive demonstration was organised in the capital Beirut gathering between 60 000 and 100 000 people. The youth was very much present and the demonstrations were highly dynamics.

One could read and hear the following messages in the protests: “Revolution against the ruling class, against sectarianism, against racism, and against patriarcat”; “Secularism, equality and social justice”; “From Douma to Beirut the people is one and does not die”; “From Baghdad to Damascus and Beirut and Palestine, one revolution”, “the people want the fall of the sectarian regime”, etc...

Numerous protesters were condemning also the corruption of the political elites of March 8 and 14, as well as the neo liberal and privatization policies that impoverished the popular classes of the country and led to the destruction of public services.

In these mobilisations, a new front was established gathering various leftist and progressive movements, in which we can found at its heart the Socialist Forum, called “the people want” under the slogan “secularism, equality and social justice”. This progressive coalition demands

notably: the liberation of all the protesters arrested during the demonstrations “you stink” and the end of the repressive campaigns of the State; the establishment of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of a non sectarian proportional election and with Lebanon as a single district; resignation of the Environment Minister and the sidelining of the Council of Development and Reconstruction on the waste issue; prosecution for all those involved in the business of privatization and waste management; an investigation on all those involved in the violence in recent protests, that is to say the political and security officials, headed by the Interior Minister, Nohad Machnouk; etc ...

The multiple and various attempts of the sectarian and bourgeois political parties of March 8 and 14 to co-opt the movement for its own political benefit and opportunist interests are for now still a failure.

The mobilizations in Lebanon, such as the continuing ones in Iraq that also gathered hundreds of thousands of protesters on Friday August 28, show us that the shock wave of the revolutionary processes that began in the region in 2011 are very far from being finished, despite the various counter revolutionary offensives. We must give our support to these new uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq while continuing to support the revolutionaries in Syria, Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, etc ... fighting for the initial objectives (democracy, social justice and equality) of the revolutionary processes and against all forms of the counter revolution.

As we have said before and despite the significant and multiple difficulties, the revolutionary processes are not dead...

30/08/2015

Labour Law Reforms, Indian Capitalism and

the Modi Government

1 September 2015, by **Radical Socialist**

The national convention called by the Central Trade Unions, a group of mostly moderate organisations, mainly led by either reformist left parties or affiliated to bourgeois parties, and therefore not at all inclined to make excessively radical claims, adopted a declaration that said, in part:

“The Governments’ aim in aggressively pushing through sweeping changes in labour-laws is nothing but to push out overwhelming majority of workers out of the coverage of all labour laws and to drastically curb the trade union rights. The CTUs had besides other issues raised the issue of strict enforcement of labour laws and universal social security but this Govt. is doing away with all rights-components in all the labour laws aiming at creating conditions of bonded labour in all the workplaces. Employees Provident Funds and Employees State Insurance schemes are proposed to be made optional which is also aimed at demolishing the Provident Fund and ESI schemes dismantling the basic social security structures available to the organized sector. And for the vast unorganized sector workers, old schemes are being repackaged and renamed, without providing for funds and implementation-machinery/network with a view to befool the people.’ [53]

So who is right — the bosses and the government, with their array of experts, development economists, management gurus, or the workers and their unions? Before and during every strike, dozens of newspapers and dozens of television channels produce innumerable experts, who explain in unctuous tones that getting rid of the archaic laws will benefit not just the bosses, but the entire economy, including the workers. The archaic labour laws, we are told, act as shackles on the feet of the Indian economy.

So what are the laws which must be reformed? The list includes the Factories Act (1948), the Apprentices Act (1961), and the Labour Laws Act (1988).

It is true, that since independence, or even since 1991, labour laws have not changed much. The basic idea behind some of these laws is, that in any non-agricultural work, if there are ten or more workers in a workplace (when it has electricity) and twenty or more (when it does not have electrical power), then there will be governmental regulation of the rules of work. This sector is called the “organised sector”.

Establishments under the organised sector usually have to register themselves under the Factories Act. This means, in theory they are bound to allow government inspectors to enter their premises at any time. But even so, some 90 per cent of India’s labour force, belonging to the unorganised sector, are currently outside of these rules. So such things as rules about working hours, overtime pay, rights of women workers, all these are restricted to a less than ten percent fragment of the working class. There was a formal claim behind the making of this structure in the colonial and immediate post-independence period, namely, as the nation developed, as modernisation proceeded, the organised sector would grow and more and more workers would come under protection. In reality, from the 1970s, development has taken a different path.

Nevertheless, the existence of these laws does have some consequence. Even if, today only ten percent of the working class is protected by these laws, the rights they enjoy appear as a forward looking goal to the vast majority. In the same way, we can refer to the regular announcement of pay revisions, of payment of Dearness

Allowances [54], etc. The bourgeoisie, its paid media hacks, its paid ideologues who are called economists, all attack these workers/employees. They allege that these workers are privileged. It is routinely spread in newspapers, in fiction, in organised rumours, that these are people who get fat salaries without doing any work. Had the state sector not existed, it is then asserted, they would not have these privileges.

There is of course some truth in these fables. Take the public sector and the private sector buses in Kolkata. Private sector bus drivers and conductors usually get a share of the money taken in, not a salary. As a result, they work long hours. Public sector buses are kept in depots, where there is a full time maintenance staff. Private sector bus drivers and helpers have to look after their own buses. So owners make big profits. And as long as certain groups of workers go on getting definite pay scales, periodic revision of the pay scales, dearness allowance, a number of guaranteed promotions during one’s working life, some even if limited) benefits for women workers, such as paid maternity leave or child care leave, these persist in becoming benchmarks for other workers, in formulating their demands and in fighting for them. This was why, even as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi had objected to the formation of the Seventh Pay Commission (his view had been echoed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee).

So the law is important because it creates a somewhat better space where the workers can fight. To ignore that is not a useful political stance. Year after year, big capital has been demanding that the laws restraining them must go. Some of the Acts they want removed or modified are the Industrial Disputes Act and the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act. The IDA says, in any

plant having 100 or more workers, before sackings or closure, the owners must seek government permission. The second Act restricts the use of contract labourers in existing industries. Modi wants the number of workers needed to bring a factory under the Factories Act to be increased from 10 to 40. It is to be noted that in today's world of lean production, a factory employing 40 workers and using robots multiplying the work of those 40 tenfold or more, is actually quite a considerable factory. The BJP-led Rajasthan government has already taken some steps. In the Contract Labour Act, where the references had been to twenty workers or more, they have increased it to fifty or more. In the case of the IDA, they have announced that permission of the state government need not be sought regarding sackings unless the size of the workforce is 300 or more. When the workers are taken in as apprentices, all restrictions on sackings have been lifted. They have also made getting recognitions for unions more difficult. In addition, Modi has proposed making firings easier, imposing up to Rs. 50,000 fines plus jail terms for "illegal" strikes; and the already taken action - making child labour legal.

Child Labour

On one hand, much din is being made and much data is being fudged in order to claim that poverty is going down in India. On the other hand, instead of taking social welfare measures directed at poor children, child labour has been legalised. In an interview, Gautam Mody, General Secretary of the New Trade Union Initiative, explained in an interview, that officially the position is, children may be made to work outside school hours. But if children have to attend school, and then perform labour outside school hours, then where does childhood go? What does education mean? Secondly it has been said that the labour of members of the family can be used when using child labour, But if it is not clarified what family means, this can be a real problem. Using the concept of "joint family", children of poorer kin can be

exploited. Moreover, as child labour becomes widespread, and extremely low wages are paid to these children, that will have the effect of dragging down the overall wage level, certainly in a number of sectors. So the "reform" of child labour law has the clear intention of lowering wages and producing larger numbers of low paid unskilled labourers.

Contract Labour

The bulk of the people in the labour market of India are short term contract labourers. At present, 85 per cent of the enterprises engaged in industrial production work with less than 50 workers. 58 per cent of factories have less than 30 workers. Even in the organised sector about 80 per cent of workers have no formal, written agreement. Or they have contracts for less than one year. A huge part of these workers work under sub-contractors. Even in government jobs, or in jobs where the salary ultimately comes from the government, thirty per cent are currently working with short term contracts. But out of the 36 million contract workers now in existence in India, hardly 6 million even now come under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act of 1970. Modi's proposed reform wants to take all workers in all factories hiring 50 or fewer workers outside the purview of this Act. In that case, of course, far more workers would come under the tender mercies of the contractors.

Small Industrial Enterprises

By the Small Factories (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services) the definition of a small factory has been sought to be changed to all factories employing fewer than 40 workers. In the name of simplifying the laws, all such factories are thus going to be taken out of the protection of 14 labour protection laws. It is to be remembered that post-1991, most of the new jobs created fall in the unorganised sector. The proposed reforms will immensely strengthen the owners in that huge sector.

Factory Inspection and "Self-Certification"

Industrialists and bankers often use the term "inspection raj". Inspections can be of different types. But the truth is, India never had much of a decent labour inspectorate. In 2012, in order to see whether the Minimum Wages Act was being properly implemented, there were a princely total of 3171 inspectors for about 7.7 million enterprises. It is evident that there was not much real inspection. According to official records, in 1986 there had been actual inspections of 63 per cent of all factories. By 2008 this had come down to 17.88 per cent.

Even 31 years after the Bhopal disaster, awareness of industrial safety is extremely poor. In the case over Vadodara's Hema Chemicals, it was the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee that found a mountain of 77,000 tonnes of toxic waste material created by the owner. [55] Yet, in this situation, instead of looking at the problems workers face, the Modi government has, in a particularly shameless manner, called for "self-certification". The owner will annually certify that the company is following all laws. There may be occasional (not annual) inspections. If that ever results in proving that the owner had lied, then they might be handed stiff penalties. As had happened to Union Carbide after Bhopal, one supposes!! In reality, everything will be imperilled as a result of this: workplace safety, drinking water, eight hour working day, adequate toilet facilities, extra pay for overtime work, leave with full pay - every right won over a century.

The Gujarat Model

Before the elections of 2014, we were repeatedly told, that the road to the country's development was being shown by the Gujarat Model. So what does development mean in that case? The Gujarat Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act, 2004 and the Gujarat Special Economic Zones Acts have ensured that most of Gujarat's

industries fell outside the control of India's labour laws, or most of them. But though the SEZs were outside the control of national labour laws, they did not generate vast numbers of jobs. What happened was, the rate of profit and the total profits of the bosses multiplied manifold. Secondly, the SEZs were built by occupying large tracts of land. At the all India level, that model has already led to tremendous uproar. Seizing the opportunity, even the bourgeois opposition parties have started making trouble over this issue in Parliament.

But what, overall, was the Gujarat Model? In 2012, an independent trade union named the Jyoti Karmachari Mandal filed a query under the Right to Information Act concerning the Gujarat Government's Swami Vivekanand Youth Employment Week. The Gujarat Government had claimed that 65,000 young women and men had been given jobs through Rozgar Melas (Employment Fairs). But a district-wise break up obtained through RTIs showed a total of not more than 51,587. Of these, 11,172 were apprentices, so there is no guarantee they would retain their jobs after the apprenticeship period was over. That leaves 40,415. But the responses to the RTI provided only 32,372 names and addresses.

Moreover, it was learnt from the RTIs that not one person had been given appointment letters. What was done, it emerged from the data provided by the RTIs, was that 18.7 million rupees were spent out of public funds (for the security of the ministers who went round these fairs handing over fake documents called "Employment letters" (bad in law) to the youth, and for setting up stalls, putting advertisements etc. The result was the hiring of low paid workers - mostly for the private sector. So this is the model that Modi wants to present to the whole of India. The rulers will no doubt be happy.

Environment and Workers' Health Issues

Another important issue connected to this is the health issue. In 1960, industry in Gujarat was restricted to four cities - Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot. The discovery of mineral oil and natural gas changed the picture. Currently 51 per cent of India's chemical industry production comes from this one province. Twenty per cent of Gujarat's total industrial activity is over this one industry. Yet

even so many years after Bhopal, the state government is not worried about the health of workers in this industry. In 2009, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and IIT Delhi joined hands to develop a new system of pollution measurement. On this index, the Comprehensive Environmental Pollution Index, in 2009 Ankleswar in Gujarat with CEPI 88.50 was India's most highly polluted place. In 2011 and 2013 this dubious honour went to Vapi in Gujarat, with CEPI 85.31. In 2013, out of the 30,310 factories registered under the Factories Act in Gujarat, 4,559 were identified as dangerous chemical works. Yet the Gujarat government has never developed any plan to tackle dangerous chemicals. As the first step to transferring the Gujarat model across India, the Modi government has already diluted many of the environment protection rules to facilitate setting up highly profitable industries.

So the words Labour Law Reform, do not imply protecting, far less improving, the health, the wages, and working environment of workers. Their meaning should now be clear: destruction of trade unions, intensification of exploitation, reduction of wages, increasing child labour. That is why the strike of 2 September is such a vital action.

Make the One Day All-India Strike on 2 September a Huge Success

1 September 2015, by Radical Socialist

But the class struggle dimension is not often publicly recognised, because there the bourgeois liberals and the fascists are in essential agreement. So the common area between liberals (who might claim to oppose Hindutva) and the fascists is that in the name of "reforms" for "development", profit rate must be increased. That is why, we need to discuss closely the one day All-India Strike called by the trade unions for 2 September, 2015.

Why the Strike?

On 26 May 2015, at a National Convention held in the Mavlinkar Auditorium at the call of 11 Central Trade Unions as well as 50 national federations of Central Government employees, a one day strike call was issued in order to resist the anti worker-peasant, pro-bosses' profit policies of the one year old BJP

government.

The trade unions had presented a Ten point charter of demands at the time of the UPA government. All-India strikes have occurred thrice, in 2010, 2012 and 2013 over those demands. [56] Just as the UPA government chose to remain silent over those demands, so has today's national Democratic Alliance government under Modi decided to

ignore the demands. Both NDA and UPA have severe objections to implementing any of the recommendations of the Indian Labour Conferences.

Accordingly, we first need to look at the charters of demands, produced by the Central Trade Unions as well as the Central Government Employees Federations. Whenever workers call strikes, the bourgeois newspapers, the television channels, all raise a tremendous hue and cry - these people are damaging the economy. Attempts are made to stoke up conflicts between the poorest paid workers and those slightly better off. So we begin by closely examining the demands.

The 12 point Charter of the Central Trade Unions:

1. Urgent measures for containing price-rise through universalisation of public distribution system and banning speculative trade in commodity market.
2. Containing unemployment through concrete measures for employment generation.
3. Strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measure for violation for labour laws.
4. Universal social security cover for all workers.
5. Minimum wages of not less than Rs. 15,000/- per month with provisions of indexation.
6. Assured enhanced pension not less than Rs. 3000/- P.M. for the entire working population.
7. Stoppage of disinvestment in Central/State Public Sector Undertakings.
8. Stoppage of contractisation in permanent perennial work and payment of same wage and benefits for contract workers as regular workers for same and similar work.
9. Removal of all ceilings on payment and eligibility of bonus, provident fund; increase the quantum of gratuity.

10. Compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days from the date of submitting applications; and immediate ratification of ILO Convention C 87 and C 98.

11. Against Labour Law Amendments

12. Against Foreign Direct Investment in Railways, Insurance and Defence.

The 10 Point Demands of the Central Government Employees Federations:

1. Effect wage revision of the Central Government Employees from 01.01.2014 accepting memorandum of the staff side JCM; ensure 5-year wage revision in future; grant interim relief and merger of 100% of DA; Include Gramin Dak Sevaks [57] within the ambit of 7th CPC. Settle all anomalies of 6th CPC.
 2. No Privatisation, PPP or FDI in Railways, Defence Establishment and no corporatization of Postal services.
 3. No ban on creation of new posts. Fill up all vacant posts.
 4. Scrap PFRDA Act and re-introduce the defined benefit statutory pension scheme.
 5. No outsourcing, contractisation, privatization of governmental functions; withdraw the proposed move to close down the printing presses, the publications, form stores and stationery departments and medical stores Depots; regularize the existing daily-rated/casual and contract workers and absorption of trained apprentices.
 6. Revive the JCM functioning at all level as an effective negotiating forum for settlement of the demands of the Central Government Employees.
 7. Remove arbitrary ceiling on compassionate appointment.
 8. No labour reforms which are inimical to the interest of the workers.
 9. Remove the ceiling on payment on bonus
 10. Ensure five promotions in the serve career.
- Some general issues can be

understood from these demands. Generally, of course, unions raise demands in the interests of their members. But some of these demands are demands that go beyond union members to serve the interests of the entire working class, indeed of all toiling people.

The Public Distribution System

The governmental logic behind gutting the countrywide PDS has been, why should the government pay “subsidies “ to those who have the ability to pay? By this “logic”, a division has been created between those who are ostensibly “above’ the poverty level and those who are below it. A huge part of the population has been removed from the rationing system. We say - the government must increase its revenues by increasing direct taxes on the rich, on companies, etc. Using that wealth, every human being living in India must be given rice, wheat, pulses, soap, and other essential goods through the rationing network.

We feel that if Mukesh or Anil Ambani [58] are willing to stand in queue for the ration or to eat the quality of rice obtained from the ration shop, let them also get their ration cards and draw their rations. The “subsidy” the government would have to bear in order to set up a universal rationing system, will have to be funded by hiking taxes on the Ambanis, the Adanis, the Tatas and the Birlas.

Job creation

Only the state can afford to create employment opportunities without everyday looking at the rate of profit. So it is through public investments that employment can be generated and the problem of unemployment tackled. Not only the second demand of the Central trade unions, but also other demands actually have that thrust.

Minimum wages Rs 15000, Minimum pension Rs. 3000

Over this demand, a fraud is being perpetrated to divide workers and toiling people generally. The argument is, if wages are raised, the cost of living will also go up. If the wages of rural workers is raised, then prices of cereals, lentils, vegetables will go up immediately. Services will cost more. Domestic workers (still called servants in most Indian languages) wages will rise [this is a threat directed at the better paid wage earners, who hire part time or even full time domestic help]. The hike in the wages of transport workers will also mean a hike in transport costs.

First of all, everyone has the right to live a decent life. So regardless of exactly what the impact will be on workers with somewhat higher incomes, the demand for minimum wages and pensions for all is the most socially just demand that one can think of.

Secondly, these two demands are not isolated ones. There is a full charter of demands taking into consideration all working people. The demands also include demands for wage rise of workers and employees of the organised sector. What is ignored, when the better paid workers are instigated against this demand, is the reality that in today's India, in fact less than 10 per cent of the workers are organised. These are indeed core demands that will have an effect on all the demands of the workers. In today's working class movement in India, the importance of these demands simply cannot be overstressed.

Further, it must be realised that a large part of this unorganised labour force, workers in construction industry, domestic workers, or for that matter workers under contract in numerous industries, do not work under the same owner all their lives. So the central thrust of these demands is not directed to the individual

capitalist or boss, as it is directed to the state as the collective voice of the ruling class. It is for the state, rather than any private employer, to guarantee a monthly pension to all workers after they retire.

Globalization and Its Impact

Next come the demands related to globalization and the attacks on working class due to globalization:

These include an opposition to the reduction of permanent jobs and the increase of contractisation. It is worth looking at how massively this has grown in different sectors. Through the introduction of the so-called PPP model, many jobs even in core government sectors have been farmed out to private companies, especially contractors. Vital aspects of the economy are affected. As a result, private profits grow while losses are off-loaded on the gutted, exhausted public sector. At the same time, through contractisation and privatisation, an increasing number of workers are pushed into precarious conditions of existence. For example, in the educational sector, even in higher education (general colleges, universities, and technical colleges), teachers hired through short term contracts (at most one year) now amount to 40 per cent of all teachers. An increasing part of the other staff (clerical, technical, security, etc) are also being turned into contract, often short term staff.

Finally there are basic democratic rights issues, notably the demand that the right to form trade unions be accepted rather than hampered, and that the ILO conventions 87, 98 and 104 be recognised and implemented. Through these conventions, India must promulgate laws that would make impossible the current scenario, where union-busting laws like the Essential Services Maintenance Act are passed and implemented. Government employees must also be given the full and unhampered right to form unions and the right to strike.

Along with these, there are demands relating to already implemented as

well as proposed labour law reforms, but so important are these, that they merit a separate discussion.

Before that, however, one core issue must be addressed. In 1991, when P.V. Narasima Rao was the Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh the Finance Minister, India embarked on an open, full-fledged policy of economic liberalisation, under the heading of globalization. Ever since then, we have been given certain promises. At the heart of all those promises was one central argument - that globalization, or the reduction of state control and the increase of economic liberalism, would result in an immense development with a trickle-down effect, so that the poor too would benefit. After a quarter century, the time has surely come to take stock of the concrete effects.

After between ten and fifteen years of the new policies, i.e., in 2001-05, according to the estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the average Gross Domestic Product rose by 6.5 percent per year. But wages rose by 2.6%. In 2006 wages rose by merely 0.4 per cent, and in 2007 they actually declined by 0.6 per cent. But even the word wages can be confusing, when the division is such that the wages of bureaucrats, managers, are piled together with those of truck drivers, brick layers, or domestic help. A few other components help us to understand the distribution of income (wages, profit, all) better.

1990-91 2010-11

Private Cars 1,80,000 29,00,000

People travelling by planes 89,00,000
5,70,00,000

Cabinet Secretary's wages 30,000
90,000

(Monthly, in INR)

Annual salary of the Tata Steel

Managing Director (in INR) 3.78
million 41 million

In other words, "development" has indeed occurred. It has made the Indian wealthy more wealthy. It has enabled a few within the Indian

capitalist class to break through right to the top of the big capitalists globally, and it has meant prosperity for the top 10 to 15 per cent of the Indian population. The clearest gross estimate of how globalization has meant gains, and for whom, come from two sources. We can look at the Income Tax and property tax records; and we can look at the reports on worldwide wealth, including the aforementioned Forbes list of the rich.

These show that in 2009, the top 100

Indian rich had total wealth amounting to 276 billion US dollars. In the same year, the top 100 Chinese rich had wealth amounting to 170 billion US dollars. Yet if the GDP is computed taking into account relative purchasing power, (GDP- PPP) then the Indian GDP was less than half that of its Chinese counterpart. In other words, despite the rhetoric of India being a democracy and how that makes it difficult to garner profits while in China supposedly the dictatorial rule makes everything

easier, it is in India that the wealthy have a tighter grip over the distribution of wealth.

So the strike is not because of any shady and manipulative attitude of the union leaders, as bourgeois propaganda tells us all the time. Nor is there any adventurism. What exists is a deep anger among the toiling people, with which has come together in recent times a determination to fight against the proposals for labour law reform by the Modi Government.