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30 June 2016, by **robm**

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Anticapitalistas on the outcome of the 26J elections

30 June 2016, by **Anticapitalistas**

There are two important issues that we want to highlight. On the one hand, we must not underestimate the importance of the result in historical terms. Millions of people have voted for change (although change does not have a single meaning), for a new political force, which was the target of strong attacks from the elites. This confirms that, despite the absence of a large section of our support, we have managed to build an electoral bloc capable of confronting the parties of the dominant classes. On the other hand, this does not hide the disappointment that short-term expectations have not been met. The alliance between Podemos and IU lost more than a million votes compared to the 20D [election on 20 December 2015] and has failed to reach its potential.

The electoral cycle is temporarily closed and although they have not met

all the goals, we must recognize that there are important steps forward. If the cycle of mobilization, social conflict and self-organization of 15M was the basis that created the social layer that has allowed us to confront the elites on the electoral level, now we have reverse this dynamic and launch a process of popular construction in the grassroots in the medium term to allow us to strengthen, influence the next parliamentary term and prepare for the upcoming battles.

The regime will set up a government without an absolute majority, but loyal to the Troika and austerity. For Anticapitalistas, to govern or support a government has to mean achieving concrete improvements for the popular classes and at the same time, allow open paths to a radically democratic, ecofeminist and socialist society. It is time to clearly define the

political camps: no possible government combination is ours and we in will be opposition, firmly supporting and encouraging social conflicts, making strong programmatic proposals, using the parliaments as a platform, working for a convergence that is not just an alliance of parties but a social alliance between the working class and pauperized middle class against the cuts that the government to be formed will carry out under orders from Brussels. Being with working people, with patience, creating community and counterpowers: organize, fight, create popular power.

After this election cycle, an honest and comrade debate should open in the block for change. As Anticapitalistas we will defend our proposal of a broad party-movement, rooted locally, linked to struggles and the popular classes, useful for social movements, with a

perspective of rupture and of course, pluralist. We have to build in a unified way, with respect and dialogue between the different proposals that are put forward. And we must continue to build the people's unity from below against the unity of the elites. We must now therefore use the electoral unity in the social fightback.

The international context is difficult. There is a right turn in Europe. It is urgent to combat the rise of authoritarianism: in this coming

period we must see ourselves as part of a democratic and anti-fascist movement in Europe. Sketching out these alliances, we have to seek points of convergence to generate a movement at European level. This battle is played internationally.

We will continue fighting and building. We are millions and we have shown that yes we can. Now we must organize in every neighborhood, in every workplace or educationl

etabishment. The regime and the elites are not going to find it easy to stabilize their regime. All we can foresee is the struggle to further open the gap and increase and strengthen the bloc for change. Not one step back, we have come to stay. We will continue.

Anticapitalistas
28 June 2016

Source [Anticapitalistas ante el resultado de las elecciones del 26J](#).

Brexit crisis: for unity and solidarity in Europe, against racism and social dumping

28 June 2016, by **Fourth International**

1. The result of the British referendum is a further stage in the crisis of the EU after Greece and the migrants crisis. A large majority of voters in England and Wales has voted for "Brexit", imposing "Leave" on the whole of the United Kingdom despite the contrary vote in Scotland and the North of Ireland - a factor of crisis within the British state potentially leading to a second independence referendum in Scotland.

2. The xenophobic discourse stigmatising East European immigrants used by the main spokespersons of the "Leave" campaign, whether Boris Johnson (Conservative Party) or Nigel Farage (UKIP), dominated the campaign. They thus succeeded in capturing the deep-rooted social exasperation among broad popular layers - those who have been the main victims of austerity, job losses, benefit cuts. This exasperation turned against the elites (in Westminster or Brussels). Unhappily, at a mass level, this rejection of the EU does not express at the moment a progressive anti-austerity radicalism, but a rejection of European migrant workers, scapegoats for job losses; mixed with a rejection of the European Union seen as responsible for the attacks they

have suffered. This has led to public expressions of racism and xenophobia that had become unacceptable since the 1970s when, among others, the Anti-Nazi League helped to turn back the tide of mounting rightwing extremism.

3. The dynamics that led to the calling of the British referendum - notably the development of UKIP, bolstered by the Eurosceptic right wing of the Tory party - mean that the terrain on which the referendum debate was carried out in Britain was extremely unfavourable to the left. The Labour Party was torn between a traditional rejection of the EU - as had been the case in the previous referendum in 1975 - and pressure from trade-union forces and others saying that the EU's policies had been a shield against some of the worst excesses of neo-liberalism combined with the desire to reject the rightwing anti-immigrant xenophobia of the Leave campaign. Labour voices calling for leave received greater media coverage than the party's official position of Remain. Despite this only 37% of Labour voters supported Leave.

4. The mainstream "Remain" campaign appeared as that of the élites, of an arrogant City, playing on

the fear of catastrophe in the case of a "Leave" vote, while millions of British workers have already experienced a social disaster imposed by the very same people as those that tried to convince them to stay in the EU.

5. In this situation it was inevitable that the left campaigns - Another Europe Is Possible (AEIP) for voting yes to staying in the EU, and Left Leave (Lexit) for voting no - would have a very limited hearing. Nevertheless AEIP had strong support from Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, the leadership of the Green Party, and many left trade union activists notably Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the fire fighters union (FBU), as well as thousands of activists around the country.

6. The result of the vote therefore leaves all workers and students from EU countries in Britain, and in the first place those from Eastern Europe, in a very precarious material situation, and feeling vulnerable to expressions of the xenophobia whipped up during the campaign. Physical attacks on migrants - most notably Polish people - have already occurred. Similarly, the jobs and buying power of all British workers will suffer from the consequences of the monetary

manoeuvres around the pound sterling and all eventual measures taken by the EU. Far from being part of a progressive plan of rejection of austerity and capitalist policies, the "Leave" vote will lead to an even more reactionary drift of a new Conservative government, facing a Labour Party weakened by referendum with a strong campaign against Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the party by the Labour right.

7. The initiatives taken in Britain immediately after the referendum to demonstrate solidarity with all migrant workers are therefore very important and should be continued and extended. Despite the differences on the referendum, the task now is to organise in the broadest unity possible against austerity and in solidarity with migrants, and to resist the rightwing Labour campaign against Corbyn and the left.

8. "Brexit" structurally weakens the EU and has provoked a crisis of direction at the top whose consequences cannot be predicted. Month after month, the consequences of pro-austerity dictates are made clear to the ruling class: the votes for revolt of the Greek people in January and July 2015, the strong French mobilization against attacks on labour laws, and recent days have seen heavy losses for Matteo Renzi in local

elections in Italy.

9. The total lack of democracy in the functioning of the European Union, the accumulation of social exasperation faced with attacks by right and left governments, is expressed whenever the popular electorate has the opportunity. The European Union is destroying social protection and legislation in each country, is pushing for competition of all against all, pushing casualization of all workers throughout the EU.

Unfortunately, the labour movement in Europe, and primarily the CES, is not playing its role of a bulwark and weapon for international solidarity and defence of social rights. There is not yet a Europe-wide progressive dynamic to turn that frustration into a general challenge to capitalist austerity.

10. The EU is a bourgeois institution that we do not believe is reformable and would indeed have to be destroyed to create a new basis for inter-European cooperation on the basis of solidarity among the exploited and oppressed.

11. To turn this crisis of the European Union to the advantage of the exploited and oppressed would require a level of political cohesion and social weight of radical anti-capitalist forces that has to be totally rebuilt at a

Europe-wide level.

12. In this situation our tasks are multifold:

- * At a European level to encourage all initiatives combating austerity (Madrid conference etc) imposed by the EU while clearly explaining the responsibility of national bourgeoisies at nation-state level, denouncing the setting of workers of different countries against each other and fighting for an upward harmonisation of social rights and wages;

- * Fighting together against the payment of illegitimate public debts and against undemocratic treaties like TTIP and CETA;

- * Popularising and organising solidarity with all struggles of those populations fighting concretely against Troika imposed policies (Greece, Portugal...);

- * Renewing our efforts in solidarity with migrants and their demands to be given the right to residence, work and benefits in the EU, for opening of borders and strengthening our links with migrant organisations.

- * Promoting and nourishing the debate among the European radical left on perspectives for building a new - anticapitalist, antiracist, ecosocialist, feminist - Europe.

The two party system still hangs on

28 June 2016, by Jaime Pastor

It will take time to analyze this result, very different from what most polls predicted, and among the explanations, study notably the impact of Brexit on the movement of votes of the undecided in favor of the right. Nevertheless, we can see now that it will not have tipped the balance toward change, but on the contrary towards conservatism and reaction.

In any case, it will not be easy to put a government in place: the PP must rely not only on the support of Ciudadanos

(32 seats) and "Coalicion Canaria" (1 seat) but also on the abstention of the Basque PNV (right autonomist- 5 seats) and the PSOE (82 seats) to form a government. Ciudadanos and the PSOE must also accept, under pressure, that this government would be led by Rajoy (PP), who emerges strengthened from these elections, after having ruled out this hypothesis during the campaign. A pressure which is already at work, particularly on the PSOE, if we look at today's

editorial in *El Pais* (the largest Spanish daily newspaper), which says that it is necessary that the PSOE "allows, with its abstention, the establishment of a government by those in favor of what the ballot boxes have decided".

While Brexit demonstrates the failure of the project of the European Union and that the euro area is still more polarized between creditors and the debtors, we find ourselves in a situation of uncertainty where the only

thing that is certain is the growth of inequality and the social and political movements against austerity.

The challenge remains knowing which forces are able to respond to this real malaise: either those who surf on “the politics of resentment” against refugees and immigrants to rebuild a neo-fascism which accommodates to economic globalization or new socio-political alternatives that militate for a restoration of solidarity between the peoples, starting in the south of Europe, and against the dictatorship of debt and xenophobia.

As to UP, in spite of coming first in Catalonia, the Basque Country and Navarre, it is obvious that the hopes raised by the coalition of Podemos and Izquierda Unida (IU) have not been fulfilled in the ballot boxes and it did not outpoll the PSOE as the polls had predicted. We will of course need to analyze the reasons and the choices of more than a million lost voters. One reason could be the juxtaposition of different discourses in a short period of time which must surely have confused the potential electorates of both IU and Podemos.

Thus, after a “national-populist” discourse which had shown its limitations in the Catalan elections of September 27, 2015, a more “plurinational” approach was adopted before finally returning to a new idea of “homeland”, which, as we see it, was counter-productive. Simultaneously, from December 20, 2015, we have gone from the discourse of the “people against the caste” to a more conventional “left” discourse, including classifying the PSOE as part of the left. This is to respond to the aspirations of IU, who wanted to regain the space of the so-called left of rupture and were finally taken by the somewhat chaotic discourse of Pablo Iglesias, whose erosion as a charismatic leader is now palpable.

The limits and contradictions of this discourse have only been more flagrant with the programmatic ambiguity around the fundamental questions like the attitude to be taken to the Troika, the debt or again a critical assessment of the experience of Syriza, to mention only the most obvious. These limits have been all the

more important because UP has not reached its goal of winning a territorial anchor with an organization different from the other parties. This “model”, that of the electoral war machine, proved to finally be very conventional, top down and not very pluralistic, which has generated numerous internal crises and sapped the efforts to construct the organization needed to irrigate the territories and complete the very necessary but insufficient television and internet campaigns.

However there is no question of self-flagellation or settling of accounts, what matters is rebuilding an atmosphere of solidarity, fraternity, respect of pluralism, to seek a new framework of consensus to work together because “yes, we can”. For this, we need more “wars of position” on all fronts. It is now our role as an opposition to reformulate what unites us and to propose politically in a coherent fashion so as to rebuild links with the social organizations which support change and a rupture with austerity and with the regime which applies them.

What social and political scenario will emerge after June 26?

25 June 2016, by Jaime Pastor

Indeed, whatever its result and over and above the economic consequences that it will have, it is not difficult to predict that the project of “more Europe” will not survive it, confirming definitively the end of this project. This also illustrates the tendencies within the EU, with an increasingly variable geometry, simultaneously seeking to safeguard the unity of the euro zone. The first tendency limits it to the status of a commercial bloc (precisely at the moment of negotiations with the United States over the TTIP). The second aims at ensuring greater internal cohesion by means of new steps in the direction of

an authoritarian federalism (in the midst of the increasing tensions between the countries of North and South, between Brussels, Frankfurt and Berlin).

We should add the movements against the counter-reform of labour legislation in France, that is to say in a key country of the Union and the euro zone, precisely at the moment when criticisms of austerity policies, seen as ineffective, can now also be heard within the OECD. It is certain that it will not be easy to force a retreat on those who have dictated these policies and this law, in the service of which François Hollande has placed himself,

as a recent article indicated [1]. But it is already obvious that the rejection of these policies extends from now on beyond the countries of the South.

At the same moment, the tragedy of the “crisis” of the rights of the refugees and of asylum continues, doubled with the shame provoked by a Europe occupied exclusively with blackmailing the governments of the neighbouring countries of the South, obliging them to build a greater number of concentration camps in return for “development aid”. It thus continues to turn a deaf ear to the words of which the Somali poet

Warsan Shire reminds us: "Nobody leaves their house until their house is this small voice in your ear/Which says/Leave/Leave here immediately/ I do not know what I have become/But I know that anywhere/Will be surer than here [2].

In the midst of this climate of uncertainty as to the future of the European Union, we are also faced with another unknown factor, that of the results of the elections on June 26. However, the majority of the surveys coincide on the possibility of a relative repetition of the scenario resulting from the last elections on December 20. The difference concerns large-scale abstention, for the benefit of the PP and to the detriment of the PSOE. But also the real possibility that Unidos Podemos (UP, an electoral coalition of Podemos, Izquierda Unida and various "lists of convergence" in several autonomous regions) is transformed into the second political force, although with the electoral system in force there remains a doubt as to the relationship between the votes obtained and the number of seats, between the PSOE and UP). On the other hand, we do not have data concerning the possible results for the Senate. So it is to be feared that, taking account of the practically majority system of this election, we do not manage to prevent the presence within this discredited institution of a majority having the capacity to block any democratic "change" of the Constitution, a function for which it was really created.

In spite of the fact that a significant sector of the electorate has not yet decided where its vote will go, it seems highly probable that in the end the governmental options are situated between the alternative that the PP represents, on one side, and on the other, UP. Consequently, we have to envisage what will be the correlation of forces within the new Parliament, what alliances and the agreements will again be indispensable in order to form a new government and, in this way, to avoid new elections, without, however, that being a guarantee of a parliament that will last for four years.

In the context of this possible scenario, the key to the investiture of a new government will reside in what

the PSOE will be able to do, by means of its vote in favour or its abstention, whether it is with respect to the PP or UP. However, the leaders of the PSOE continue to resist recognizing this bipolarisation of the electorate. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated sufficiently during this campaign: on one side, the forces that are ready to allow the continuity of corrupt elites and the austerity policies of the euro zone (which the PSOE has shared until now); on the other, those which aspire to progress towards a break with that continuity. This bipolarisation is leading to a contracting of this idealized space of the "centre", within which the PSOE still wants to operate during these elections. This is a difference from Ciudadanos, whose leader, Albert Rivera, has chosen to reveal the real face of an ultraliberal and centralist Right, increasingly bellicose against Podemos, for fear of losing votes to the advantage of the PP.

A recent article by Susana D  az (president of the Junta of Andalusia and a leader of the PSOE) in the daily *El Pa  s* confirms her obstinacy in the face of this evidence, reiterating her rejection of any rapprochement with UP, since if it were to happen, "social democracy runs the risk of giving up its positions and its fundamentals, taking the discourse of the alternative currents as a reference and leaving the field free for them" [3]. A position which, certainly, contrasts with the timid openings that some Socialist leaders in Catalonia have expressed towards In Com  n¹ Podem, and who seem to be expressing the attitude of a significant part of their own electorate. It would be advisable to wonder what this Andalusian leader means by the word "positions". Would it not rather be a question of the privileges accumulated by an elite which attains, with the ERE [4] of Andalusia, its highest degree of infamy and which, moreover, resists any renouncement of the mechanism of the "revolving doors" (term which indicates moving from political posts to positions within companies)? And also to look at the meaning of "fundamentals". All that does not have anything to do, of course, with the fundamentals of the socialist ideology which the party - within which the "careerists" exert more and more

influence and the "believers" less and less - renounced several decades ago, in spite of the respectable efforts of the critical sector led by Jos   Antonio P  rez Tapias (a member of the PSOE who teaches at the University of Granada).

Susana D  az thus demonstrates her firm alignment on the campaign of fear conducted by the majority of the establishment confronted by the hypothesis of a government led by UP and the "lists of convergence". A campaign which throws light on the worst demagogic practices of the old and the new Right, just like those of the old and the new guard of the PSOE. The parties are in competition with each other to find the best way of sowing panic within the electorate in the face of the possible victory of these new forces, in spite of the many guarantees that some of their principal leaders demonstrate concerning respect for the "responsibilities of state". For example, the admiration expressed by Pablo Iglesias for Jos   Rodr  guez Zapatero, former prime minister of the PSOE government from 2004 to 2011; the very government that initiated the turn to austerity in May 2010, then concluded a pact with the PP to carry out the counter-reform of article 135 of the Constitution (which gave priority to the repayment of the debt) in August 2011.

We have of course already noticed the president of Bankia, Jos   Ignacio Goirigolzarri, asking for a prolongation of the time for the reprivatisation of this bank, which is going through a process of cleaning-up thanks to public money, and protesting against the proposal of UP to transform this bank, along with the Banco Mare Nostrum, into the starting point for the creation of a new public bank. This is only one symbolic sample of the new series of "red lines" which will be drawn by those on high over the coming days and weeks, without forgetting the political significance of the visit of Obama, president of what remains an imperial great power, between July 9 and 11, following the summit of NATO in Warsaw and in the middle of the negotiations aiming at the formation of a new government. In politics, coincidences like this do not exist.

To this distrust in the face of a programme which can, in fact, be described as social-democratic, is added the fear that if UP arrives in government it will be able to reveal new scandals of systematic corruption which spread since the "Transition" (in 1978) and reached its apogee with the real estate and speculative bubble of the last decade. There is no doubt that there are still many aspects which must emerge, as we are seeing at present in many autonomous communities and town halls, among others in the capital of the kingdom, Madrid. For this reason, the fear of Rajoy and company that the *aforamientos* concern the past are not surprising [5].

The first battle which will follow June 26 will be therefore be the interpretation of its results: will they will be examined in the same manner according to whether a new anti-PP majority is formed, anti-austerity and anti-centralist (i.e. in favour of a multinational Spanish State or even a referendum on independence in Catalonia); or, on the contrary, whether the votes and seats can be added up to make possible the

creation of a bloc which defends the regime? A bloc which defines itself as being that "of the constitutionalist forces", ready to prevent the access to the government of these alternative forces which worry Susan-D  az so much? For the moment, the leaders of the PSOE seem to incline towards the second way of seeing things, setting as the only condition the resignation of Rajoy or the search for alleged "independents" who would be favourably received by the new triad PP-PSOE-Ciudadanos.

If this hypothesis turned out to be right, which would not be at all easy but on which without any doubt the big economic powers are betting, we could be heading for an open confrontation which, except for those who do not want to see it, will most probably have been expressed in the ballot boxes. On one side, the will of a clear majority of the electorate to drive the PP from power, as well as the firm decision to embark on a new road, the road of the conquest of democracy - economic, social, political, environmental, citizens' and international -, as expressed in the "50 steps to govern together"

stipulated by UP. A common programme whose many steps must be concretized, for example the one that concerns the struggle against the debtocracy (the holders of debt), and other questions which are lacking, but which must constitute, if UP gets into government, a starting point to move on, together with millions of people who will have given it their vote on June 26, towards an even broader convergence even fuller, between the various peoples of the state: a convergence towards a common project (whether it is federal and/or confederal), on the basis of respect of the right to decide on their future for those who, as in Catalonia, demand it.

We should not spare our efforts, through the growing self-organization and empowerment of our peoples, those from here and those from elsewhere, to be worthy of this exceptional historical opportunity and to cope successfully with the enormous resistance of the representatives of the oligarchical despotism which dominates today over these lands and in Europe.

June 20, 2016

Divided Britain in disastrous referendum vote

25 June 2016, by **Terry Conway**

Turnout was high at 72.1% - despite torrential rain in parts of the islands - higher than at any general election since 1997 (when it was 77.7%) The result shows a deeply divided Britain. More than 70 % of those under 30 voted remain. Scotland and the North of Ireland voted remain - though the turnout in Scotland at 67.2 was lower than average and way down on the massive show of 84.6% in the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. The constitutional implications of these differences are not yet completely clear but Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said that a second Scottish independence

referendum is now highly likely.

Wales, where Labour has taken its supporters for granted for decades and even after the election of left leader Jeremy Corbyn last summer little has changed in terms of that approach, voted to leave. In England the pattern varied, but for example, in the North West, the big cities of Liverpool and Manchester voted remain but the smaller towns voted to leave. The working class and Labour's traditional supporters are left deeply divided. The centre of British politics, which moved dramatically to the left when Jeremy Corbyn was elected last

year, has now moved dangerously to the right.

This was not a referendum the left chose - but a concession made by David Cameron to the Eurosceptic wing of his own party. It was always clear that the debate would be dominated by two reactionary camps baying at each other - as Fire Brigades Union General Secretary Matt Wrack pointed out between people arguing about whether they could exploit working people more effectively by staying in the European Union or by leaving it.

The referendum was always going to be a carnival of reaction. The question that dominated the debate and was always going to do so was the issue of migration. Racist claims by mainstream politicians filled the airways and were rarely challenged by journalists. In terms of what is seen as 'acceptable' in terms of racism, it feels like Britain in 1966 - not fifty years later. Migrants - not right wing governments in Britain - were painted as the cause of all ills; from unemployment, low wages to decaying public services. The old tactic of divide and rule was employed extremely effectively.

One week before the referendum the toxic nature of this debate was made clear when Labour MP Jo Cox, a prominent supporter of 'remain' and a passionate campaigner for the rights of refugees was gunned down in her Yorkshire constituency. Her murderer is a man with a long involvement in far right organisations who shouted 'put Britain first' as he brutally attacked her. Not only is this the name of a far right organisation - but it was one of the slogans of leave campaign.

And while the right focused on and used the question of migration to whip up prejudice they had other angles to their populism too. A lot was made of the amount that Britain pays into the European Union budget - with false figures and partial information flying around. One particularly cynical use of this was the claim that the £350 million that Britain a week that Britain supposedly spends on the EU could be spent instead on the National Health Service. This is from people who have pushed the privatisation and starving of funds of that vital service. Donald Trump's style and approach is not a million miles from that of these people.

And of course the right in the Labour Party are now using this as yet another opportunity to go for Jeremy Corbyn - this time tabling a vote of no confidence. It's not at all clear how far this will get as other prominent right

wingers aren't convinced this is the right time to move as Corbyn remains as popular as ever in the Labour Party as a whole.

Corbyn was not the reason 38% of Labour voters plumped for leave. As Socialist Resistance argue: Jeremy Corbyn played a principled role during the referendum campaign - calling for a vote to stay in but with no illusions in the EU or its institutions. His interview on Sky TV News in the final week, for example, was filled with opposition to xenophobia, privatisation and austerity in front of a predominantly young and engaging audience. [6]. Rather it was the years of neglect under New Labour in particular compounded by the attacks of the Tories subsequently.

Many of us who campaigned for a remain vote in this referendum did so not because we have any illusions in the EU or its institutions - we were always clear it's a bosses club. After all having David Cameron and former right wing Labour leader Tony Blair both arguing for remain was hardly a recommendation for taking that view either. But as the Socialist Resistance statement on the result says : because an exit from the EU at this time and in this way will push the political situation in Britain sharply to the right and weaken the struggle against austerity. It will also be a disaster for every migrant, refugee, and minority in the country.

Many of us who worked for remain believed and continue to believe it was a tactical decision - a question of how best to support the struggles of working people in Britain and internationally - which includes of course migrants. We were and remain concerned about the impact of a leave vote on the thousands of citizens of other European countries living in Britain, who are undoubtedly worried about their fate now (most EU citizens in Britain did not have a vote unless they are citizens of Commonwealth countries i.e. Cyprus, Malta and Ireland). And the fact that we already

hear of posters appearing in Cambridgeshire telling Polish workers to go home is proof that we were tragically right.

The racism that has been pumped out during the months of campaigning will have a long term effect as well on all migrants wherever they are from. Some in the mainstream leave campaign courted people from former British colonies in Asia by cynically - if correctly - talking about how Fortress Europe discriminates against them. The clear implication was that if Britain were to leave the EU, we could let in more migrants from elsewhere. But what is planned is higher border fences, literal and virtual - as well as more scapegoating of people whose families have lived in Britain for generations

As the Left Unity statement on the outcome says:

We call on all those who reject this disastrous turn in British politics to unite to oppose racism, to defend the rights of migrants and to fight to protect and extend workers' and other rights that are now under threat. We reject the 'divide and rule' methods of our ruling class, setting one worker against another, wherever they come from, and turning one community against another. The problems we face result from the neo-liberal, deregulatory, anti-working class policies imposed by successive British governments, not from immigrants and refugees - our fellow working people. We have been proud to share this position with the Labour leadership, the TUC and the overwhelming majority of trade unions and we will work together to take these principles forward.

Further it will be crucial for the left in Britain, often semidetached from political developments elsewhere in the continent to redouble its efforts to strengthen its links in solidarity across the continent. In the very immediate future I am certainly looking to the elections in the Spanish State to show that united we stand.

Brexit vote is a disaster, but the struggle goes on

25 June 2016, by **Socialist Resistance**

The Brexit vote to leave the EU is a victory for the right-wing xenophobes and a disaster for the struggle against austerity in Britain. It is a victory for racism and a mandate to strengthen the borders of Britain against migration.

We say that it is a disaster not because we have the slightest illusion in for the EU or its institutionsâ€”we regard it as a neo-liberal bosses club. Nor because we have any time whatsoever for the reactionary official â€”remain’ campaign led by Cameron, who with his so-called renegotiation set out to worsen the conditions of workers in this country including migrant workers. It is because an exit from the EU at this time and in this way will push the political situation in Britain sharply to the right and weaken the struggle against austerity. It will also be a disaster for every migrant, refugee, and minority in the country.

It is interesting that Cameron said in his resignation speech that there will be no change in the status of EU citizens in this country - â€”at the present time’.

The millions who voted for Brexit did so because they accepted the argument that the worsening of living standards and public services were caused by immigration, not by austerity imposed by a Westminster government. Nor did the Remain camp blame the British banking and finance establishment for the 2008 economic crisis.

As Left Unity puts it in their statement: “This referendum came from pressure from the far right - driven by anti-immigration sentiment, fuelled by racism. This has been the most reactionary national campaign in British political history, resulting in an open emergence of the extreme right.”

They are absolutely right. The atmosphere was poisoned, hatred whipped up, and an MP assassinated by a fascist shouting â€”put Britain first’, one of the top themes of the mainstream exit campaigns.

Whilst Jo Cox’s assassination was a deeply tragic event it was also direct result of the carnival of reaction generated by the referendum campaign. Jo Cox was a defender of refugees and a supporter of the remain campaign. The filth and bile pumped out by the mainstream exit campaigns, backed by the bulk of the media and right-wing politicians, has not only taken Britain back decades in term of racism and xenophobia but it created the conditions for a far right fanatic, with links to white supremacists, to gun her down in the street.

The referendum has legitimised racism and xenophobia as never before. Vile statements with echoes of the Tory racist MP Enoch Powell have been spouted with impunity and accepted by the media as some kind of fair comment. Powell’s infamous â€”Rivers of Blood’ speech back in 1968 resulted in him being sacked by Tory leader Ted Heath and Powell being turned into a political pariahâ€”Farage’s racist poster â€”Breaking Point’ resulted in some mild and belated criticism, entirely as a result of the assassination of Jo Cox. Similar images have been published repeatedly in the papers without comment or objection. A complaint has been made against the Daily Express on the basis that it had migration headlined on its front page for 17 days in succession.

Some sections of the left and the labour movement recognised these dangers. The launch of Another Europe is Possible was an important

step. Corbyn and McDonnell, Momentum, Left Unity and Ken Loach, most Greens and especially Caroline Lucas worked hard to stem the racist bile. The majority of trade union leaders took the right viewâ€”and both UNITE and UNISON put out important material against racism and defending migrant workers. Matt Wrack of the FBU and Manuel Cortez of TSSA played particularly important roles. That is to their profound credit.

Most of the radical left, however, supported an exit vote and the so-called Lexit campaign - which had zero influence on the entire referendum. It peddled the illusion that a left exit was on offer when it was not, and falsely claimed that were Cameron to be forced out it would open up opportunities for the left. Even now, after a victory for the Farage and the Tory right, those in Lexit such as the SWP claim that it was a “revolt against the rich and powerful” and that the danger from racism “is far from inevitable”.

They failed to recognise the dangers that the mainstream exit campaigns, led by right-wing xenophobes, represented. They were oblivious the racism and hatred that would be generated by them, the reactionary impact this would have on the political situation and the balance of class forces, and dangers involved of being in any way associated with themâ€”particularly in the case of an exit vote.

They chose to ignore (even when challenged) the damaging outcome that an exit vote would have for the 2.2m EU citizens living in this country who’s status would have been threatened as a direct result. Yet they are organisations that have opposed the racism and xenophobia for the whole of their existence. Rock Against

Racism struck a massive blow against racism in the 1970s, and for which the SWP can take great credit.

Immediately the result was announced, Farage was on the media crowing about an historic victory for the liberation of Britain and outlined his reactionary vision for a new Britain. He was treated as the leader of the winning side. He said that Cameron would have to go forthwith – which he did a few hours later – and that the new Tory Prime Minister would have to be a Brexiter in order to carry out the mandate of the referendum.

A leadership election will now be triggered in the Tory Party to be completed in advance of the Tory Party conference. We can then assume a general election will be called soon after with a manifesto designed to implement what they will claim is the mandate of the referendum: a clamp-down on immigration, a strengthening of the borders, and no doubt a restricted status for EU citizens living in the country.

An election at the end of the year under conditions where the political situation is moving to the right is very dangerous. The left needs to rapidly gear up for it, and so does the Labour Party.

Jeremy Corbyn played a principled role during the referendum campaign – calling for a vote to stay in but with no illusions in the EU or its institutions. His interview on Sky TV News in the final week, for example, was filled with opposition to xenophobia, privatisation and austerity in front of a predominantly

young and engaging audience. Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell made a radical call against austerity and racism at a large ‘Another Europe is Possible’ rally in London with Matt Wrack of the FBU, Caroline Lucas and Yannis Varoufakis.

But the mainstream media mainly presented the referendum for months as predominantly a battle between the two wings of the Conservative Party. Many Labour MPs hostile to Corbyn went along with that and they appeared on platforms as subordinates to the Tories. Thirteen years of the pro-austerity Labour government of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and five years of ineffective opposition under Ed Miliband played their part in the disillusion of Labour voters. Labour councils in power for decades have failed to stand up for local populations under attack. Hostility to the lack of affordable housing, the downgrading of local health services, cuts in school budgets and so on were allowed to be deflected into the Right’s xenophobic campaign against migrants.

In some parts of the country – often where Labour and the left is best organised – the Labour vote swung to Remain: in London eg Lambeth, scene of recent frontline battles around library cuts, voted 79% for remain; in Bristol where a Corbyn supporter dramatically snatched the Mayoral role only seven weeks ago there was a Remain majority; in some of the largest northern cities – Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle – there were Remain majorities. But in the vast majority of Labour heartlands in England and Wales where local

Labour Parties have been moribund for decades and where the Party machine is firmly in the hands of the right of the Party, Labour voters protested against their condition by voting Leave.

The former Labour heartlands in Scotland in opposition to Labour’s unionist position have now swung behind a more left talking Scottish National Party and every single one of the 32 local districts in Scotland voted to Remain, also creating a constitutional crisis that may lead to a second independence referendum.

Now Corbyn faces challenges from the largely hostile Labour Parliamentary Party for his alleged failure to mobilise the vote sufficiently. Yet it was the areas in which the right were in control of the Party where the Labour vote failed to be galvanised by the need for a Remain vote against austerity and xenophobia. The rank and file of the Labour Party and unions needs to fight strongly to defend Corbyn against the Parliamentary Party and any moves to remove him.

If Labour is to win an election, likely to come at the end of the year, against a Tory Party led by a newly invigorated and right-moving Boris Johnson-Michael Gove leadership with a manifesto to curb immigration and claiming the authority of the referendum, it can only do so with a radical left programme that opposes austerity in all its forms and supports the right of migrants and all workers.

If Corbyn is prepared to fight on such a platform, which we expect he would, the left should get fully behind him.

The You Stink challenge in Lebanon

25 June 2016

In summer 2015, the streets of Beirut saw another expression of the Arab uprisings that have swept across the Middle East and North Africa since early 2011. Tens of thousands of

people took part in protests over garbage collection and disposal, which quickly turned into a wider expression of anger at systemic corruption. The two rival wings of Lebanon’s ruling

establishment—identified by their allegiance to either the March 8 Alliance, including the Amal Movement and Hezbollah, or the March 14 Alliance, led by former

Prime Minister Saad Hariri and generally supported by the U.S.—were implicated.

A combination of state repression and divisions inside the movement, which authorities ably sought to exploit, forced the protesters from the streets. But now, a new electoral campaign called Beirut Madiniti is challenging the ruling parties in municipal elections, becoming the latest expression of lingering anger at the political status quo in Lebanon.

In the first installment of a two-part interview, Farah Kobaissy and Elia El Khazen, both members of the Socialist Forum in Lebanon, talked to Wael Elasady about the Beirut Madinati campaign and what it says about social and political dynamics in Lebanese society.

Can you explain to us what the Beirut Madinati campaign is and how it started?

Farah: It began when a group of people, after the You Stink protests, said that we not only want to protest the situation, but we also want to give people some kind of alternative or project. This was the starting point, and people began meeting.

Later on, Beirut Madinati brought together hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who were excited about the idea of standing in elections for the first time and independently competing against the ruling political parties in Beirut. They also had a positive message to present to society. We have an alternative, we have a project, and we want to gather people around it.

So on the one hand, you had Beirut Madinati running, and on the other, you had a list that was gathering together most of the ruling party figures from both the March 8 and March 14 camps [the rival factions of the political elite that have dominated Lebanese politics]. In other words, various forces opposed to one another—the Future Movement, Amal, Lebanese Forces—were running together on a list.

Those running on the ruling parties' list were people like the CEO of

Solidaire, a company that owns and is developing large tracts of downtown Beirut. It was clear we were running against those who have wealth and power. They have been the ones forcing people in Beirut out of their homes and handing it over to real estate developers.

The election result for Beirut Madinati was very important because it won almost 40 percent of the vote in Beirut. This is fantastic, and it tells us a lot about the situation in Lebanon and the amount of social anger at the ruling political parties and their policies. For a campaign that is only a few months old and seriously competing against parties that have held power for years and control the major media outlets and the economy, this is remarkable. It is worth stopping and thinking about the message this holds for us.

Also, the elections are not only taking place in Beirut. The success around Beirut Madinati in the capital gave confidence to others and provided a push to run independent efforts in the south of Lebanon against the Amal Movement and Hezbollah candidates. This happened in various villages, where independent candidates were able to run and won support from various families and also from the Communist Party. In some villages, the Communists were able to win all the seats. Something is happening and moving and shaking, and we want to build on it.

Elia: It's important to point out the differences between the municipal and parliamentary elections, which have led to them becoming the place in which this political moment is being expressed.

In the parliamentary elections, what they have done is to compartmentalize things geographically in a way that ensures victory for the traditional political parties. In the municipal elections, this isn't the case, so you can see the discontent in a more direct way, and people are more likely to vote. People feel like their vote has meaning at the municipal level, but in the parliamentary elections, it's nearly impossible at this point for independent voices to emerge.

What were the main issues driving support for Beirut Madinati?

Farah: There is a lot of discontent in the street regarding the internal policies in the country, especially those that affect the everyday life of people in the city, such as housing, electricity, water, garbage, pollution and 100,000 other urban problems. People were expressing their utmost outrage against the ruling parties.

Second, those who usually have allegiance to the ruling political parties wanted to punish their leadership for running on joint lists. For example, people who traditionally were saying we would vote for an Amal candidate, but we don't like Hariri, now are voting for Beirut Madinati because their first choice, Amal, is running on a joint list with someone else they oppose. This alliance between the competing ruling parties was a total shock for people.

The usual political discourse coming from these parties is to pump up sectarian and political clashes between people—and now all of a sudden, they are united in one list? No, I will not vote for you. People weren't satisfied with this alliance. This, combined with the economic and social outrage, is what accounts for the results.

What was the program of Beirut Madinati?

Farah: The program of Beirut Madinati was written by some academics and professionals who have a kind of social orientation. So basically there were 10 points dealing with creating more public spaces and gardens; traffic and public transportation; the garbage crisis and role of the municipality of the garbage management.

The program was about everyday life problems facing people and how to make the city more inclusive. It wasn't a socialist program; it was more of a liberal program with a social aspect to it. I think it was good.

We can criticize the program: for example, on the question of housing, it was not very clear, since the campaign didn't want to enrage entrepreneurs.

There wasn't a clear position regarding the real-estate developer Solidare, which has been responsible for much displacement of local residents.

But it was good as a lesson; for example, it helped me learn how to run with people who don't share with us the same opinion and same program and same vision, but we can actually discuss this and put forward a basic program that might resonate with people. As socialists, we have our program, our policies to push, but at this moment, I think it's important to unite with people who are against this system, even if they don't totally share with us the same political vision.

What were the goals of your participation and the participation of Socialist Forum?

Farah: I was running in Beirut with Beirut Madinati as an independent, not as a member of Socialist Forum, because the campaign has a general rule that it doesn't accept people running in the campaign who are affiliated with political parties.

This, I think, is a problem. Although I understand why they have this position, I don't agree with it. They made this rule to keep out people who are part of the ruling political parties from being a part of the campaign, and especially because nothing else really exists as far as political parties outside the ruling parties that dominate the system.

There's Socialist Forum, but generally, all the political parties are part of the political system, even the leftist ones. So I had to run as an independent.

The reason why I ran—and why we decided in the Socialist Forum that I should run as an independent—is that we saw it as an opportunity to link up with people who are not in our direct circles in neighborhoods, where we would otherwise never have contact with them.

Despite a lot of experience organizing and doing a lot on the political front since 2011 with the anti-sectarian movements and then the You Stink movement in 2015, there is a kind of detachment between these

movements, on the one hand, and our social movement, on the other. So it was a very important opportunity in this way, and we need to build on it.

What is also very important with this campaign for me is that it redefined for us what politics means. Beirut Madinati is redefining politics over what kind of city we want, what kind of housing we want, what kind of infrastructure. These are very important questions, which are very political as well.

What do you see as the next steps now?

Elia: I think that it is very important that we continue the struggle, even though we have ideological differences with most of the people running as independents against ruling class parties. I think it's important to be involved with the hundreds of volunteers on the ground who are getting politicized through the elections or through street protests because they are learning how things are done, how political parties gang up with each other when it comes to their own class interests.

I think people see through this, and they look for alternatives beyond the electoral campaigns. Which I think you can feel when you yourself are engaging with Bernie Sanders' volunteers, who might at first not see something beyond the presidential campaign, but eventually if you continue interacting with them, inviting them to meetings, inviting them to reading groups, challenging their ideas that this should go beyond the election, they may.

I think people need an alternative, and they eventually look for one—if not us, then someone else. So we need to be in every battle. I think the volunteers are key, such as the people who come to the open spaces to discuss the program of Beirut Madinati. I think the connections that Farah was able to make with the people, the problems that she heard, the deep discontent, is key.

The main idea is that there is an alternative—that's key, and the fact that people are voting for it is key, especially in the south, where it had

been assumed that the pedestal inhabited by Hezbollah was unassailable. You have a lot of candidates from the Communist Party and independents who are able to challenge this dichotomy of Amal and Hezbollah.

Can you talk a little bit more about the main political forces in Lebanon like the March 8 and March 14 coalitions? What is the significance of these coalitions running together? What is their social basis, and why do you think they would run together?

Farah: We are in a moment that is post-March 8 and March 14. We are in the moment where people are discovering more and more that what unites these two factions is way more than what divides them.

So what are the March 8 and March 14 movements?

It goes back to 2005, when there was the so-called Cedar Revolution. There were a number of mobilizations after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri at the hands of the Syrian regime. Millions of people went into the streets calling for the Syrian regime to release its grip on Lebanon and for the Syrian army to leave the country. This camp was supported by the U.S. in opposition to the Syrian regime—it became known as March 14.

Then you had the March 8 camp, which was composed of Hezbollah, Amal and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and other nationalist forces, which were allied with the Syrian regime and actually didn't want it to leave Lebanon. These camps actually were formed at that moment.

But within movements at the local level and in response to Lebanon's trade union movement, we see how these political divisions tend to disappear. The March 8 and March 14 camps have joined forces to smash these movements—for example, when tens of thousands of professors and public employees were organizing demonstrations for three years in order to fight for salary increases, among other demands. Both camps united against their demands.

So each of these camps has a political background aimed at securing the interests of the wing of the bourgeoisie that they represent, but then they come together to smash any social movement.

Every party has its own social base. For instance, Hezbollah draws from various social categories within the Shia community, but mainly, its members come from the petty bourgeoisie. But the professional leadership of Hezbollah is more and more drawn from the Shia bourgeoisie, and those who made money in Africa and other places. Increasingly, there is a rising bourgeoisie among the Shia.

Hariri, the leader of March 14, represents the big financial bourgeoisie. His political party is the Future Movement and is supported by Saudi Arabia. Because of the sectarian nature of these political parties, their base cuts across social classes. So there are a lot of contradictions in these parties and even within Hezbollah, in class terms.

Can you talk some about Socialist Forum in Lebanon?

Elia: One example of what Socialist

Forum has done was to help organize the alliance called Al Sha'eb Yurid (The People Want) during the protest movement last year. It was the only component in the struggle pushing for a more radical understanding of the structural problem of capitalism instead of the liberal reforms pursued by other forces.

It was the only organization that had parity between women and men—many women who participated in the Al Sha'eb Yurid voiced that this was one of the only spaces where they could participate in politics without men interrupting them.

This was a very good experience in leading the political voice of the movement. This has helped us to put forward the Socialist Forum's political views, which has ultimately helped us in recruiting a lot of people who were interested in our analysis of Lebanese society.

Farah: Socialist Forum was the result of a merger between two leftist tendencies in the country—the Fourth International Tendency and the International Socialist Tendency in Lebanon. It's a political group and organization that works towards

socialism.

We work on different issues related to social justice, equality and secularism. We organize Marxist study groups. We organize conferences and protests around different practical and political issues. We also try to build solidarity with workers, and we try to organize, whether in our workplace and neighborhoods.

We have a newspaper called [Al-Manshour](#), which we print and sell, and we have a journal published in Arabic called Permanent Revolution, which we edit, but which many socialist organizations in the Arab world contribute to it. It's printed in Lebanon and available online. We have been raising funds lately to organize a center, and we think a center will also boost our activities and encourage more people to join.

There are a lot of things happening in this country and in this region, and we are full of hope for the future. Personally, I am very optimistic and so excited about the coming years. I think they will bring a lot of change.

June 20, 2016

socialistworker.org

‘It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness’

24 June 2016

Another Europe is Possible worked tirelessly over the past few months to forge a movement that could progress an alternative vision for Europe. Britain's decision to leave the European Union opens a world of uncertainty that campaigners in the UK must now try to steer in a positive direction, in spite of the divisions that have been stirred. We don't pretend that this will be easy. The mainstream campaign to leave the EU has pandered to nationalism, has encouraged a wave of anti-immigrant

sentiment and has fostered a notion that outside the EU we can return to an age when Britain was the world's foremost ‘great power’.

We understand and share the distrust many people feel towards the institutions of the EU. The EU lacks proper democratic accountability, negotiates exploitative trade policies like TTIP, visits economic destruction on its own member states, and at times has treated refugees as if they were criminals.

Our argument for remaining in the EU was that, together with the hundreds of millions of fellow Europeans, we have the power to transform Europe and, in so doing, to control corporations, halt climate change and overcome the nationalisms that have haunted our continent for centuries. The campaign to leave the EU has demonised some of the poorest people in Europe. We share the sense of fear that many of those people must now feel.

That's why many of us who have worked to build "Another Europe is Possible" will not stop working towards forging a better Europe, and a better country, with allies and friends across the continent. We commit ourselves to fighting the rising tide of nationalism and racism across Europe and building a campaign to defend the rights and dignity of immigrants in Britain. We will work for the most just transition out of the EU possible, campaigning against the erosion of human and workers' rights and the type of extreme free trade deals which the leaders of the Leave campaign have threatened.

We will not give up in our attempts to build a very different sort of world based on equality, democracy and humanity. In this new Britain, we believe our movement is even more important. In coming weeks we will revisit our work and propose new priorities with those who have worked

so tirelessly in the past few months, pounding the pavement across the UK to make our voices heard. We hope some of those who campaigned for a left-wing exit will also join us in this work.

It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. In the months ahead we will try to ensure that we lay the foundations for a better country. We must prove to the world that Britain will not become a byword for intolerance, insularity and despair. Another Europe is possible. Another Britain is necessary.

Signatories:

Caroline Lucas, Green MP for Brighton Pavillion; Clive Lewis, Labour MP for Norwich South; Owen Jones, author; Matt Wrack, FBU union general secretary; Steve Turner, Unite the Union deputy general secretary; Dave Ward, Communication Workers Union general secretary; Manuel Cortes, Transport Salaried Staff

Association general secretary; Zoe Williams, journalist; Neal Lawson, Chair of Compass; Zoe Gardner, migrant rights activist; Nick Dearden, Director of Global Justice Now; Natalie Bennett, Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales; Julie Ward MEP; Claude Mores MEP; Molly Scott Cato MEP; Cat Smith MP; Luke Cooper, Convenor of Another Europe is Possible; Michael Chessum, Momentum Steering Committee and Another Europe is Possible National Organiser; Michael Mansfield QC, human rights lawyer; Deborah Hermanns, National Union of Students EU students representative; Kate Hudson, Left Unity; Salman Shaheen, journalist; Liz Davies, human rights lawyer and Honorary Vice-President Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers (personal capacity)

Marina Prentoulis, Syriza UK; Anastazya Oppenheim, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts; Lord Wood, Labour Peer

Jo Cox and the well of hatred

23 June 2016, by Andy Stowe

Socialist Resistance sends its sympathy and solidarity to the family, friends and comrades of Jo Cox. We have much in common with the idealism that shone through her political commitment. She spoke movingly in parliament about migrants and how she saw her own children in the faces of babies in refugee camps; while we did not agree with her support for air strikes she raised her voice loudly in defence of Syrians attacked by jihadi butchers and Assad's murderers; she was a friend of the Palestinian people and had no qualms about being photographed in front of Westminster holding their nation's flag; although she didn't support Jeremy Corbyn, she nominated him for the Labour leadership ballot because she understood how crucial it was that the views he expresses were heard in the debate. Her death at such a young

age [7] is a loss to progressive politics in Britain and an incomparably greater loss to her family.

Jo was the 59th woman to be killed by a man in Britain this year. Male violence against women is a chronic feature of British society and we cannot exclude it as one element in the killer's motivation.

There seems to be less doubt about the other things that drove him. The man who has been arrested is reported to have had mental health problems and to have shouted something like "put Britain first" when carrying out the attack. If he'd been shouting "Allah akbar" the coverage would have been dominated by his religion rather than his mental health. It's also reported that he has a long history of links with violent, ultra-right racist groups and had bought manuals on making weapons from them.

Whoever killed Jo Cox did it for political reasons. People with mental health problems do not live quarantined from the rest of society and political debate in Britain has been dominated by one topic for the last several months – immigration, and particularly how it's linked to British membership of the European Union.

The racist tabloid press has been carrying lying, sensationalist front pages relentlessly with made up stories about "swarms" of immigrants, "rapist" immigrants, "job stealing" immigrants. And at the same time leading Brexit campaigners have been saying exactly the same things in fractionally more polite language. The exception being Farage who stood smirking in front of a poster redolent of Nazi pogrom incitement on the morning Jo Cox was murdered.

Farage, Gove, Johnson and Hoey have

made the EU referendum into a plebiscite on immigration and racism. Comrades on the left who argue that working class people who vote for Brexit are expressing some anti-establishment protest are oblivious to the fact that they are actually being swept along in the slipstream of a racist, hard-right campaign. What other meaning is there to the England football fans' chants of "f**k off Europe, we're all voting out" or their taunting of refugee children by flinging coins at them?

But this coarsening of politics isn't just limited to Johnson and Farage. David Cameron, Zac Goldsmith and

most of the Tory leadership tried to smear Labour's mayoral candidate Sadiq Khan as a terrorist sympathiser during the election campaign. Cameron used that very phrase to describe Jeremy Corbyn for his principled opposition to air strikes on Syria.

Labour leader Corbyn described Jo Cox's death was "an attack on democracy from a well of hatred". He's right. And the people who've been drawing from that well of hatred are all those politicians who've been using racism and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the referendum debate and those who seek to stigmatise dissent

and principle by throwing insults. We have to stand up against this.

The forces of the far right and of xenophobic hostility towards migrants have become emboldened and encouraged by the Leave campaign. A Leave vote would be a disaster for the labour movement and for every migrant and minority in the UK. The labour movement and left needs to understand the stakes, exemplified in the murder of a prominent Labour politician by an almost certain racist, and have the courage to challenge this carnival of reaction by advocating a massive Remain vote. Jo Cox understood this.

A crisis for the two Matteos and so many possible alternatives...

23 June 2016, by Thomas Müntzer

Only three months ago a member of the PD secretariat, with the typical arrogance of the "Renzi generation" had the brilliant idea of poking fun at all those who had taken part in the referendum on protecting the environment against mining. The referendum only mobilised 35% of the electorate and therefore fell - since it did not reach the 50% quorum. The comedian Maurizio Crozza who has a much better handle on reality commented "Beware of insulting people who went to vote because they will vote again." Basically you only need to have some perception of what is going on or at least to own a calculator, to grasp the idea that with abstention rates of 40%, those 35% could sooner or later have a majority and perhaps it was not the best idea to insult them.

But this failure to understand what was going on reached a highpoint in Rome where the PD already started at a disadvantage due the scandals of Mafia Capital [8]. What a clever strategy in the midst of such a scandal and the enormous problems of the city, to base the whole campaign for

the mayor and town council on the questions of the Olympic bid and Roman stadiums! These are precisely the type of projects that have generated scandals and waste of money everywhere in the last decades. The ingenious idea of actually closing the election campaign with an event in front of the Olympic stadium seemed to advertise the fact - amplified by the local paper *Il Messaggero* and so much other media - that of the two candidates the PD one was guaranteeing the continuity of the business affairs of the true bosses of Rome - the speculators and developers.

Modern Politics (we still want to use a big P) has no idea of the social roots or real links ordinary people have with reality because it is so tied up in its own ordering of the official narratives that it forgets to look properly - at least occasionally - at that living reality. The economic and social crisis has been hitting people for eight years and those people who are paying the costs of this are urgently demanding a radical response, only to have their hopes continually betrayed. It is a

little difficult to think that it is enough to repeat ad infinitum that the recovery is underway, that there are more jobs or even that Roma (football club) will have a new stadium without being constrained to sell its top player.

The striking voting pattern in the working class suburbs of Rome and Turin expresses the social or class basis of the election results. Just as in the first round in Rome last Sunday's vote saw the PD only win to a degree in the historic centre and in the Parioli neighbourhood [9]. In all the other areas the Five Star Movement (M5S) won double its votes, indeed it won 70% in the traditional working class stronghold of Tor Bella Monaca. It was the same thing in Turin where the M5S candidate, Chiara Appendino, hammered away about the working class areas and about the existence of two Turins - the spectacle for the tourists in the centre and the social problems of those who were experiencing the crisis further out.

There is obviously a desire for radical change but people use the instruments

at hand however confused they might be politically, often in a semi-engaged way, but nonetheless with real anger, including when this means abstention. After the M5S victory in Rome there were no significant mass celebrations (unlike in Naples) but there is no doubt that the vote was a real vote against those who had governed this city for the last twenty years and are the current government of the country.

But not only was Renzi defeated but also the right, which has practically disappeared from the scene in some places. In the big cities the PD only seems to manage to win where, as in Bologna and Milan, they are facing the centre right in the final runoff whereas in Naples they were completely buried by De Magistris [10]. Furthermore the right lost two of its historic strongholds - Varese (where the Lega Nord had governed for 23 years) and Latina. In the latter case a citizens slate (Latina Bene Commune) set up as an alternative to the PD won against the right with a soviet style score of 75%. So while Berlusconi is in an unstoppable decline Salvini's line has not benefitted. It lost in places where it claimed a strong local identity such as Turin and even more in Varese. The Lega has not yet been able to win over support within the centre right area and is not competitive with the M5S in the fight for the protest vote. It is not accidental that in the second round run offs the Lega and Meloni [11] supporters tended to vote massively for the M5S unlike in Bologna and Milan. Certainly the centre right won back some cities from the PD, for example Trieste and won some new councils in Tuscany. They hope to have found in Parisi [12] and his reunified centre right a possible way back. However what has really entered into a crisis is the idea of the two Matteos - members of the same generation and with the same name - presented by the media as the only possible alternatives.

In reality more than ever what we are seeing is an increasingly volatile or 'liquid' vote which can point to a variety of possible outcomes. The economic crisis is crowned by a crisis over the credibility of parties and indeed of any whole society political

projects. This leads to electoral volatility and political phenomena that can balloon and decline very rapidly. Those observers who suggested that the Renzi project would last twenty years were superficial in their analysis of a society that is fragmented by precarious employment and where social belonging or identity of a new type still has to be established. Security is no longer guaranteed for whole layers and the sense of being in a group or class is increasingly weaker. The regime itself is weaker so the classical patronage systems are breaking down (although they can obviously be replaced by other, more modern ones). Even the stability of the M5S movement cannot be taken for granted particularly since it will no longer enjoy the luxury of being in opposition but will be judged by its record in government. What has happened in Naples with De Magistris or on a lesser scale in Latina and other places shows that alternative projects can have a different more progressive content but only if they put themselves forward in a determined way without trying to re-unify the old apparatuses and to use the old tools of politics which is something the radical left tends to do.

To be sure the particular nature of Beppe Grillo's M5S is particularly adapted to the runoff process, so much so that it won 19 out of 20 of them. In Rome Virginia Raggi went from a first round total of 460k to 770k and her co-thinker Appendino in Turin went from 107k to 202k whereas the PD's Sala in Milan went up only from 224k to 264k and even De Magistris in Naples remained practically stable from 172k to 185k (in a city with a record abstention rate of 65%). While describing the M5S victory as caused by the right - as Fassino tried to do while walking away to enjoy his retirement - is superficial, it is true that their brand, 'neither right nor left', honest and radically alternative to existing politics, allows them to mop up the votes of disappointed PD voters, those orphaned by Berlusconi, but also where it is helpful to its cause, either the more extreme right wing voter or even from supporters of the radical left. De Magistris is a different case since he easily won the runoff with the hard core of his support on the first

round. While his movement took on some aspects of the M5S and thereby cut the latter's support there to the minimum it is not a catch all party. It is characterised by a much stronger left identity and in the innovative relations it has with the more radical movements in the city. Celebrations by thousands of its activists and supporters are evidence of this.

Renzi is putting his political survival on a yes vote for the constitutional reforms in the Autumn but this is linked to the new electoral reform of two rounds. Paradoxically this favours the M5S. Consequently whichever way it goes the situation remains politically very fluid.

Many commentators have drawn similarities between the victories of the mayors in Madrid (Manuela Carmena) and Barcelona (Ada Colau) and the Italian results but the situations are very different. We have not had an adversarial social movement here that subsequently led to it occupying an alternative political space. There have been no indignados nor housing action movements like those in Catalonia whose impact on politics have deepened political conflict. However undoubtedly here there is a deepgoing crisis of legitimacy of the neo-liberal policies of austerity supposedly dealing with the crisis and yesterday's vote opens up a new phase. The government has emerged much weaker, the ruling class is worried and is looking at possible alternatives. Political openings in the city are possible but only if we succeed in quickly ditching the idea of simply delegating power to the M5S representatives. The Rome and Turin councils could go in opposite directions since they do not have a defined political project and a structured political leadership which goes beyond the demands for honesty and more democracy. It will undergo very strong media pressure (see the role of Repubblica and newspapers close to powerful Roman interests during the campaign) and it could respond in a haphazard, clumsy way, even with a right wing political line.

But it is undeniable that a space for conflict for the social movements has opened up and if we are able to take advantage of it we should challenge

the new M5S local government particularly on some points of its programme. If on the streets Chiara Appendino called for "hands off Val Susa" [13] then now the No Tav movements have a greater possibility of intervening to make concrete gains and it weakens any turn to a more moderate position. It is the same thing in Rome for the audit of the debt, for public ownership of water, for the self-management of social space and for a No to the Olympic bid and new speculative building developments. It is a question of local councils being challenged on their policies with a capability for an adversarial approach. But not in the same way in which we usually oppose the council friends of

the local ruling class, who at this time are disorientated and who will try to take advantage of every conflict which opens up.

De Magistris's Napolitan experiment in its relationship with the popular Assembly called Massa Critica-Decide the Citta (Critical mass, the City decides) is still the most interesting model to look to. The strengthening of its potential for self-government will be fundamental in the next period in order to outline a possible alternative in the governing of the city. We can also draw some lessons and ideas for intervening in some areas of conflict with M5S councils. If their policies are going to really be a clear break with the councils dominated by the local

ruling class it will depend to a large extent on whether the movements can pressure the M5S to follow them on the same areas of concern (privatisation, speculative developers, jobs and management of public goods and services)

For these reasons it is urgent to develop social struggles and for the movements to break onto the political stage in an autonomous way. They need to intervene in this crisis of legitimacy in an attempt to build bases of a new type, to develop credible overall political projects and to really change the political and social policies of the country, starting from the governance of the cities.

Stop the repression in Mexico

22 June 2016

Since the Mexican government passed an alleged "educational reform" - actually a reform that profoundly affects working conditions, attacks job security and the rights of unions to organise in the sector- through Congress, education workers have maintained strong resistance.

The government of Peña Nieto tried to break the resistance of workers in education, especially teachers, including those in primary education, in several ways. One was to compel teachers to undergo an educational assessment, which is a punitive measure and would result in the dismissal of those who do not succeed. The review is built on the basis of market criteria in line with the logic of privatization developed on all fronts by the neoliberal governments that have succeeded in Mexico.

The review takes no account of regional and cultural specificities. It claims on the contrary to standardize education by eliminating these regional differences. This type of evaluation particularly affects teachers in indigenous communities where the need is not to speak English

as well as Spanish but rather the local language. This standardized evaluation is therefore discriminatory and serves as a pretext to fire teachers who *supposedly* would not pass the exam.

The movement against the education reform has refused to submit to these assessment exams despite threats of dismissal against those who refused to comply.

The government is refusing any dialogue with the opposition movement and is carrying out repression. Opposition to the reform is involving ever wider sectors of teachers but finds its main expression in the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) with a strong presence in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas and Michoacán. In other states of the republic, the opposition is organized by other union currents.

In recent weeks, government repression has increased. Including through sacking or by stopping the pay of thousands of education workers in the country, who refused to submit

to the evaluation exam or who participated in a strike movement organized by their local union.

More recently, the government arrested union leaders, not only during repression against particular protests, but also by issuing arrest warrants against them and taking them from their homes. Some have been transferred to detention centres far away from where they work or live. This is the case for the Secretary General of Section 22 of Oaxaca, Rubén Nuñez, who was arrested and transferred to a federal prison in the remote state of Sonora, in the north.

The most serious repressive episode took place this weekend, when thousands of agents of the Federal Police attacked several places in the state of Oaxaca simultaneously where there were demonstrations and road blockades organized by social movements. On Sunday 19 June, dozens were injured and at least six people were shot dead in the attacks.

Recently, the movement expanded to include parents of students who started organizing to support the

struggle of teachers. The repression affected both the teachers' movement as such and the organized sectors of the people, mainly parents of students in solidarity with their children's teachers.

The situation is very serious, at this time, the repression is spreading to other parts of the country. On Monday in Mexico City police attacked a rally of solidarity with Oaxaca.

It is urgent to stop the repression and support the fight against the alleged "education reform". The government claims to be ready to discuss with the motion provided that it accepts its "educational reform". This is obviously nonsense since it is precisely in

opposition to this reform that want to discuss teachers. In fact, the only option left to the teacher by the government is that of capitulation and unconditional acceptance of reform.

At the moment, the international solidarity with the movement of teachers is fundamental, as it was a few months ago for the movement, in Ayotzinapa fighting for the 43 students still missing. In this regard, we must remember that these 43 students were in training in a school in Ayotzinapa that prepare teachers for education in rural and indigenous areas. This is the type of school I which is clearly in the sights of this "educational reform" that wants to standardize education based on the

criteria of capitalist efficiency.

The movement of international solidarity with the struggles of the Mexican people should be deployed through a range of actions: statements, rallies in front of consulates and embassies, demonstrations against visits by Peña Nieto abroad. We must show the world that the teachers and the Mexican people are not alone in this struggle and the end to repression and the release of new political prisoners, activists and trade union leaders who oppose the "education reform" is an international requirement.

June 20, 2016

AKP government's permanent war against women

22 June 2016, by Yeniyol women's branch

In 2011, they transformed the Ministry for Women and Family to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, shifted the focus on women's rights to protection of family and women as a vulnerable group like orphans or people with disabilities.

Although they have attempted to delegatize abortion they could not ban it due to the public reaction. After Erdoğan declared that "abortion is genocide" and "birth control cannot be compatible with the muslim family structure" in 2002 abortion and contraceptives became inaccessible for many women.

Research conducted by feminists and health organizations show that it is almost impossible for women in many state hospitals, as physicians avoid supplying abortion or contraceptives due to governmental pressure. These policies against birth control and sexual rights are in line with their neoliberal and Islamist social project that lays the burden of care work and household responsibilities wholly on

women who are supposed to be valuable human beings only if they give birth children. Recently, Erdoğan, who often warns people to have at least three children, claimed that women who prefer not to have children or manage their households are "deficient," regardless of their successes in the area of business.

In May 2016, the parliamentary commission formed to research the causes of divorces and the factors influencing negatively the unity of the family suggested several policy proposals that would destroy many gains of women in Turkey in name of preventing divorces. The commission, reflecting the aims and the mentality of the AKP, suggests bringing in several obstacles for women to end their marriage even if they are exposed to violence. The report, having almost no reference gender equality, recommends compulsory sessions with a professional intermediary in cases of domestic violence or divorce, demands closed hearings in all cases relating to family

law "to protect the privacy of the family" and proposes the introduction of a time limit to alimony payments. The report advocates that the religious councillors intervene the cases of divorce to reconcile the couples, which will also increase the influence of sexist Islamic laws on society. Another problem with the report is that divorce cases should be held in secrecy to protect the privacy of the family, which will keep women activists away from observing the courts.

Sexual violence against minors has been a profound problem in Turkey as many cases have shown in the recent years. Both the government's and media's attitude towards child abuses is to cover up or hide the incidents and to individualize the widespread problems by bringing charges only against individual "perverts". After a recent case revealed that many children have been raped for years in a school of pro-government Islamist foundation named Ensar. The government denied the state's

responsibility to inspect officially all the schools and claimed there was no negligence of the foundation. "A single incident should not become an excuse to defame an institution that has come into prominence with its services," said the Minister of Family Affairs.

According to the report of the abovementioned "divorce commission" the legal age of marriage should be 15

which is 18 at the moment and if the minors who are younger than 15 are engaged in sex with adults and if they decide to get married then there will be no charge of paedophilia.

AKP government led by Erdogan has taken many steps to change both the state and society in more authoritarian and patriarchal way, and they will continue if we cannot resist. They see that the oppression of women and

imprisoning them to the traditional gender roles, besides their exploitation in paid works, is a requisite for naturalizing and establishing other forms of inequalities. If the suggestions of the "divorce commission" are passed women and children will lose many concrete rights. If women and children will lose all the oppressed people will lose and the danger is great!

A setback for Renzi

21 June 2016, by **Franco Turigliatto**

In Turin, despite the support of all the influential forces of the city (from Fiat to the Banca Intesa San Paolo) for the PD candidate, outgoing mayor Piero Fassino, Chiara Appendino of M5S polarized the enormous social discontent of a city with very high rates of unemployment among workers and an increasingly impoverished petty bourgeoisie, almost doubling her vote with a clear success in the popular suburbs.

The good results for the PD candidates in Bologna and Milan do not lessen the overall defeat for the party, because they only reconfirmed the vote in the first round and were obtained against a right which is itself in difficulty; also, in many cities of average size it was centre-right coalitions or the M5S which were victorious.

The success of M5S is based on winning support on the theme of

honesty and opposition to the political class, but also in advancing from time to time objectives which are more social and "left", or more ambiguous, or more to the right in order to cover the major part of the political space; this approach corresponds to its inter-class nature.

Its victory combines with the heavy failures in the first round of the elections of the forces of the left who are paying the price for their choices in the recent past and who question their programs. The case of Naples is a particular one, where the big victory for the outgoing mayor De Magistris over the candidate of the right, with the PD excluded from the ballot, is the expression of a coalition clearly to the left and represents a clear defeat for the political camps who have been in the government of the country over the last 25 years. This coalition and mayor are based on a radical

opposition to austerity policies, strong links with the movements and social struggles and on unity respecting diversity. De Magistris stressed that his victory had been obtained against the PD, against the right and against the M5S.

Finally, these elections show to the dominant classes the fragility of an institutional framework designed to manage a bipartisan austerity (between centre-left and centre-right), now in crisis and the risk that this framework, far from preventing surprises and political incidents, could facilitate them. The electoral law of the Italicum [14], although much vaunted, could boomerang against institutional stability. And the referendum on the anti-democratic counter-institutional reform that Renzi hoped to easily win in autumn now becomes a little more difficult for the Prime Minister.

How the "bathroom bills" feed bigotry

21 June 2016, by **Elizabeth Schulte, Keegan O'Brien**

Political leaders in Florida and across the country, Republican and Democrats alike, are expressing their

horror and outrage at the unbelievable act of anti-LGBTQ violence at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando on June 12.

Republican Florida Gov. Rick Scott joined in the mourning for victims of the mass shooting that took 49 lives

and injured many dozens more—a murder spree that began on the dance floor in a place they considered a refuge from bigotry in the early morning hours of June 12.

But while politicians like Scott have decried the massacre, they don't acknowledge the connections between anti-LGBTQ violence and the discrimination that LGBTQ people face every day, often legalized by laws these politicians wrote and support.

It's rank hypocrisy for them to stand among the families and friends of the slain at Pulse when, just a month earlier, they were opposing same-sex marriage or supporting so-called "bathroom bills." These bills have a very real effect, re-enforcing anti-LGBTQ stereotypes and consigning LGBTQ to second-class status.

After spending the first day concentrating on blaming ISIS for the massacre, and not even saying the words "gay" or "LGBT," Scott finally denounced the anti-LGBTQ attack, as he visited a memorial on Tuesday. But he obviously sees no connection with the violence at Pulse and the anti-LGBTQ scapegoating that he and other politicians use to score political points with the right.

Scott is a long-time opponent of same-sex marriage and fought hard to preserve a state ban, which was adopted by voters in 2008 but then ruled unconstitutional by a federal court in 2014. Scott appealed the court's decision and lost. This March, he signed into law a so-called "pastor protection" bill with language that specifies clergy don't have to marry same-sex couples.

Florida is among more than a dozen states where legislators attempted to pass discriminatory bills that bar transgender people from using bathrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity—and that restrict public bathrooms by "biological sex."

When the Obama administration announced guidelines calling on U.S. public schools to allow transgender students to use bathrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity, conservative legislators in

several states tried to get the order overturned.

The biggest battleground for these so-called "bathroom bills" is in North Carolina.

On March 23, Gov. Pat McCrory signed into law the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act, better known as House Bill 2 (HB 2), the most far-reaching and discriminatory anti-transgender law in the country.

The law has several components. First, it prohibits city governments from passing anti-discrimination laws that override state legislation—specifically overturning a recent ordinance passed in Charlotte banning discrimination against LGBTQ people.

Second, it mandates that all public schools require people to use the bathroom that aligns with the sex indicated on their birth certificate. Third—and this has been the most overlooked feature of the bill—it prohibits cities from raising the minimum wage above the current state level.

With the Charlotte ordinance about to come into effect, Republican lawmakers rushed HB 2 into law in a special session, giving legislators and the public no time to review it. Every Republican and 11 Democrats voted in favor of the bill in the House. In protests against the GOP's maneuvering, Senate Democrats walked off the floor, and HB 2 passed unanimously.

McCrory and his Republican colleagues have deployed a slew of vile transphobic rhetoric to justify their bigotry and discrimination, claiming that trans people are "deranged" and that anti-discrimination laws are nothing but a cover for predators to victimize women and children.

This, of course, is a total lie. There have been zero reported cases of trans people assaulting women or children in bathrooms. However, there have been countless cases of trans people being verbally harassed, physically assaulted and even killed in

bathrooms.

In the most recent national Transgender Discrimination Survey report, 63 percent of respondents reported experiencing a serious act of discrimination in their lifetime, and according to a 2013 Williams Institute report, 70 percent of trans people report being denied entrance, harassed or assaulted while trying to use the restroom.

In addition to codifying discrimination and second-class citizenship, North Carolina's bill whipped up a climate of transphobia and gave confidence to the worst forms of bigotry.

This climate has had a clear effect. Trans Lifeline, a crisis hotline for transgender people in North Carolina, has reported a 150 percent increase in calls since last month when the bill passed. Many young people calling in report feeling like they have "lost hope" that things will get better for them.

Transphobia kills, and Gov. McCrory and every legislator that played a role in passing HB 2 has blood on their hands.

Many people are asking: Why now? With the Supreme Court legalizing same-sex marriage, the growing cultural visibility of trans people and legal victories for trans rights, North Carolina's law seems like a relic from a bygone era. But around the country, anti-transgender laws continue to rear their ugly heads.

Lawmakers in 15 other states, including South Carolina, Tennessee, Kansas, Illinois and Minnesota, took up so-called bathroom bills this year, with North Dakota passing one in February that was vetoed by the governor.

On one level, these laws are an attempt by the Religious Right to create new scapegoats in a period of increasing austerity and budget cuts. Nothing makes this connection more clear than HB 2's restriction on raising the minimum wage.

North Carolina has become a haven for companies looking for low-wage,

nonunionized labor. Over the past 30 years, North Carolina has attracted businesses by implementing neoliberal economic policies that have lowered taxes on corporations and the rich, while doling out huge sums of government subsidies.

One of the ways the state has accumulated money is by remodeling the tax structure and shifting the burden onto workers and the poor in the form of an increasing sales tax. The state has also worked hand in hand with corporations to keep wages low and shut out unions, making North Carolina's union membership rate the lowest in the country. Just 1.9 percent of wage earners in a union—meanwhile, more than 1.7 million people, or about 20 percent of the population, lives in poverty.

In a society with such extreme inequality, it's necessary to divide working-class and poor people who would otherwise have everything in common with one another.

Scapegoating oppressed groups for society's ills—whether it be LGBTQ people, people of color, immigrants, public-sector workers, Arabs and Muslims or any other marginalized group—has been a longstanding tactic of the American ruling class to maintain its rule by fragmenting the majority and redirecting class anger away from the economic and political elites responsible for engineering exploitation and oppression.

Thankfully, HB 2 has been met with widespread opposition in North Carolina and nationally, an indication that the struggle for trans rights is at

a critical turning point.

Contrary to what some on the left have argued, the legalization of marriage equality and the movement it took to win it played a big part in kicking down social prejudice and paving the way for the widespread support for trans rights taking place today.

Even Corporate America and the White House have felt the pressure to come out against HB 2. Eager to distance themselves from open bigotry—and any potential financial losses a boycott might cause—more than 120 "leading business leaders and CEOs" signed an open letter sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign in opposition to HB 2. Among the signers were Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz and Apple CEO Tim Cook.

The Obama administration's Department of Justice filed a federal lawsuit against North Carolina for civil rights violations, and Attorney General Loretta Lynch pledged to stand behind trans people in their fight for progress.

This shows that the "bathroom bills" are a maneuver—and a not particularly effective one—for the Religious Right to regain ideological ground in a culture war it's been badly losing over the past decade.

The Obama administration issued its guidelines for public school bathrooms in large part as a result of years of protest and organizing in support of LGBTQ rights, including all the federal rights that come as a result of equal

marriage. The hard work of grassroots activists played a key role in changing the broader public discussion over LGBTQ rights and shifting more people in favor of equality.

The Obama administration likely would have done nothing had activists not put their feet to the fire.

The widespread support to overturn HB 2 is a watershed moment in the fight for trans equality. Overturning HB2 will be a major win for the LGBT movement, but the fight has to extend beyond North Carolina.

Trans people still lack federal protection from discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and face disproportionately high rates of unemployment, poverty, homelessness and incarceration. Bathroom access is just the tip of the iceberg.

But activists can't wait for change to come from the corporate boardroom or halls of Congress. The only remedy for overturning HB 2 and winning full equality and social justice for trans people will be through building on the solidarity and struggle on display in the streets of North Carolina and extending it nationwide.

In the aftermath of the Orlando massacre, we can see the devastating effects of bigotry and anti-LGBTQ scapegoating. But as thousands of people come together in vigils and gatherings to condemn the attack, we are also seeing the possibility for building solidarity and resistance in the face of this bigotry.

June 16, 2016

socialistworker.org

Protest the sentence of Baba Jan and the other activists

20 June 2016, by Awami Workers' Party

Minto said his party had tried seeking justice from courts but that the Appellate Court's short order had made it clear that the singular purpose served by all state institutions in remote regions like G-B was to perpetuate control of the regions through local elites and to suppress indigenous movements of the people for democratic rights and civil liberties enshrined in the Pakistani Constitution.

Minto said the battle for justice for Baba Jan and other activists, particularly, and GB people, generally, would now be taken to streets all across the country. His party, the Awami Workers Party would also raise the issue at international forums.

The major demands of the campaign are:

- immediate release for Baba Jan and other activists
- cancellation of the case filed on trumped up charges,
- publication of judicial inquiry report
- punishment for policemen involved in the killing of two locals during a 2010 demonstration.

Background

On 9 June 2016, the GB Supreme Appellate Court sentenced Baba Jan and 11 others political activists to 40-year prison terms while hearing the state's appeal against the GB Chief Court's decision. Earlier, the Chief Court had set aside Baba Jan and others' conviction in the matter by an anti-terrorism court in September 2014. The Appellate Court judgment is not unanimous (2:1). It is a short order with no reason. A detailed judgment is still awaited.

Baba Jan and other activists' alleged crime was that they had raised their voices for the thousands of families affected by the massive landslides of 2010. The landslides had caused an

artificial lake in the Attabad area of Hunza in 2010, rendering thousands of families homeless. Baba Jan and other activists had mobilised the people of the region, holding scores of demonstrations, to seek fair compensation and social support for these families.

The timing of the June 9 verdict raises suspicions about its fairness and impartiality. Baba Jan was scheduled to contest a by-election for Hunza-6 constituency in the Gilgit-Baltistan legislative assembly on May 28, 2016. Three days before the scheduled election, Baba Jan's campaign team comprising local leadership of the AWP GB had led a massive rally of his supporters including scores of women and youngsters. On the same day, Zafar Iqbal of the Pakistan Peoples' Party, not a contestant himself, had approached the Supreme Appellate Court seeking directives for Baba Jan's disqualification on grounds that he had been convicted by an ATC. It is widely known in the Hunza-6 constituency that Iqbal is working in collusion with PML-N contestant, a son of the G-B governor and a member of the traditional ruling family of the region.

Completely ignoring the fact that Baba Jan's conviction had been overturned by the Chief Court, the Appellate Court directed that by-elections be postponed till a decision was reached in the G-B government's appeal against Chief Court's decision. This was not unexpected since the Election Tribunal of the G-B had already accepted Baba Jan's nomination papers and allowed him to contest the election from jail.

Hunza 6 constituency is an important part of the G-B region. The constituency is located on the Pakistan-China border and serves as the main link between the two countries. With the launch the \$46 billion Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC), the importance of this road link will multiply manifold for the two states and their private capitalists.

In this backdrop, it is very clear that the PML-N led federal government is extending its patronage to the traditional elite of Hunza (GB

governor) to prevent the possibility of a candidate with mass public support to enter the G-B legislative assembly. The government and its capitalist allies know very well that Baba Jan will bring with him the concerns of the working men and women of the region to the assembly otherwise dominated by the elite and not allow any corruption in the multibillion dollar project.

The government has already witnessed the overwhelming support for Baba Jan in the June 2015 general elections. Baba Jan had defeated two of the three candidates affiliated with mainstream political parties, standing second only to the PML-N candidate who was backed by networks of patronage extending from Hunza to the federal capital of Islamabad.

Since then, mass support for Baba Jan's candidacy has further increased. All public opinion surveys done in the constituency indicate a land slide victory for Baba Jan. After losing mass support in favour of an ordinary working class hero, the government was clearly looking for an alternative to keep him out of the electoral race.

Baba Jan's ordeal has exposed the colonial nature of administration in the region. Constitutionally, GB is not a part of Pakistan. It was given the status of a province with limited self-governance in 2009, including the right for the people to elect their representatives to the GB legislative assembly. However, the Pakistani federal government remains in control of all major decisions related to the region. The judges to the Chief and the Appellate Courts depend for their extension in office on the Pakistani prime minister. Whosoever comes to power in Pakistan co-opts local elites and remotely controls the region through them.

The administration should beware that by putting Baba Jan and other activists behind bars it will not succeed in silencing them or controlling the movement of working men, women and children that they have helped build in the region. Baba Jan and others' sentences will not be accepted by the people who have developed a connection with their struggle, reflected in the widespread popularity

of the slogan: Teri Jan Meri Jan, Baba Jan Baba Jan, (Your Dearest and Mine, Baba Jan Baba Jan).

Protest

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is taking up the case of Baba Jan and his comrades; you can read what they say in detail [here](#).

They are urging people to write letters to the authorities calling them to immediately release Baba Jan and 11 other defenders and withdraw the case filed on trumped up charges. The state must also make public the judicial inquiry report and penalize the policemen responsible for the killing of two locals during the 2010

demonstration. Please also denounce the continuous marginalization of human rights defenders in Gilgit.

The AHRC will write a separate letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders calling for his intervention into this matter.

To support this case, please click [here](#).

Life After Bernie: People's Summit Searches for the Movement's Political Future

19 June 2016, by **Dan La Botz**

That disjuncture between the Sanders' movement's belief that we have achieved something quite important and Clinton's clear victory in the primary provides the contradictory context for this conference of progressives, radicals, and socialists searching for the way to the future, I among them.

Vision Not Organization or Strategy

Held in the cavernous McCormick Place convention center, the plenary sessions taking place in an enormous hall large enough to hold 3,000 seated at large round tables, with several huge screens magnifying the image of the speakers many fold, the conference resembled a union or political convention. Virtually every minute of the conference was organized and planned down to the last detail; the speakers and the conversations were timed to fill each session. Participants could access information and respond to surveys through an app created for the occasion. Such a format offered limited space for discussion except in the few table discussions and breakout sessions. And there was no place for the spontaneous and the creative, or

for a suggestion or a proposal. If the Occupy movement had inspired Bernie's movement, it had not inspired the Summit.

Political cultures contrasted if they did not clash as the National Nurses United's union staff and union members and People's Action community and political organizers guided the Sanders grassroots activist through the highly structured agenda. Yet even in this framework, there was a spirit of independence. The Sanderistas who had come from all over the country, California to New York, Minnesota to Texas, averaging perhaps 40 years old many aging baby-booms and lots of millennials among them and about 15 percent people of color remained, despite Sanders' apparent defeat, filled with enthusiasm and anxious to move on with the "political revolution" and the fight against the "billionaire class."

While the conference reflected the breadth of outlooks of the Sanders movement and offered opportunities for discussion and participation, it was to the disappointment of some never conceived as a democratic, decision-making body. The conference was intended to reflect the movement and to raise some more radical political ideas, but it was not intended to provide a direction for the future, and it didn't.

It was about vision, not organization or strategy.

Vote for Hillary? Work for Progressive Candidates? Build the Movement?

Throughout the conference many of the plenary speakers implied but did not state outright that we should vote for Hillary, work for Bernie's candidates, and build the movement. But it was not clear that everyone would accept the advice. When Dominique Scott, a student at the University of Mississippi, speaking on a plenary panel, said that neither Trump nor Clinton reflected her movement or her values suggesting that she wouldn't vote for Hillary the crowd erupted in wild applause and cheers. Many of those present either won't vote for Hillary or will vote for her virtually against their will, and will leave the voting booth with a profound disgust at the Democratic Party which has put them in that position.

Offering options, some of the speakers suggested that whether or not one votes for Hillary, people should

support Bernie's candidates—he now claims there are 7,000 of them—and other local progressive candidates, or, if activists preferred, they could work in the movements. From the beginning, the Sanders' campaign emphasized volunteerism, autonomy, and confidence in activists to do the right thing, and that sentiment prevailed at the Summit as well. No one was being told what to do next—which was both a strength and a weakness.

In a conference like this, which is not the founding convention of anything, the spirit and the meaning can only be captured in the speakers' talks, audiences' response, the back-and-forth in the break-out sessions, the organized table discussions among the participants, and the chatter in the halls. There is no manifesto or proclamation, there are no motions or resolutions, so what we're listening for is the sound made by the Zeitgeist passing through the meeting rooms and the halls, brushing up against us, making its way, sometimes gracefully, sometimes clumsily, to the future. So what did it look, feel, and sound like?

A Braiding of Movements

The Summit reflected the movement in the diversity of speakers on all of the important issues of our society: racism, patriarchy, the LGBTQ movement, labor, and the environmental issues, above all the carbon-based economy and climate change. The conference organizers clearly intended to give the Sanderistas a sense that all of the social movements needed to come together to create one larger political movement with a comprehensive program for social change, a notion that suggests the need to create a political party, though that was not where things were going.

The plenary session on Friday night, was opened by RoseAnn DeMoro, the executive director of National Nurses United, the principal sponsor of the Summit, whose talk, seemingly inspired by the young Karl Marx and David Harvey but delivered in the down-to-earth manner of someone

who spends her life talking to nurses, focused on the way in which the neoliberal political economy has destroyed the humanity of our society as it has put everything up for sale, had turned everything into commodities, not only our labor and our consumption, but even our leisure time. Her discussion of neoliberalism and its impact on the economy was without a doubt the most sophisticated discussion of political economy by a labor union leader in many decades. And DeMoro also found time to mention that "liberals are usually bad, they usually sell you out when you think they're with you, so, beware" and that we had learned in this campaign a lot about the "massive political corruption in the Democratic Party."

Juan Gonzalez, co-host of Democracy Now!, then introduced the panelists by referring to his own experience as a young Columbia University student activist at the 1968 Democratic Party Convention at a time when "the country seemed to be on the verge of civil war." "We in SDS refused to vote," said Gonzalez. "We wouldn't support McCarthy. We wouldn't support Humphrey. Our slogan was 'Vote with your feet. Vote in the street.' I'm here to tell you, the slogan was right, the tactic was wrong. In retrospect there would not have been a substantive change, but there would have been a positive change had Richard Nixon not been elected. Hopefully we learn from our mistakes, a new generation learns from the mistakes of the past." Gonzalez's remark, implying the need to vote for Hillary Clinton, set the tone for the panel. The crowd was not necessarily having it. When he concluded saying we are here to ask, "Where do we go? Do we reform? Do we transform? Or do we overthrow and replace?" the thousands in the auditorium cheered the last phrase. They were taking the idea of "political revolution" seriously.

Naomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine* and *This Changes Everything* suggested that it was very significant that nurses, whose lives are about caring for and healing people—the very opposite of a commodified economy—should be at the forefront of this political and social movement. Both she and activist and actress

Rosario Dawson suggested that many of those present were nursing wounds suffered in the primary, and the nurses were helping to heal them. They not only heal their patients, Klein told the crowd, but through their sponsorship of this conference, they were making it possible to advance a humanitarian agenda that could heal the wounds of the planet and of our society. The alternative to neoliberalism, said Klein, is our movement's "holistic, intersectional" ethos. She told the crowd that the Sanders campaign has raised the idea of socialism, had "moved Hillary to the left, and forced Donald Trump to talk about free trade."

John Nichols told the Sanderistas—with no explanation of why or how—that the movement was "going to rise." Nichols made the old argument that Socialist Party candidates Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas had run for the presidency several times, raising the argument for socialism, so that when Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected to the White House many of their socialist programs had become government policy. "We always win, because we always rise," Nichols concluded bombastically and at twice the volume of other speakers. He had ignored the equally venerable counter-argument that Roosevelt had saved capitalism and had taken the nation into the Second World War; that government, capital, and labor had become fused into one during the conflict and had emerged from it in a partnership that created the system of corporate domination we now faced. But he had demagogically told the crowd what it wanted to hear, namely that they had won and would go on to win, presumably by forcing Clinton to carry out their program as another generation had forced Roosevelt to do so.

That was certainly the view of Frances Fox Piven, City University of New York professor and author with Richard Cloward of the famous *Poor People's Movements: Why they Succeed, How they Fail* (1977). She argued, as she has since that book was published, that people should vote for the Democratic Party but build a movement that can force through an agenda of reform. "They need us to

cooperate," she said. "We have to threaten not to cooperate." It is this view that differentiates her outlook from the small number of far leftists present, who, like myself, are not interested in alternately "threatening" and "cooperating" with a corporate party, but building a working peoples' party that can, as Juan Gonzalez put it, "overthrow and replace" the existing economic and political order.

While mostly reflecting the movement, the conference panelists also raised some ideas that had not been part of the Sanders platform and may have been new to many of the Sanderistas. Tobita Chow of the People's Lobby, for example, disagreed with Bernie Sanders' call to break up the big banks, arguing instead for the nationalization of the banks and of other large corporations. We need, he said, "democratic control" over the financial industry and other corporations. He also suggested that the Sanders movement needed to see itself as and to become part of a worldwide working class movement against neoliberalism, together with workers in Bangladesh, Vietnam, and China.

Doing Politics

Several elected officials spoke: Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, Cook County Commissioner; Nina Turner, former Ohio State Senator; and Tulsi Gabbard, Congresswoman from Hawaii. While Garcia and Turner, each in their distinct styles, laid out progressive positions on current political issues, Gabbard brought something new to the conference, strongly criticizing and condemning the U.S. role in Iraq and her powerful anti-interventionist speech, while in line with Sanders' condemnation of regime change, was particularly aimed at opposing any U.S. military moves in Syria. There's a problem here though, as Gabbard is an Islamophobe: pro-Israel, pro-Sisi (Egypt) and pro-Assad (Syria) and pro-Modi (India).

Throughout the conference the Peoples Action speakers, many of them leaders of NGOs (501C3 and 501C4 as well as of local PACS) pushed the idea that the future of the movement was in supporting local

candidates. The have in mind backing Democrats, it seems. But the down ballot option is also appealing to all sorts of other activists from the environmental to the labor movement and from LGBTQ to Black anti-incarceration activists. Some might take up the suggestion for independent or socialist candidates as was done in Chicago's last election where several school teachers ran for office and where a Latino community activist, Jorge Mujica, ran as a socialist candidate.

Who Was Not There?

Surprisingly the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), one of the most militant unions in the country whose strike a few years ago and on-going militant demonstrations of thousands that continue to confront Mayor Rahm Emmanuel and the city's political and corporate establishmentâ€"battles a war over whether money should go to children or bankers. Conference organizers had attempted to include CTU president Karen Lewis, but when because of other commitments she could not attend, they failed to work with the union leadership to find a role for CTU at the Summit. So the union was not present, though no doubt some Chicago teachers were.

It was also curious that the Communications Workers of America (CWA), which had endorsed Sanders wasn't either a sponsor of the event or given a place in it. After all, the CWA is another militant union that has just emerged from an 18-day strike against Verizon. NNU nurses has joined CWA picket lines during the strike, but somehow the Verizon workers didn't make it to the Summit. If in addition to the nurses there had been present a few hundred Chicago teachers and a couple score of CWA workers it would have given the assembly a different character.

There was a Labor for Bernie meeting, though organized at the last minute and held at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, it was practically an independent event. The 40 or so union leaders who attended discussed plans for the future mostly around building

local political organizations. With Bernie out of the race, even the six national unions that endorsed him and the six that were under pressure to endorse nobody will no doubt end up with the rest of the labor movement working for Hillary Clinton. Though among Bernie's union supporters as among the rest of the movement, not everyone is going there. Chuck Zlatkin, Executive Assistant to the President of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), said, "The AFL-CIO has become an adjunct of the Democratic Party and our members are as fed up with the Democrats as with the Republicans. Both parties fail to serve us. After Bernie, how do we form a working class partyâ€"for we are the working class movement, whether it's a third party, a labor party, or a party of the 99%?"

Labor for Bernie built an impressive national union network to support Sanders. Many in the group hope it can transition to meaningfully engage labor in continuing the "political revolution." However that broader mission will clearly be much more challenging.

The Far Left at the Peoples Summit

The weakness of the far left at the Summit was striking. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) had brought 100 of its membersâ€"many of them young, new membersâ€"to the conference and held a several-hours long meeting with them on Friday before the event began. DSA's main goal was to incorporate these new members into the organization and to have a presence, though it offered no strategic suggestions about where the movement should go.

Seattle City Councilperson Kshama Sawant was present, though her group Socialist Alternative, which has been highly involved in the Sanders campaign, sent only a handful of members and did not their usual highly visible presence. They did, however, hold on the fringe of the conference what seemed to be an unofficial meeting of twenty or thirty people to discuss alternatives to Hillary. The International Socialist

Organization (ISO), which had not supported Sanders in the primary, had a booth and a few members, but no organized intervention in the conference. There were members of other socialist groups such as the Communist Party USA and Solidarity, though they had no organizational presence.

DSA had taken the initiative to organize a breakout session titled "Democratic Socialism in a New Time" at which they featured Sawant, Bhaskar Sunkara of Jacobin magazine, and Debbie Medina of Brooklyn, a DSA member running for the New York State Senate. But Medina fell ill and was replaced by Frances Fox Piven. Sunkara argued that we should draw on the rich socialist tradition to develop a political program and to build a large-scale socialist movement. And while Sawant argued for independent political action, talked about her group's petition to get Bernie to run as an independent

candidate, and raised the alternative of Jill Stein of the Green Party, Piven suggested that people should vote for Hillary and work to build a movement that she could not ignore. As other socialist groups entered the debate, it became fractious and as one young man told me, it unfortunately "ended on a bitter note."

Where Do We Go From Here?

The Summit organizers were not prepared to suggest the organizational form to carry the movement forward that was so fervently desired by the movement activists, but suggestions did arise at various points in the conference. At the breakout session on independent politics, Bob Master, a leading figure in both the CWA and the Working Families Party, suggested that the National Nurses United and the other sponsoring organizations should create a national coordinating

committee. In the New York regional meeting, Nancy Romer, a union and environmental activist, argued that we needed to create an alliance of organizations and a couple of national campaigns, perhaps around such issues voter rights or campaign finance reform.

All of us recognize that with each new political step—the Democratic Party Convention, the election of a new president, the inauguration of the new president—the movement is likely to lose its shape, its energy, and its adherents. Everywhere one heard the cry for national organization—yet whether or not that will happen remains unclear. The People's Summit did not point the way forward—perhaps the alternative will arise out of the demands in the convention in Philadelphia and the protests outside.

June 21, 2016

[New Politics](#)

After the killings in Orlando: grief, anger and vigilance

19 June 2016

The killings perpetrated at the Pulse lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) nightclub in Orlando in the United States

leave us in profound grief. Our thoughts are with the victims and their loved

ones, predominantly from the Latino community, and all the victims of hate crimes against LGBTIQ people around the world. We are participating

in and initiating solidarity rallies, in many countries grieving over the biggest

concentrated slaughter of LGBTIQ people since the Second World War.

The fact that Daesh hailed this slaughter reveals even more clearly

the ultra-reactionary character of this organization. But the bigotry behind this is not new, not created and encouraged by one single culture or religion. In the US, the country where the killer was born and raised, right-wing politicians denouncing the Orlando massacre nonetheless hypocritically persist in blocking LGBTIQ rights. Denunciations from other sources in other countries in the name of Christianity refuse even to acknowledge that the victims were LGBTIQ people. LGBTIQ people - and particularly trans women - are targets of murderous hate crime across the globe.

The dead and wounded in Orlando were the victims of an ongoing, bloody

clash between two right-wing ideologies. One ideology preaches sexual

repression in the name of theocratic fundamentalism. The other instrumentalizes LGBTIQ rights in the interests of anti-Muslim racism and imperial interventions. Muslim LGBTIQ people, cruelly victimized by both

these two ideologies, have been particularly eloquent in exposing them both; we are angry that their voices have been so little heeded. We reject both these ideologies, and vow to continue joining in the fight against them both, in the name of sexual freedom, peace and human solidarity worldwide.

Bureau of the Fourth International

19 June 2016

Venezuelan socialists say: "We won't retreat in the face of threats"

19 June 2016

On June 10, Marea's national headquarters were raided by police—a sign, say its members, of the Maduro government's increasing repression against the left. In this statement published at the Aporrea.org website and translated by Todd Chretien for socialisworker.org, the organization demands answers about the raid and calls on the government to respect rights of dissent and protest.

On Friday, June 10, at approximately 11 a.m., the national headquarters of the Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide in English, MS by its initials in Spanish) was raided. A squad of heavily armed CICPC police officials entered our premises. The raid was authorized in a judicial order signed by Judge Denisse Bocanegra D'Áz related to Case No. 9 C S-1.329-16 in response to a request filed by the Public Ministry.

Without any real explanation, without informing us of the contents of the judicial complaint, and without reasons given for the display of force, the officials left 30 minutes after entering our offices without finding anything for which they were supposedly searching.

Based on the operation's disproportionate show of force and its lack of justification, MS considers it a serious violation of our political liberties, which have already been very limited in the country. Marea Socialista's National Working Group reminds the public that this isn't the first time pressure of this sort has been brought to bear against our organization. Retaliations, threats, violations of privacy, firings and restrictions of social and political rights of MS leaders and activists have been occurring over the last three

years, increasingly over the past six months.

One of the most shameful examples involved five separate branches of the state obstructing MS in the process of attaining electoral status. While the National Electoral Commission rejected the name we requested, the Supreme Court delayed our appeal against the CNE's decision, and the Public Ministry, in a semi-feudal interpretation of the law, had the gall to decide that MS could not use the name "Socialist" because, according to the designated state attorney, we are not socialists (!?)—an argument that, besides being totalitarian, is ridiculous. As all this was taking place, the executive and president of the previous National Assembly launched an intense campaign of retaliation, disqualification and political persecution against us, using all the means of communication available to the state.

Word spread quickly about today's raid, prompting a call to MS leaders by the director of the CICPC, in which he first claimed that he was unaware of the operation and asked us (!) for explanations. Then, in a subsequent call, he tried to explain that the raid was actually unrelated to MS. However, we reject this excuse for the following reasons:

1. The office that was raided has been the MS national headquarters for three years, it is identified with MS flags and placards, and public political activities are organized in this space, the majority of which are widely publicized and open to the whoever cares to participate. Moreover, besides organizational operations, all sorts of other activities take place at

the office, including press conferences, seminars and workshops.

2. The raid was conducted under the authority of a judicial order requested by a prosecutor and signed by a judge. The police agents were identified in the order, and it was issued four days before it was executed. The scale of the operation, the overt show of force and the menacing deployment all had, in our opinion, the clear objective of intimidation and restricting the political rights of citizens established by the National Constitution.

3. As demonstrated above, this was not an isolated action. And it not only MS that is suffering—the raid forms part of the daily outrages committed against others who are only defending or claiming their rights. It marks the consolidation of an authoritarian trend that has been developing in the government and which is being translated into actions conducted by the security forces. This trend, in almost every case, is supported by sectors of the judiciary, officials of the Public Ministry, other branches of government, and media outlets under government control.

As we have stated in editorials, articles, opinion pieces, interviews, meetings and all the means available to us, the current declaration of a state of emergency represents a fresh blow to democracy. Indeed, it provides a context to the raid. The same is true of the approval of the Arco Minero decree [authorizing oil exploration by foreign firms in a special zone], which, besides promoting ecocide, represents a miserable surrender of sovereignty and resources to transnational

corporations as well as illegal restrictions of social, labor, economic and political rights.

The disrespectful way citizens are forced to stand in humiliating queues for basic necessities is authoritarian. As are arbitrary rationing, cuts and suspensions of basic services, and the daily militarization of cities. As are the obstacles, maneuvers and tricks that interfere with the possibility of recalling elected officials, one of the most advanced political rights in our Constitution. As is the lack of access to food and health care suffered by the neediest people.

Faced with these outrages, Marea Socialista declares: As militants

committed to the Bolivarian project, which is bastardized and manipulated by the current leadership of the Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and the government, we will continue with our struggle. We denounce corruption and official impunity, unmasking the anti-democratic character of the measures put in place by this government. We will struggle to reconstruct the national project that has been demolished over the last three years by inefficiency, arrogance and cynicism.

We will continue to struggle for our ideas and our rights as well as those of the population as a whole, and we demand the unrestricted observance of the Constitution.

We will continue to organize in our headquarters, as we have done all along, and we will not back down against threats, pressure or retaliation.

We declare that the leadership of both the PSUV and the conservative Democratic Unity Roundtable [MUD, by its initials in Spanish] do not represent us, and we will continue on the path of building a new political force.

Finally, we demand that all those responsible for this raid provide a public clarification of the facts and clear Marea Socialista of any related charges.

Why popular movements win: the student movement in Québec

18 June 2016, by **Pierre Beaudet**

Some popular movements are victorious, while many others lose. As activists we constantly ask the question - what is the difference between the winners and the losers? Of course there are many external factors that such movements face: repression; the capacity of the elites and the State to isolate and insult the movement and to delegitimise resistance; manipulation by global elites who fear that local struggles can set "bad" examples. And there are also internal factors of the movement: its organizational strength, its leadership, its tactical imagination, its sense of timing, its ability to build alliances.

This is the story of the resistance of the "Carrés Rouges" (Red Squares), the Quebec student movement named after the squares of red material they wear as a symbol.

Facing the long march

In the spring of 2012, the Carrés Rouges called a strike in post-secondary institutions. Before the strike, there had been important organisational changes in the student movement. A new organisation (ASSÉ) displaced older student federations by emphasising internal democracy, struggle, popular education and alliances with other popular movements.

In 2010, ASSÉ took a strategic decision. It felt that the government was too entrenched and that other sectors of the popular movements were not ready for battle. By the fall of 2011 however, the situation had changed. The strike was preceded by over 1,000 assemblies and meetings, big and small, in the roughly 70 post-secondary institutions in Québec. Large institutions, like the state-

university UQAM (45,000 students), were organized through decentralised assemblies. They emphasised rotation of responsibilities, transparent processes, and the building of a platform that would represent the will of the vast majority of students.

Québec

Québec is the name of a province of Canada and, at the same time, of a distinct nation inside the Canadian state. It has a population of 8 million, out of the 40 million in Canada as a whole. Most are French-speaking and have a distinct cultural identity.

French settlers arrived in Québec in the sixteenth century. It was densely populated by aboriginal people. 200 years later, the French were

conquered by the British, who then controlled the whole of North America. The French-Canadians, as they were then called, rebelled many times, including in a major republican movement in 1837.

Later, in the 1960s, a new movement arose, demanding national and social emancipation. It was based in popular movements. A reformist-nationalist party emerged from these movements and won elections in 1976. In 1995, a national referendum asking the Québécois if they wanted an independent state, ended up in a stalemate.

In the last 15 years, Quebec has been the site of major popular, feminist and internationalist struggles.

For more explanation of Québec and its popular movements, in English, see [here](#).

Waging the battle of ideas

As a left-leaning group, ASSÉ had for a long time proposed that postsecondary education should simply be free (like in many European countries). However, students also knew that in the North American context this would be very tough to achieve. In North America, there is a consensus amongst the elite that students have to “pay their share”, and that society “cannot afford” free education. This consensus even includes centrist political parties, the media and the cultural establishment. These myths are part of a solid hegemonic block. It is not an easy task to shift it.

So at the end of the day students decided to focus on the freezing of fees, and not their abolition pure and simple. They called on progressive think-tanks to produce evidence that lowering fees would actually benefit the whole society in the long run and that it was affordable, with proper fiscal measures in place.

Innovative methods

So the strategy was based on two things:

â€¢ A short-term, simple, straightforward demand: freeze fees

â€¢ A long term perspective: accessible education for all.

The strike picked up rapidly from February to March, by which time about 50% of the total student population was on strike. Massive picketing prevented classes. Sympathetic lecturers made that easier.

The democracy of the students had a number of important characteristics:

â€¢ The strike mandate was renewed every week.

â€¢ Negotiations were transparent: there were no secret talks or attempts to find a “compromise” outside of the assemblies.

â€¢ Decisions were taken at assemblies by vote, not by vague consensus or consultative process.

â€¢ Rather than “leaders”, there were “spokespersons”: there were always two, one male, one female.

The students directly confronted the government. But they also engaged with the population. They managed at least partly to break down the wall of silence. They did this partly through their own (social) media. But they also used artists, musicians, poets, and actors (some of them well-known) to break into mainstream media.

They were visible because they were wearing the “red square” in public. After a while, almost everyone came to know what these “carrés rouges” meant. By April, it became obvious that the students were winning the “battle of ideas”. This was certainly helped by an external factor, as the government was going through a series of scandals.

The eruption

Normally, in May the winter-tired Québécois masses come out into the street. Cafes are full. The cities are alive well into the night. In this environment, there was a critical mass in favor of the students. People came out in the streets with pots and pans, in support.

Then, the government made a mistake. It passed a new law to force students back into classes. In addition, it imposed restrictions on pickets and demonstrations. Instead of being put down, the movement was inflamed. Many tens of thousands of people came onto the streets, defying the law. Many were arrested, but even the police admitted that they were totally outnumbered. Simultaneous demonstrations took place, Students marching with banners calling for “Stop the fee hike” and “accessible education for all”. with up to 250,000 people in Montreal, a city of three million people.

The student leadership was wise enough to de-emphasise direct confrontation with the police and destruction of public infrastructure which the “Black Blocs” and other anarchist elements were promoting. They thought that these were counter-productive and in fact were often used by under-cover police to delegitimise the movements.

The government was deeply destabilised. It called elections three months later, and lost. The new (centrist) government accepted parts of the student demands. The strike ended, despite the opposition of some ultra-left (mostly anarchist) groups. But, on the whole, society was changed.

Looking back

The key element in this success is the methodology of the students. They combined wide-open participation and free discussion with clear strategies and realistic decision-making processes. The struggle was structured. It was based on established and accepted procedures. It refused to give a big role to

individuals, unlike parts of the "Occupy" movement in the United States and Canada in 2010- 2011.

It established a culture of empowering and extending participation. But this did not become an end in itself. It was an organizational tool, to anchor the struggle in the masses. When there had been enough discussion of the different perspectives, the assemblies took binding decisions. These decisions were based on strategies agreed by the majority. The decisions were precise - they made clear the boundaries of actions. Nothing was left vague or open to "interpretation". And once the majority had decided,

the strategy had to be accepted by all. This stood against the anarchist idea of a "diversity of tactics" - the idea that anyone can do anything.

Many activists, especially the youth, had been afraid that their capacities would be stifled, as they are in other large organizations. They had feared being trapped by hierarchy, closed leadership, and centralization. In the end, the students' methods overcame those genuine fears.

Looking ahead

And now? In the last 10 months,

hundreds of thousands of public sector unions have confronted the government. They have used some of the students' methods, although the trade union leadership has been at best slow to change and at worst has obstructed it. There is a huge environmental movement preparing to stop pipelines and other assaults on the natural environment. There are serious attempts to establish organised relationships with movements outside Québec, including the rest of Canada and even the United States. Something is in the air, although as that other Marx, Groucho, would say: "you can predict everything except the future".

After June 14, the fight continues

17 June 2016, by Léon Crémieux

And yet mobilization endures. This was the biggest Parisian event since the beginning of the movement, three months ago, two or three times larger than that of March 31. Obviously, it was a national event, but several large cities were also in the streets, like Marseille, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Rennes and others. Similarly, the atmosphere was not that of a last time round the track. Because in this event, as in all the demonstrations undertaken for some weeks, the state of mind is one of determination. A large number of employees came from both large and small enterprises in the private sector, from all regions, most often brought in coaches by the CGT, but also by Force Ouvrière or Solidaires.

The demonstration and its slogans reflected determination in the demand for withdrawal of the El Khomri law and the rejection of the PS government. Despite the daily propaganda conducted for months in TV and radio by the PS and all commentators and so-called economic and social experts, employees are still standing firm against this law: in all surveys, only 30% of those polled support the maintenance of the draft

law. 70% - and almost all employees - want its withdrawal pure and simple or at least profound changes.

And yet, the movement has not yet managed to force the government to concede. Because the givens present since the beginning of the movement are still there. On the one hand the government is still as weak. Its credibility is reduced week after week to almost nothing. The leading Valls-Hollande duo display the face of strong leaders, of an increasingly repressive state, to hide their weakness. The Prime Minister plays on this register by repeating incessantly that France is at war in the face of terrorism, that the Republic must be defended and there is now media hysteria, orchestrated by the government, concerning any event that may enter into this reading. Thus, on the morning of June 14, after the murder of a couple of police officers in the Parisian region, the Minister of the Interior acceded to an old claim of the reactionary police unions and of the extreme right: authorization for police to carry weapons off duty. The damage suffered by the facade of the children's hospital on June 14 was turned by the Prime Minister into "a

hospital devastated", whereas no demonstrator entered into the hospital. But this media portrayal of an "inhuman act" will serve to justify, perhaps, the prohibition of future demonstrations. Ironically, the leader of Force Ouvrière, Jean Claude Mailly responded to this threat by saying that it should also be necessary to ban the next matches in Euro 2016, the pretext to multiple clashes with already at least one death and some serious injuries. On this police state terrain and against the setting of a country at war, the government is beaten at its own game, the right and the Front national reproaching it now for its weakness before social disorder.

This climate of state, government and police violence is applied to the demonstrations. At least 150 demonstrators were injured on June 14, fifteen had to be directed to emergency services and at least one is in a serious state, his vertebral column hit by a tear gas bomb fired at point blank. Flash-balls, body armour, stinger grenades and tear gas are used to seriously injure demonstrators, not to mention charges against the corteges with intensive

use of truncheons.

The government is therefore seeking to get out of the situation after June 14 by increasing tension and police violence. The goal is to definitively break the social movement before the second passage of the law in the National Assembly early in July.

On the side of the movement things are still contradictory. The timetable for action given by the national inter-union coordination [the Intersindicale], much too widely spaced apart, especially since mid-May, does not allow the building up of the relationship of forces needed to defeat the government. The determination of combative union teams has allowed the maintenance of the strength of the movement up to now, but many sectors and enterprises have gone on strike in a scattered manner, resuming when another started.

The only time the government has come close to climbing down in recent weeks was at the end of May, when the blockade of fuel depots and the strike by truck drivers closed down 30% of service stations. Defeating the government is only possible by a blockade of the economic life of the country, at least strong enough to create a situation in which the social and political isolation of the executive requires it to give in.

This is something many trade

unionists have been aware of since the beginning of the movement. It lay behind the "We block everything" appeal launched on March 22 by 100 trade unionists, essentially CGT and Sud. It was also the state of mind of many trade union teams who, particularly since mid-May have multiplied blockades and strikes, such as those in the collection and processing of household waste in several cities in France. Employees in the oil refineries held out for several weeks, but the impact of their strike was broken by the massive importing of fuel by the major groups. The strikes in the SNCF and by Air France pilots, axised on local demands, have not been able since June 1 to generate a force comparable to the tension of the previous two weeks. This all the more so since at the SNCF, prior to the renewable strike imposed on the CGT from June 1 onwards, there had been, since March, several isolated 24 or 48 hour actions, using up some strength.

However, other sectors, workers in the nuclear power plants, ports, glassware, and the agro-alimentary sector have also entered into action in the past few weeks. The strength of this movement and the composition of the demonstrations shatter the image built up over the years of a trade union movement limited to employees in the public sector. For some months it has been employees in industry, transport, trade and services who

have structured the mobilization.

Stuck in a situation in which it is not the master, the CGT leadership is trying to tack, particularly since mid-May. Trapped in a pincer movement between the strength of the movement and the blocking of any margin of negotiation with the government, Philippe Martinez manages but does not want to push more towards confrontation. Thus he has explicitly refused to take advantage of the launch of the Euro 2016 soccer finals, on June 10, to try to put the government on the defensive, condemning the trade unionists who had strengthened the strike on the transport lines serving the football stadiums.

Similarly, the Intersyndicale has no plan to escalate mobilization after June 14. The next action is only for one day on June 23 and the Intersyndicale calls not so much to strengthen the strikes but rather to multiply the signing of petitions. The CGT departmental union for the Bouches du Rhone, for its part, is relying on the strength of June 14, with 300 companies in the private sector in the Marseillaise region striking that day, to launch an appeal for a 48 hour strike, on June 23-24, with the intention of forcing a real showdown. Once again, nothing is yet settled in this mobilization which has lasted four months, having several times renewed its forces.

Soweto anniversary : is our 1976 moment still to come?

17 June 2016, by Leigh-Ann Naidoo

In South Africa, 1968/69 was the pivotal time where Steve Biko and other university students formed the South African Student Organisation (Saso), a radical black student organisation that developed the philosophy of Black Consciousness (BC). This BC philosophy and practice

centered the black self through reflection and self-love. It insisted on connecting black struggles across communities and national borders with a Pan African outlook. Saso also critiqued the university system, whilst at the same time developing its own educational programmes.

There were leadership training programmes for university students and "formation schools" for high school students and community members. Saso significantly changed the thinking about education and society from 1968/69 onwards - they stopped fighting for education equal

to white education, and started criticising white, privileged education as a domesticating or dominating one.

40 years later

The much publicized 2015/16 student resistance began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015 when shit was thrown on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes. This was a protest against the continuation of institutionalised racism at UCT. This racism was symbolized by the central place which the statue continued to occupy, two decades after the fall of legal apartheid.

The protest started with a critique of signage and heritage at the university. It quickly began questioning the emptiness of transformation by insisting on a process and programme for decolonizing the university. The three-week occupation at UCT inspired similar black-led student movements across university campuses: the Black Student Movement at the University Currently Known as Rhodes, the Black Student Stokvel at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Open Stellenbosch at the University of Stellenbosch, October6 at Wits and the University of Johannesburg, Tuks UPrising at the University of Pretoria, and Reform Pukke at North West University.

For students, this meant a total change of the university as an institution. The starting point was understanding the devastating role and repercussions of colonialism and later apartheid, in order to figure out how to dismantle the institution of the university with its colonial roots. Students inside and outside of these student formations started to insist that language policy be relooked at, that the curriculum be reformed, that the faculty be more demographically representative, that institutional and interpersonal racism be eliminated, that the symbols and signage be changed, that the dehumanizing system of outsourcing on campuses be ended, and more.

Students started using creative and disruptive forms of protest to put pressure on university managements

to respond to their demands. These started out with calls for statues to fall and for changes to the names of buildings and to the artworks that hung on their walls. They were followed by exposing the actual racial and gender make-up of university staff. At Stellenbosch University a documentary film was made and distributed detailing the experiences of racism by black students on their campus.

Many people agreed with the sentiment of the students' demands. Fewer people agreed with the urgency and methods that students were using to insist that things change faster than before, that things change immediately, and more structurally. Everyone started talking about the merits of the student demands:

- Was it necessary to remove statues?
- Was that erasing history?
- Whose history and heritage was being protected and preserved at universities?
- Why are there still so few black professors and even fewer women?
- Were these students being racist by insisting that white people refrain from trying to insert themselves into protest spaces?
- Would it be opening a Pandora's box if university managements responded to the pressure and demands of students?
- How many texts by black authors would need to be added to curricula before students were happy, and how would these relate to the dominant Eurocentric curricula?
- How do we deal with rape culture and male students and professors

who are known sex pests?

- Can we afford free quality higher education?

There were no easy answers, but the students succeeded in getting everyone talking about the unacceptable state of universities in 2015. Protests continued at individual campuses for reasons specific to those campuses until October 6, when a national day of protest took place.

Put the last first, and the first last

Students, academic staff and outsourced workers at the University of Johannesburg and Wits met collectively from July 2015, in order to respond to the questions raised by RMF a few months earlier. People sat together to think through what a critical relationship to the university could look like. There was a strong sentiment that universities had become talk shops and that little had actually changed since the first democratic elections. As a result, any collective engagement to change universities would need not only to think and talk about the problem but also to act to change it.

A framing question was suggested, debated and agreed upon: What is a decolonized public African university? On action, there was agreement to follow Frantz Fanon's suggestion: in the decolonisation process, "put the last first, and the first last". There was consensus that outsourced workers at universities were definitely "the last". Many had been working for the university for many years and were still receiving no benefits. They were treated like second-rate university community members, and paid slave wages of R1,800-2,000 per month.

The campaign for fees to fall resulted in university campuses being shut down by students across the country. Within ten days of the first shut down, President Zuma announced a 0% fee increase for 2016. We heard later that this commitment would be mostly paid for by the rerouting of unspent government funds from the

Department of Basic Education budget, originally meant to upgrade school infrastructure. Surely this decision is one that will have repercussions and resistance from the high school students and schools where those funds were desperately needed?

The struggle in 2016

Student struggles are continuing. But the fledgling movement has stumbled. Flat, nonpartisan structures have been a very necessary experiment in more participatory forms of democracy. But how can they be made sustainable? University managements have placed the movement under severe pressure with tactics including:

- securitised campuses, with increased numbers of riot style private security on campus
- criminalisation of disruptive protest through court interdicts, which keep police on standby

- expensive legal teams
- prolonged internal disciplinary processes.

This has meant that the space to organise on campuses has been closed down and key student organizers have been excluded. In addition, different political formations have tried to capture control of the movement. And there have been serious divisions around questions of gender and sexuality. But even as these pressures have mounted, student organising and regrouping has continued in varying ways.

The battle to win a radical form of insourcing continues at universities, as management reneges on as much as it can, to make the process more affordable. Students and workers have continued to support each other's struggles under difficult conditions. Workers have also managed to self-organise outside of traditional union structures as they have recognised the inability of union structures at present.

From university students to school students and

communities

There have been various attempts to connect university student struggles with community and high school ones. Like in the lead up to the 1976 uprising, the ideas of the new student movement have filtered into broader community discourse and struggles through the media. Some of the more radical student activists have been excluded, suspended or expelled from university campuses, as the Saso students were forty-odd years ago.

And like the Saso students, they have returned to their communities armed with critical questions of transformation and power, and more committed to spreading at least the BC and Pan African philosophies and practices. So last year looks more like a 1968/69 moment. Black students organised themselves to reflect, critique, imagine and action a different kind of university, education system and society. Now, we have entered a time when communities and schools are figuring out their own learning from the student movement questions and actions of the last year. The possibility exists that a "1976" high school student uprising is yet to come.

Soweto: the black students' rebellion of 1976

16 June 2016, by Noor Nieftagodien

The national uprising by students in 1976 marked a decisive turning point in South Africa's history. Together with the Durban strikes of 1973, it shattered the political quiescence that followed the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. On June 16, thousands of black students in Soweto embarked on a peaceful march to object to the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. But the police responded with violence, killing Hector Pieterse, Hastings Ndlovu and several other young black children. As a result, what started as a

protest against the state's language policy rapidly transformed into a struggle against "the system", which spread across the country.

Henceforth townships such as Soweto, Alexandra and Bonteheuwel became the epicentres of the struggle against apartheid. A defining feature of the 1976 uprising was the decisive entry of black students onto the stage of history. Until the 1960s, the number of Africans in schools remained relatively low. But the urban African population was growing, especially the

number of young people. And industry required a larger pool of industrial labour. So there was a rapid expansion of schooling for Africans.

In 1976 there were 3.8 million Africans in schools. Nearly 10% percent of those were in secondary schools. In Soweto alone the number of secondary school students increased from approximately 12,500 to more than 34,000.

What these figures highlight is the emergence of a new social force in South Africa. They shared similar

experiences. They were based at institutions where they could be relatively easily organized into a significant political force. Once mobilized behind the banner for liberation, black youth became leading actors in the struggle to defeat apartheid. The trigger that ignited this transformation was the apartheid government's determination to impose its racist policies on black South Africans.

Bantu Education aimed to entrench the oppression of Africans and to prepare them for unskilled employment. Apartheid's foremost ideologue, H.F. Verwoerd, insisted there was no place for Africans "in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live."

According to this racist rationale, education for Africans was designed to prepare them to tend to the needs of white society. To meet this objective, they had to be taught in the languages of whites: English and Afrikaans. Although this policy was on the books from the 1950s, the government insisted on its implementation from the early 1970s.

At the time, the apartheid rulers felt emboldened by the successful repression of black resistance. They imagined that their ideology would remain unchallenged.

The spirit of Tiro

In retrospect, the events of 16 June 1976 shook the country to the core. But at the time they caught many by surprise. Consequently, one of the main narratives about the rebellion has been that it was a spontaneous outburst of anger by black students. For the apartheid state and white society, this version conformed to their racist belief that black protests were irrational and destructive, and that black students could not formulate political demands or organise protests without the

incitement of outside "agitators".

In fact, the historic march was the culmination of months of mobilisation and years of rebuilding township-based resistance organisations. From the early 1970s a largely autonomous process of building political cells and networks began to unfold in townships across the country. The first cells were small, disconnected and often temporary. Many of them were created by school students who were searching for ways collectively to develop their political education and to mobilise limited forms of protest.

Most of these political activities were either inspired or directly initiated by the Black Consciousness Movement. Its popularity grew rapidly after the 1969 launch of the university-based South African Students' Organisation (SASO). In March 1973 SASO initiated the formation of the South African Students' Movement (SASM) to organize among school students. Black Consciousness ideas of psychological liberation, black pride and leadership, and challenging the status quo enjoyed strong support from the majority of students in these movements.

This spirit of black defiance was most memorably demonstrated in April 1972 at Turfloop University, when the president of the SRC, Onkgopotse Tiro, delivered his historic graduation speech in which he mounted a scathing critique of white authority. For this he was expelled. This led to a mass solidarity strike at the university. Thereafter, Tiro was briefly employed as a part-time history teacher in 1973 at Morris Isaacson School in Soweto, where he inspired students to become politically involved. Tiro and other BC figures embodied confidence and defiance. But it was the loss of fear that they instilled that arguably defined the youthful uprising of 1976.

The road to June 16

Opposition to the imposition of Afrikaans commenced within weeks of the new academic year in 1976. Students at Thomas Mofolo Secondary School in Soweto were among the first

to take action. On 24 February, they confronted the principal about the new language policy. Sporadic protests occurred between March and mid-May. They tended to be confined to individual schools and were usually quickly quelled by the police. During this time, Phefeni Junior Secondary emerged as a prominent site of mobilisation, particularly the Form Two students who were directly affected by the introduction of Afrikaans. They first employed a "go slow" tactic to bring their dissatisfaction to the school's attention.

When their pleas were rejected, the students embarked on a class boycott from 16 May. This action introduced a critical shift in gear of the protests: on 19 May, schools in the surrounding area launched a solidarity boycott, involving approximately 1,600 students. An informal co-ordinating body was established, mainly comprising junior secondary schools, which attempted to unite these separate struggles. Seth Mazibuko, a senior student at Phefeni, was a pivotal figure in these efforts.

A week later, under the pressure of the mounting protests in Soweto, the annual General Students' Council of SASM passed a resolution offering unambiguous support to the junior students: it undertook "[t]o fully pledge solidarity with the schools on strike against Afrikaans being used as a medium of instruction [and] to actively sympathise with those schools on strike." Thereafter, SASM leaders became actively involved in the movement and worked with the co-ordinating committee of the junior secondary schools to convene a meeting of student representatives from all over Soweto on Sunday, 13 June, at the Donaldson Community Centre in Orlando East.

This was an historic meeting at which activists committed themselves to support the boycotting students by organising solidarity action. An Action Committee was established, comprising members of the SASM leadership and the junior secondary schools' co-ordinating committee, including Tsietsi Mashinini, Murphy Morobe, Seth Mazibuko, David Kutumela and Isaiah Molefe. The

scene was set for the march that would change the course of history.

June 16, 17 and 18 witnessed unprecedented state violence, first in the streets of Soweto and then in townships across the country, resulting in scores of deaths and hundreds of injured. At the same time, students in Alexandra, East Rand, Cape Town and elsewhere mobilized solidarity action with their Soweto comrades, producing the first national anti-apartheid movement since the early 1960s. Having failed to crush this movement, the state abandoned its Afrikaans medium policy on July 6.

Student and worker unity

This victory did not end the struggle. Students now refocused their campaign against state repression and Bantu Education as a whole. A crucial question posed then was how to extend the struggle beyond the schools, especially by involving parents and workers. Black parents have been accused of acquiescing in apartheid and being cowed into submission by state repression. Their apparent silence over the issue of Afrikaans has also been contrasted with the militancy of the students' rebellion. While this may be true for many parents, it would be wrong to assume that parents or teachers did not object to the state's policy on Afrikaans.

In fact, some of them voiced opposition as early as 1974, but mainly through the politically moderate School Boards, which were generally ignored by the white education authorities. Mr Kambule, the Orlando High principal, captured the generational divergence on this issue early June 1976: "School children are doing exactly what the parents and everybody feels about Afrikaans - only they had the courage to stand up against it."

Undoubtedly, many parents feared state repression, which had become increasingly brutal during the 1960s. They also feared what would happen to their children. Nonetheless, some parents had begun to organize

themselves to address the education crisis, and on June 17 the Soweto Parents' Association (SPA) met student leaders to show their solidarity. Soon thereafter, the SPA renamed itself the Black Parents' Association, which went on to play an important role in Soweto's political resistance.

In early August the Action Committee established the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC), consisting of two representatives per school, to co-ordinate students' struggles. Tsietsi Mashinini was elected as chairman. The new student leadership immediately launched a campaign for the immediate release of all detained students. The first action was a march to the police headquarters in Johannesburg.

Crucially, the SSRC appealed to parents and workers to stay away from work and join their march to John Vorster Square. On 4 August, approximately 20,000 residents marched along the Soweto Highway, the main road between the township and the city. Although the police stopped the march, the action highlighted the power of solidarity between students and workers. Emboldened by this success, the SSRC called for a second stayaway for 23 to 25 August. This was by all accounts a successful demonstration of the SSRC's capacity to unite students and workers behind clear political demands.

Most significantly, a reported 75% of Johannesburg's African workforce was absent on 23 August. This was not only an improvement on the figures of the previous stayaway, but also represented the largest strike in Johannesburg since the early 1960s. But, there was one constituency that did not heed the call for a stayaway: the hostel dwellers, who tended to be aloof from the township's life and politics.

Students also seemed to have made little effort to explain their campaign to the hostel dwellers. In fact, they viewed these migrant workers as strike-breakers and confronted them, which led to violence. At this point, the police joined in a sinister alliance with the Urban Bantu Council to mobilise the aggrieved hostel dwellers

to launch an attack on township residents.

On the morning of 24 August a crowd of hostel dwellers, armed with an assortment of "traditional weapons", descended on Orlando West and Meadowlands, attacking young people indiscriminately. The community organized self-defence and over the next few days Meadowlands and Orlando West resembled war zones, which led to dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries.

Within days the SSRC issued a pamphlet aiming to make common cause with the hostel dwellers: "The students have nothing against people living in the hostels, they are our parents, they are victims of the notorious migrant labour system. They are forced to live hundreds of miles away from their families, their needs and grievances are ignored by the powers that be... The students reject, in toto, the entire oppressive system with its largely pocket institutions like the UBC's and the bantustans, those toy telephones are designed to divide the Black community. United we stand".

This intervention was part of a concerted effort to build unity among the different sectors of Soweto's population. It aimed particularly to involve hostel dwellers early and directly in plans for a third stayaway from 13 to 15 September. The shift in tactics yielded positive results and, in sharp contrast to the August events, migrant workers were active in mobilising support for the planned action. As a result, the stayaway was the most successful of the three strikes called by the SSRC.

In fact, the September strike was a national success, with large numbers of coloured and African workers in Cape Town joining the action. The generation of 1976 understood that in order to challenge the power of the state, it was necessary to forge a strategic alliance with workers. In the years following the uprising, many young activists joined the independent trade union movement and built civic organisations, which laid the organisational basis for the unity of workers and students in the 1980s. A similar strategic task now confronts

the current generation of black student activists.

A rape survivor's voice made the world listen

16 June 2016, by Susan Carroll

All of the myths and lies about rape, the victim-blaming used to excuse sexual assault and the justice system's inability to provide justice were on display in a California courtroom when a judge sentenced 20-year-old Stanford University student Brock Turner, convicted of rape, to just six months in a county jail.

Turner was on top of the 23-year-old woman, who was unconscious, thrusting against her, behind a dumpster outside a fraternity party when two Stanford graduate students riding by on bicycles tackled him and held him until police arrived.

In March, Turner was convicted of three felony counts for the 2015 rape, which carried a maximum sentence of 14 years in state prison and a minimum of two, with prosecutors recommending six. But Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Aaron Persky decided to be far more lenient, telling the court, "A prison sentence would have a severe impact on him."

As staggering as the judge's sentencing was, so too was the outpouring of support for the survivor, who is being referred to as Emily Doe, as the powerful statement she read in a packed court in front of her rapist was circulated and read by millions around the world.

This case draws a brighter public spotlight on sexual violence on college campuses, which protests over the last year have helped to expose, along with the lack of action by university administrations that fail rape survivors—protests like that of Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz, who vowed to carry the mattress she was raped on until the university took her assault seriously.

Now, in response to Judge Persky's

sentence, prospective jurors are refusing en masse to serve in his Santa Clara County Superior courtroom, and a Change.org petition supporting the call for his removal has received over 1 million signatures. USA Swimming announced that it was banning Turner from competing in any of their sanctioned events.

But this was only after Emily Doe spoke out against her attacker and her voice was finally heard.

Up until then, her rape was emblematic of the way campus sexual violence is treated and discussed in our society. According to the now-familiar script, Turner was the archetype of how male students are typically regarded: an athlete from a "good family," a "bright young man" with a "promising future" who just made a "mistake."

In other words, not one of those "real" rapists—as Turner's childhood friend Leslie Rasmussen wrote in a letter to Judge Persky, defending her friend's actions:

This is completely different from a woman getting kidnapped and raped as she is walking to her car in a parking lot. That is a rapist. These are not rapists. These are idiot boys and girls having too much to drink and not being aware of their surroundings and having clouded judgment.

This is "clouded judgment"? Two Stanford graduate students tackled Turner after they discovered him on top of the unconscious woman behind a dumpster outside a fraternity party. She remembered nothing between being at a frat party on campus and waking up in the hospital, battered and bruised.

During the trial, the media emphasized Turner's promising swimming career, with photos of him in the water during competitions appearing often more frequently than the mug shot after his arrest. As Emily Doe said in the statement:

And then, at the bottom of the article [I was reading], after I learned about the graphic details of my own sexual assault, the article listed his swimming times. She was found breathing, unresponsive with her underwear six inches away from her bare stomach curled in fetal position. By the way, he's really good at swimming. Throw in my mile time if that's what we're doing. I'm good at cooking, put that in there, I think the end is where you list your extracurriculars to cancel out all the sickening things that've happened.

Rasmussen's comment, reinforced by the six-month sentence—which could be reduced to three months with good behavior—echoes the same highly racist and class-biased myth of "stranger rape" dominant before the women's liberation movement of the 1970s: that rape is something which happens "out there," in dark alleyways, committed by deranged men you don't know.

The stereotype proposes that rapists are Black, Brown and/or poor, despite all the research showing that sexual violence is overwhelmingly committed by intimate partners, friends and acquaintances—like someone you meet at a party.

The same distorted myths about rape used to justify the lynching of Black men in the South—and now by Donald Trump who says he wants a border wall because Mexico is sending "rapists" to the U.S.—is accepted as the excuse for exonerating elite

student perpetrators.

Brian Banks, a Black former NFL player who was falsely accused of rape at age 16 and spent almost all of a six-year sentence behind bars before he was exonerated and his conviction overturned, pointed to the racism and class bias of the criminal justice system as the reason Turner was given such a light sentence. Now a board member of the California Innocence Project, the organization that helped him regain his freedom, Banks told the New York Daily News:

What about the kid who has nothing, he struggles to eat, struggles to get a fair education? What about the kid who has no choice who he is born to and has drug-addicted parents of a non-parent household? Where is the consideration for them when they commit a crime?...When I screamed and pleaded and begged, it fell on deaf ears.

Coupled with the talk about Turner being a "promising" young man whose future is at stake—as opposed, it is implied, to young and poor men of color who aren't swimmers at Stanford and whose futures promise nothing—is the pervasive idea that today's "hookup culture," accompanied by a supposed increase in alcohol consumption and women's sexual activity, leads to murkiness around what constitutes consent.

In this case, the judge singled out alcohol as a factor, as did Turner and his defenders. In a letter Turner read to the judge, he spoke at length about party culture and drinking. "I never want to have a drop of alcohol again," Turner wrote. "I never want to attend a social gathering that involves alcohol or any situation where people make decisions based on the substances they have consumed."

Turner said he was in the process of setting up a program for high school and college students to "speak out against the college campus drinking culture and the sexual promiscuity that goes along with that."

In response, it's worth quoting the survivor's statement at length:

Alcohol is not an excuse. Is it a factor? Yes. But alcohol was not the one who stripped me, fingered me, had my head dragging against the ground, with me almost fully naked. Having too much to drink was an amateur mistake that I admit to, but it is not criminal. Everyone in this room has had a night where they have regretted drinking too much, or knows someone close to them who has had a night where they have regretted drinking too much. Regretting drinking is not the same as regretting sexual assault...

Everyone around you was not sexually assaulting me. You were wrong for doing what nobody else was doing, which was pushing your erect dick in your pants against my naked, defenseless body concealed in a dark area, where partygoers could no longer see or protect me, and my own sister could not find me. Sipping fireball is not your crime. Peeling off and discarding my underwear like a candy wrapper to insert your finger into my body, is where you went wrong. Why am I still explaining this?...

Campus drinking culture. That's what we're speaking out against? You think that's what I've spent the past year fighting for? Not awareness about campus sexual assault, or rape, or learning to recognize consent. Campus drinking culture. Down with Jack Daniels. Down with Skyy Vodka...Show men how to respect women, not how to drink less.

The assumption that alcohol leads to rape—and to confusion around what constitutes rape—normalizes sexual violence as a consequence of merely being a young woman in today's society, especially a sexually active woman who goes out to "social gatherings" where alcohol is consumed.

Missing from the entire discussion of Turner's alcohol-fuelled "mistake" is the life of the woman he assaulted—who was then re-victimized by the criminal injustice system. Turner's "bright future" was put ahead

of Emily Doe's humanity.

Whether or not survivors report their assaults—and most don't, given that they are often met with ignorance, neglect, hostility and even outright retaliation—sexual violence has real consequences.

One in three people who are sexually assaulted will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or a major depressive episode in their lifetime, and many more develop eating disorders, sleeping disorders, dissociation and a range of other difficulties.

The overwhelming support that Emily Doe has received since she released her incredible statement and the backlash against Turner and the judge's sentence has added to the activism of survivors on campuses over the last several years. The mainstream discussion and people's opinions about the question of sexual violence are beginning to change.

We can't rely on a criminal justice system that is stacked against women and survivors. It routinely uses our struggle to advance its own racist criminalization agenda that disproportionately affects some of the most vulnerable to sexual assault and domestic abuse, such as low-income women, undocumented women, LGBT folks, prison inmates, homeless youth and sex workers.

Like the women's liberation movement of the 1970s that challenged the dominant assumption that rape and domestic abuse were a woman's private problems, a new generation of grassroots activists is bringing sexual violence back into the center of the public sphere. In the words of Emily Doe:

To girls everywhere, I am with you. On nights when you feel alone, I am with you. When people doubt you or dismiss you, I am with you. I fought everyday for you. So never stop fighting, I believe you.

June 14 2016

socialistworker.org

South African student activists scapegoated

15 June 2016, by **Amandla!**

On 16 February / early morning of 17 February, five students were suspended by the Vice Chancellor without any charges being brought against them. These suspensions followed protests that involved the destruction of university property, namely paintings, a Jammie bus, a bakkie belonging to the Department of Biological Sciences and damage to the office of the Vice Chancellor as a result of a petrol bombing.

The five students suspended were: Lindiwe Dlamini Alex Hotz Chumani Maxwele Masixole Mlandu Zola Shokane

In addition, 16 students (and a 17th respondent - namely, any student that associates with them) were interdicted from setting foot on university property, participating in illegal protests or inciting people to participate in protests. Nine of the 16 students who were interdicted were among those arrested on the night of 16 February for participating in what the police allege was an illegal gathering and public violence. The arbitrary selection of the 16 students named in the interdict was borne out by the fact that the university withdrew the interdict against 11 of the students. A final Interdict was obtained on 11 May 2016 against five students.

UCT is targeting “ringleaders”

The University has substantial video and other evidence of hundreds of students who participated in the protests. In some cases this included the destruction of university property in the form of removal and burning of paintings. But no evidence exists against most of the interdicted students. Also none of the students who were suspended, interdicted or charged before a university tribunal

have been linked to the destruction of the Jammie Shuttle, the bakkie or the damage to the office of the Vice Chancellor, even though the granting of a final interdict against the students assumes a connection between these students and these acts.

This fuels speculation that the University is reacting against those that they see as ringleaders of Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall - even though the students themselves have insisted in organising in non-hierarchical forms.

Furthermore, on 17 March the University started a process of charging students before an Internal Disciplinary Tribunal. So far 12 students have been charged in two separate tribunals. The way in which many of the students were charged is another issue to be addressed with university management. Many students were approached by the University's “head” investigator Steven Ganger, at odd hours of the early morning and late at night. His method was to intimidate and coerce students into identifying other students

As mentioned above, initially six students, later reduced to five, were suspended by the Vice Chancellor on the night of the 16 February. These suspensions did not follow due process. No charges were brought against the students and the suspensions did not follow any hearing where the students could respond to charges.

The Vice Chancellor acted on the basis that: “it has been reported to me that your continued presence or participation in the activities of the University is likely to pose a threat to the maintenance of good order within the University, as contemplated by the provisions of rule DJP3.1 of the Disciplinary Jurisdiction and Procedure.”

The suspended students are prohibited from:

1. Attending lectures and classes;
2. Entering any premises, building or physical precinct of the University on any one of its campuses, including any residence; and
3. Residing in a student residence or other student housing unit.

No fair process

Following their suspension the students were offered an opportunity to attend a “hearing” where they could argue why they should not be suspended. However, without being charged with any wrongful act this was an extremely difficult process for the suspended students to engage with. Participating in the “hearing” held out the active threat of self-incrimination. Most of the students regarded the “hearing” as a fishing expedition by the University, as it proceeded to gather evidence against students.

Over and above the suspension notice, on 17 February the university obtained an urgent interim interdict against 16 students (including the five suspended students). According to the Interim interdict, the interdicted students were prohibited from, among other things, entering or remaining on UCT premises, erecting any unauthorised structures on UCT premises and participating in or inciting others to participate in any unlawful conduct and/or protest action.

The interim interdict was obtained without any written affidavits made by the University. Nor were the interdicted students given a chance to respond as to why they should not be interdicted. The University was allowed to submit its founding

affidavit on 22 February in its application for the urgent interdict, after already having obtained the urgent interim interdict on 17 February based on oral evidence provided by the registrar and a security official employed by the University.

On 15 March the interdicted students were able to present argument why a final interdict should not be awarded against them. The students were compelled to oppose the university obtaining a final interdict in spite of the huge legal costs involved and in spite of the fact that the university sought an award of costs against the students if they did oppose. They had to oppose because otherwise they still would not be able to enter the university and attend lectures even if the suspensions were lifted.

The process of opposing the granting of the final interdict was conducted in an utterly unfair manner. The students were granted the right to have legal representation. But the university had employed Bowman Gilfillan, one of the biggest law firms in the country, in leading the charges against them. And even though the student handbook requires that the university assist the students in obtaining legal representation no, assistance was provided.

The university, represented by

advocate Anton Katz, was allowed most of the time allocated by Judge Allie to argue their case. The interdicted students, through their legal representatives, were given just one third of the time the university had used to make their arguments. Evidence was not led, nor were witnesses interrogated on the evidence gathered by the university in support of the interdict. The students made affidavits in which they could refute the evidence presented against them. No evidence or witnesses were called to refute what was contained in these affidavits.

Punishment includes hundreds of thousands of rands in legal costs

Almost two months after hearing the application for the granting of a final interdict, on 11 May Judge Allie, a UCT alumnus, granted the university a final interdict. As a result, the students are prevented from entering or remaining on the university premises without prior written consent. There is no time limit to this order, so it applies "for ever and a day."

What is even worse, the judge awarded costs against the five students "jointly, and severally, including the costs of two counsel." This could be anywhere between R250,000 and R600,000. The implications of applying the costs

order "jointly and severally" is that if any of the students are not in a position to pay their share, the other students must pay it. If the university pursues the costs order, it is likely that the students will be sequestered and declared insolvent. This will have huge consequences for the students themselves. So this threat of sequestration and insolvency gives the university huge power and leverage over the interdicted students.

As parents we have been told consistently by the University Authorities that they are under pressure from "conservatives" not to let the students off lightly. There cannot be a "light slap on the wrist." It would seem they have targeted those students who are seen as ring leaders, and who are least politically connected, for the worst sanctions so they can be seen to be satisfying the views of the conservative stakeholders at UCT without taking any risk. In the process both fair process and justice are sacrificed.

These students are young people whose "crime" was to feel strongly that money should not be a barrier to education and that universities are long overdue for transformation. They have inherited the mantle of the students of the 1970s. It seems that they are also inheriting the repression of the state and the educational institutions.

South African campus updates

15 June 2016, by **Amandla!**

It is clear that there has been collusion between the state and university management to repress and undermine student activism and protest by criminalising it. We have seen this in the nation-wide use of interdicts, mass disciplinary action and arrests of activists.

Western Cape

Since the beginning of the year there have been many protests. The result has been repression of activism and, disciplinary action against many students.

In February, UCT students protested against the housing crisis at the university by erecting a shack. #Shackville got a lot of attention

nationally. Management insisted that the Shack be moved. Students refused. The result was an escalation in which paintings and other property were burned and the shack was demolished.

In the aftermath students were interdicted from the university and have been charged in disciplinary processes. This has resulted in a number of students being expelled. This is happening across the Western

Cape. Students at UWC and CPUT started this year fighting for the insourcing of workers and an end to private security on their campuses. At Stellenbosch, as a result of protests against outsourcing, 150 workers were dismissed. They also erected a shack demanding that these workers be reinstated. This protest action was dealt with by private security, and the shack was demolished within hours.

Eastern Cape

The biggest student protest against rape and rape culture took place at the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR). Hundreds of students took to the streets of Grahamstown demanding that the university take action against rapists and sexual offenders. The university was shut down by protestors and many of the entrances to the campus were blockaded. Instead of dealing with the serious issues, the university allowed police to arrest students during the #NakedProtest and interdicted many of the students from continuing with the protests.

At the University of Fort Hare, during the centenary celebrations of the founding of the university, there was mass student protest. While they were spending money on celebrations, many students were not able to afford their tuition or food. The university had not paid them their money because they were having "financial difficulties".

At Walter Sisulu University of Technology, student leader Vusi Mahlangu was kidnapped. This ignited mass protest against outsourcing. The private security dealt with students in a very brutal manner, shooting at them with live ammunition.

KwaZulu Natal

Students and workers went on mass protest action to end outsourcing. After many weeks of protesting and many arrests, students and workers won a victory: insourcing and a pay increase. These protests have continued to spread to other universities and colleges across the province.

Gauteng

Workers and students of all universities in Tshwane protested, demanding the ending of outsourcing. Many of the workers were brutalised and threatened with losing their jobs, but they won an important victory. There were also protests against racism and the use of Afrikaans at their universities. Students were brutalised by racist students as well as the police.

Free State

At the beginning of the year black students interrupted a rugby match at

the University of Free State (UFS) to challenge the language policy and racism. This led to the movement "Unsilence UFS". Jonathan Jansen has subsequently stepped down as the Vice Chancellor.

North West

Students protested against university management corruption and interference with student governance. They dissolved an elected SRC and appointed their own SRC, without the student body. Student protestors were shot with live ammunition and rubber bullets and dispersed by tear gas and stun grenades. These clashes led to the burning of the administrative building and the indefinite shutdown of the campus. This sent home many students who had paid for their fees and residences.

At the Potchefstroom campus students united with students at Afrikaans universities across the country, protesting against the language policy. They said it was racist and exclusionary. Like at UFS, black students were victims of terrible racial abuse. The university failed to take any action against the abusers. Workers supported the students, also demanding the end of outsourcing. These protests resulted in a mass firing of workers. They are continuing to fight for their reinstatement. Black students have been victimised by university management

A new trade union federation: way forward or cul de sac?

14 June 2016, by Amandla!

The final declaration of the Summit included a commitment to "founding principles". Most of them are little different from those of Cosatu - worker control, non-racialism and nonsexism, solidarity, internationalism and support for socialism are all features of the Cosatu constitution.

However, the principles begin to break new ground in four key directions.

According to the principles, the new federation will be:

â€¢ "Tolerant" as well as worker-controlled and democratic

â€¢ "Independent from employers....and from political parties" whilst not being "apolitical"

â€¢ Committed to "financial self-sufficiency...and opposition ...to business unionism"

â€¢ Organised “in the most effective manner to represent workers and serve their interests”, not necessarily based on industrial unionism.

We look at each of these to see their potential as well as their pitfalls. And we ask: where have we got to? And what do we need to do now?

Tolerance

“Within the federation, affiliates must have autonomy but not independence, but differences of opinion must be tolerated”. This is the way the Workers Summit digested the experience of the last couple of years. Remember, these were years in which Numsa was expelled from Cosatu for daring to raise debate about the federation’s policies.

At first glance it seems to be a long way from the “democratic centralism” of Cosatu. But it’s not that simple. A glance at the discussion document on “principles” circulated at the Summit shows that confusion still reigns: “The culture of open democratic debate and tolerance shall be at the centre of the democratic practices underpinned by democratic centralism.” It’s time we took out this concept of “democratic centralism”, shook off the dust and looked at it for what it is.

Is democratic centralism for unions?

The sixth party congress of the Bolshevik party, in 1917, defined “Democratic centralism” in four principles. Two of them were on election of all “directing bodies” and accountability. They are not a problem for trade unions.

These are the other two:

1. “That there shall be strict Party discipline and the subordination of the minority to the majority;
2. That all decisions of higher bodies shall be absolutely binding on lower bodies and on all Party members.”

Democratic centralism was devised as

a system for running a political party. This party was operating in a highly repressive, autocratic environment, and in the process of making a revolution.

But:

â€¢ Neither Cosatu nor the new federation are political parties. They are mass organisations of the working class, containing workers who belong to many political parties or to no party at all.

â€¢ Even if we may have to fight to avoid the return of a repressive environment, we are operating in a constitutional democracy, not an autocratic, repressive state.

â€¢ It is not the primary task of a trade union federation to make a revolution. Numsa provides the best example of what happens when you try to operate democratic centralism in a trade union federation. Numsa was expelled. It was a minority in the structures of Cosatu. It insisted on raising debate, even though it was in the minority. The majority followed democratic centralist principles: the decisions of the higher structures were binding on Numsa. Expulsion became inevitable.

But masses of workers do not go out onto the street because they are ordered to do so. They go out because they support the causes of the action. So the task of the new federation is to persuade its affiliates and their members, not to instruct them. If we follow this principle, we will have political debates instead of constitutional crises. We will discuss the merits of policy instead of trying to expel each other. And we will mobilise the masses, instead of sending them to sleep with our endless quarrels.

Independence from political parties

This is perhaps the most obvious lesson from the Cosatu experience. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) [15] will

also inject a powerful and useful voice for independence. It is likely to stand against any possible backtracking for any “working class party” that will arise in the future. Now we need to debate the limits to independence, if there are any. What could a new federation do and say in national, provincial and local elections? Where does the boundary of independence lie? Could the federation support particular candidates for a particular election? Or a party for a particular election? Or a party for elections in general?

Financial self-sufficiency and opposition to business unionism

Last year the Mail & Guardian reported that Cosatu and its affiliates owned R20 billion of investments through their investment companies. While the Workers Summit came out clearly against “business unionism”, it didn’t make clear what that meant. One thing is certain: at least some of the unions who come to the new federation from Cosatu have their own investment companies. Can a union with an investment company be said to be self-sufficient? Surely it is precisely a union’s dependence on members’ subscriptions which obliges it to focus on its members’ concerns.

We have seen the chaos in some Cosatu affiliates, where the main focus of leadership struggles is to get their hands on the loot from the investment company. Are we really intending to import that culture into the new federation? In his interview with Amandla! Last year, Zwelinzima Vavi [16] said “We must look at how we have controlled or failed to control the investment companies, and for what purpose we established them.” There is a danger that the new federation will end up debating how to control investment companies, rather than resolving, as they should, that they do not belong in any healthy trade union federation.

Absence of commitment to industrial unionism

We have to come to terms with the fact that "One industry, one union" has failed to keep pace with neoliberal industrial change. New service "industries" of logistics, catering, security etc. have been built from the neoliberal outsourced model. "One industry, one union" became a trap. It meant that security workers at a car manufacturing plant were told to go and join a union for security workers. They no longer belonged in the same union as the production workers. It meant that companies have broken up their production, and outsourced sections of it to so-called "logistics workers".

This has been a very successful coup on the part of capital. It has weakened unions and left workers powerless. It is clear that the only way forward for unions, at least in the private sector, is "value chain" organising. Manufacturing industrial unions must organise all workers in their plants, irrespective of their work. Organisation of workers must follow the value chain, from primary products such as mining or farming,

through manufacturing to the sale of finished goods.

While the new federation is not yet committed to this principle, it has at least broken with a commitment to organising according to outdated principles. "Craft" unions had to give way to "industrial" unions. "Industrial" unions must now give way to "value chain" unions.

Organising the unorganized

While it is not one of the founding principles, the declaration does include a commitment to organise the unorganized - it estimates they are 76% of workers in the formal sector. But Cosatu has been committed to this for many years. The declaration of the 7th Congress in 2000, for example, committed Cosatu: "to the campaign to organise the unorganised -including workers in the informal sector and other hard-to-reach industries". Meanwhile, the percentage of workers who are trade union members has gone down. So commitments in declarations are not enough.

What is enough? The "Principles" discussion document tabled at the summit opens up one area. On

subscriptions, it suggests the need "to be flexible enough to cater for the thousands of marginalized and vulnerable workers who do not have a regular income, let alone an employer willing to deduct union subs". Many of the ways that permanent, full-time workers organise in trade unions may not be suitable for precarious workers. How do precarious workers, who may not have a job next week, elect Office Bearers for a four-year term of office, for example?

Open up the debate

All of these areas of debate, and more, must be opened up for discussion by workers on the ground, in the period leading up to the launch of the new federation. That will not happen automatically or by chance. The 51 unions will have to work to achieve it. We must engage with younger workers on social media. We must conduct workshops and seminars. We must write and publish pamphlets, newspapers and journals. Workers come to this federation from different traditions. They bring different experiences and opinions. Only by mobilising these can the new federation learn from history and make it. Otherwise we will just repeat it.

The popular struggle against the Sissi regime intensifies

13 June 2016, by Joseph Daher

For several weeks hundreds of activists had been arrested and imprisoned, including lawyer and activist Haitham Mohamedain, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists movement. The central area of Cairo was blocked. Police deployed systematic violence against demonstrators prior to arresting hundreds of them. Many journalists

were arrested.

It did not stop there. The satirical group *Atfal Shawarea* (Street Children) -some of whom are still adolescents - were arrested this week. The charges against them include "inciting a revolt against the government, forming a group to challenge the principles of the state

and state authority, and dissemination of false information that disturbs the public peace". *Atfal Shawarea* published several videos using humour and acapella singing to comment on the situation in the country, also being critical of certain policies of the state. Nearly 300,000 people followed them on their Facebook page. On Saturday May 14, more than 150 protesters

were also sentenced to two years in prison for participating in the rallies on April 25.

Meanwhile, attacks against civil society are intensifying: NGO members risk 25 years in prison for allegedly receiving money from abroad; the regime wants to silence the voices that denounce the repression. Independent trade unions are also the target of the repression of the regime. The International Labour Organization published a statement at the beginning of May criticizing the continuing repression in Egypt of independent trade unions and of freedom of association for workers. The actions of the Sissi regime against unions include trials before an administrative court, aiming to ban and dissolve independent unions and federations, legislative threats in Parliament against the fundamental trade-union rights of representatives of the state -controlled union confederation (the ETUF) and the appointment as new Minister of Labour of Mohamed Saafan, a functionary of the ETUF who opposes the freedom of trade unions to organize.

The recently arrested activists join the tens of thousands of political prisoners and the hundreds of victims of "enforced disappearances" in recent years, not forgetting the massacre of Rabia Square (August 2013) which killed more than a thousand supporters of the Muslim

Brotherhood.

Security forces arrested 11,877 people accused of being members of "terrorist groups" between January and the end of September 2015, according to the Deputy Minister of Public Security at the Interior Ministry. The repression targets mainly alleged members or supporters of the movements of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also many democratic and progressive opponents of the Sissi regime. The authorities had already indicated that they had arrested at least 22,000 people for similar reasons in 2014. In a number of cases, the prisoners in political cases have been held in prolonged detention without charge or trial. At the end of 2015, at least 700 people had been held in custody for more than two years without having been convicted by a court.

At least 3,000 civilians have been unjustly tried before military courts, accused of "terrorism" and on other charges citing "political violence." Many, including the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders were tried in mass trials. It must be pointed out that trying civilians in military courts is fundamentally unjust.

Many campaigns involving hunger strikes and different forms of resistance have nevertheless taken place. In particular there are many examples of political prisoners

protesting against their detention and the conditions in which they are being held, as in March 2016 when dozens of prisoners in Aqrab prison went on hunger strike.

The struggle of Egyptians to defend their democratic and social rights continues. Strikes have increased in recent weeks, by nurses and metal workers in particular, who are fighting for better wages and working conditions.

More than 3,000 Egyptian journalists also demonstrated their anger in the streets of Cairo at the beginning of May following the arrest of opposition journalists. They demanded the resignation of the Interior Minister.

Nevertheless European leaders are intensifying their collaboration with Cairo: arms sales, security cooperation and campaigns promoting investment...

As the revolutionaries in Egypt sang: "Free men and women and revolutionaries, we continue the struggle."

Solidarity with Political Prisoners in Egypt!

Down with the military regime!

Long live the revolution for freedom, social justice and equality!

May 15, 2016

Politics dictates justice in Gilgit Baltistan

12 June 2016, by Farooq Tariq

The court was hearing the state's appeal against the GB Chief Court's decision to acquit Baba Jan and others of these charges. The Chief Court had set aside Baba Jan and others' conviction in the matter by an anti-terrorism court in September, 2014.

Their 'crime' was that they had raised their voices for the thousands of families affected by the massive

landslides of 2010. The landslides had caused an artificial lake in the Attabad area of Hunza in 2010, rendering homeless thousands of families. Baba Jan and other activists had mobilised the people of the region, holding scores of demonstrations, to seek fair compensation and social support for these families.

At one of these demonstrations, a police contingent had opened indiscriminate fire at the protesters, killing two locals, SherAfzal and his father. It is important to note that the report of a judicial commission formed to probe the matter and fix responsibility for the killings has yet to be made public. The reluctance of the authorities concerned to release the report highlights their malafide

intentions in the matter.

The timing of the June 9th verdict raises suspicions about its fairness and impartiality. Baba Jan was scheduled to contest a by-election for Hunza-6 constituency in the Gilgit-Baltistan legislative assembly on May 28, 2016. Three days ahead of the scheduled election, Baba Jan's campaign team comprising local leadership of the AWP GB had led a massive rally of his supporters including scores of women and youngsters.

On the same day, Zafar Iqbal of the Pakistan Peoples' Party (that governed G-B before the current PML-N led government) had approached the Supreme Appellate Court seeking directives for Baba Jan's disqualification on grounds that he had been convicted by an ATC. It is widely known in the Hunza-6 constituency that Iqbal is working in collusion with PML-N contestant, a son of the G-B governor and a member of the traditional ruling family of the region.

Completely ignoring the fact that Baba Jan's conviction had been overturned by the Chief Court, the Appellate Court directed that by-elections be postponed till a decision was reached in the G-B government's appeal against Chief Court's decision. This was not unexpected since the Election Tribunal of the G-B had already accepted Baba Jan's nomination papers and allowed him to contest the election from jail.

The Hunza 6 constituency is an important part of the G-B region. The constituency is located on the Pakistan-China border and serves as a main link between the two countries. With the launch of the \$46 billion Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC), the importance of this road link will multiply manifold for the two states and their private capitalists.

In this backdrop, it is very clear that the PML-N led federal government is extending its patronage to the traditional elite of Hunza (GB governor) to prevent the possibility of a candidate with mass public support to enter the G-B legislative assembly. The government and its capitalist

allies know very well that Baba Jan will bring with him the concerns of the working men and women of the region to the assembly otherwise dominated by the elite and not allow any corruption in the multibillion dollar project.

The government has already witnessed overwhelming support for Baba Jan in the June 2015 general elections. Baba Jan had defeated two of the three candidates affiliated with mainstream political parties, standing second only to the PML-N candidate who was backed by networks of patronage extending from Hunza to the federal capital of Islamabad.

Since then, mass support for Baba Jan's candidacy has further increased. All public opinion surveys done in the constituency indicate a landslide victory for Baba Jan.

After losing mass support in favour of an ordinary working class hero, the government was clearly looking for an alternative to keep him out of the electoral race. The only way to do so was to use the courts to uphold his conviction in a case based on trumped up charges.

There were three judges in the Appellate bench that upheld Baba Jan's conviction on June 9th, including a chief justice who hails from Karachi, capital city of Pakistani province of Sindh. It was a split decision, with two judges in favour and one against the sentence. The Chief Court bench that had overturned the ATC's judgment and acquitted Baba Jan and others comprised top judges. So in fact, three top judges have declared Baba Jan and others innocent and two have taken a political decision enabling the administration to keep Baba Jan out of the electoral race.

To link the holding of the elections with a decision yet to be taken is against all established norms of justice. The election commission is supposed to judge a candidate's credentials at the time of the filling of nomination papers. When Baba Jan filed his nomination papers there was no conviction against him. His nomination papers were rejected by the returning officer but the decision was overturned by an Election

Tribunal, allowing him to contest the elections.

Baba Jan's ordeal has exposed the colonial nature of administration in the region. Constitutionally, GB is not a part of Pakistan. It was given the status of a province with limited self-governance in 2009, including the right for the people to elect their representatives to the GB legislative assembly. However, the Pakistani federal government remains in control of all major decisions related to the region. The judges to the Chief and the Appellate Courts are appointed by the Pakistani prime minister. Whosoever comes to power in Pakistan co-opts local elites and remotely controls the region through them.

The elected assembly of 34 members hardly has any decision making power. It is an impotent body.

The AWP leader was contesting the upcoming election for raising of these and other issues concerning the working men and women of the region in the assembly.

The administration should beware that by putting Baba Jan and other activists behind bars it will not succeed in silencing them or controlling the movement of working men, women and children that they have helped build in the region. Baba Jan and others' sentences will not be accepted by the people who have developed a connection with their struggle, reflected in the widespread popularity of the slogan *Teri Jan Meri Jan, Baba Jan Baba Jan, (Your dearest and Mine, Baba Jan Baba Jan)*.

They compare Baba Jan and others with South African revolutionary Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners who chose incarceration but never compromised on their ideas of freedom and equality.

The AWP Pakistan and AWP GB have announced a mass campaign against the Supreme Appellate Court's decision.

The major demands of the campaign are: Baba Jan and others' immediate release, cancellation of the case filed on trumped up charges, publication of

judicial inquiry report and punishment for policemen involved in the killing of two locals during a 2010 demonstration.

Baba Jan's sentence has created a massive wave of sympathy for socialist ideas and for the AWP's political programme among the working men and women of the region.

The campaign against the sentence will build on this support and further popularise progressive ideas and the party's programme.

The Settlement industry

12 June 2016, by **Jonah Walters**

The response from Israeli state officials was swift and forceful. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Shapiro's comments unacceptable; the Israeli minister of defense **demanded** that he recant his statement; and a former Netanyahu aide **referred** to the ambassador using a Hebrew slur "and **right-wing buzzword**" popular among Israeli Zionists who regard their American counterparts as weak or unprincipled.

But there was nothing outrageous about Shapiro's comments, even by diplomatic standards. The overwhelming international consensus is that Israel's settlement activity is illegal and should be halted.

In January, the foreign affairs council of the European Union **adopted** a strongly worded resolution calling the settlements "an obstacle to peace." Brazil **rejected** Israel's newly appointed ambassador late last year because of his ties to the settlements.

Unsurprisingly, Israel promptly reassigned him to a diplomatic position in the United States, where, despite Shapiro's cautious criticism, the political establishment still tolerates the settlements.

In his remarks about the West Bank, Shapiro posed a simple question to Israeli administrators: "Why?" Recalling Israel's supposed commitment to a "**two-state solution**" "and pointing out that the settlements interfere with that goal" he **asked**, "What is Israel's strategy?"

Israel's strategy is clear: it's not about securing the conditions for peace "it's about extracting profits and preventing the emergence of a

Palestinian state.

Money To Be Made

Occupation is big business for Israel, as a recent Human Rights Watch (HRW) **report** makes clear.

The Israeli establishment characterizes the settlements as harmless residential enclaves, suburban oases embedded in an otherwise-unoccupied desert, where young Jewish couples can raise families away from expensive and overcrowded city centers.

But this is more propaganda than truth.

While residential settlements proliferate in the West Bank, encroaching on Palestinian land and violating international law, this is only part of the story.

Far more essential to the settlement project are the "settlement industrial zones" "business districts where Israeli factories and farming enterprises exploit Palestinian land and labor to produce billions of dollars of goods each year.

Israel operates about twenty such zones in the occupied West Bank. Officially called "industrial zones under Israeli administration," these areas encompass 1,365 hectares in Area C, a vitally important stretch of land.

The World Bank **calls** Area C "the key to economic cohesion" in Palestine because it contains most of the area's arable land, water, and other resources.

Israeli's occupation of this land is illegal according to international law. Most of it belongs to "absentee" Palestinians "that is, Palestinians who were driven from their land by Israeli expansion, and who were neither consulted nor compensated prior to settlement construction.

And part of at least one settlement industrial zone sits on the property of a non-absentee Palestinian landowner, in violation of Israel's own laws.

In addition to the 1,365 hectares containing factories "which manufacture everything from metal to plastics to textiles" there are an additional 9,300 hectares for farming conglomerates. The land controlled by industrial and agricultural enterprises is almost double that occupied by settler residences, which account for only 6,000 hectares.

Although Israeli officials can be tight-lipped about the settlement industrial zones, it seems clear that business interests, perhaps more than anything else, are driving Israeli expansion in the West Bank.

Development for Whom?

As Israeli firms pump millions of dollars into the Occupied Territories each year, some observers have the audacity to suggest that this investment benefits Palestinians.

It doesn't.

The World Bank estimates that Israeli activities in Area C "including land restrictions and water siphoning"

cost the Palestinian economy about \$3.4 billion a year, or about 35 percent of its GDP.

One Palestinian leader quoted in the HRW investigation reported that his village's livestock had decreased from ten thousand animals to only one hundred after the construction of an Israeli settlement severely reduced their grazing area.

By disrupting Palestinian livelihoods, Israel increases unemployment and depresses wages, providing a captive workforce for Israeli employers. Dispossessed of their land and prevented from establishing their own businesses by restrictive Israeli permit laws, Palestinians often have little choice but to accept jobs working for Israeli manufacturers, where they are grossly underpaid and subject to state-facilitated abuse from their employers. Israeli authorities justify the settlement industrial zones by claiming they exist to provide employment to Israeli settlers. But the numbers show that Palestinians overwhelmingly make up the labor force in these industrial areas.

In 2013, only 6.8 percent of settlers worked in manufacturing or mining jobs, despite the proliferation of Israeli factories and rock quarries in the settlements. And less than 1 percent of settlers worked on the 10,000 hectares of agricultural land that Israeli firms cultivate. In fact, of the seventeen thousand people formally working in the settlements in 2009, eleven thousand were Palestinian.

Unsurprisingly, Palestinian workers are treated poorly compared to their Israeli counterparts.

Palestinian workers often earn about 8 shekels (or two dollars) an hour, one-third of the Israeli minimum wage. A 2007 Supreme Court case ruled that Israeli labor laws apply equally to Palestinian and Israeli workers, but the Israeli government has refused to implement this ruling. It claims it can neither investigate labor practices in the West Bank nor enforce compliance with labor standards.

To make matters worse, Palestinian [workers](#) rely on work permits issued

by the Israeli military to seek and hold down jobs in the settlements, making them uniquely vulnerable to retaliation by hostile employers.

The settlement industrial zones don't empower Palestinians – they exploit them. According to the HRW report, to claim otherwise amounts to nothing more than "a poor excuse for labor abuses." But that doesn't stop some settlers from trying.

Whitewashing Occupation

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, some Israeli settlers still maintain that settlement businesses are a vital source of employment for jobless Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Some even go so far as to describe settler entrepreneurs as multicultural bridge-builders, connecting Israelis and Palestinians through shared labor.

Ron Nahman – founder of the largest settlement industrial zone and mayor of Ariel, one of the West Bank's oldest settlements – responded to criticism in 2000 by saying, "I have a better shared development plan with the Arabs in the area than any of the leftist administrations, and I pursue peace exactly like all the leftists."

Nahman's "shared development plan," it seems, consists of exploiting cheap Palestinian labor while maintaining Israeli control over vital natural resources.

Israeli authorities echo Nahman's claim. Former minister of economy Naftali Bennett called the settlement industrial zones "economic bridges of peace," and current president Reuven Rivlin [described](#) Barkan – one of the largest settlement industrial zones – as a "hub of coexistence."

Nevermind that until recently Barkan housed a company that Palestinian employees sued for wage theft and discrimination. As usual, facts don't get in the way of Zionists' spirited defense of occupation and exploitation.

This kind of rhetoric also appears in US news outlets like the New York Times. Last year, the paper [celebrated](#) the illegal establishment of an Israeli

grocery store in the West Bank – calling it "a symbol of coexistence" because it employed both Israeli and Palestinian cashiers.

The characterization of settlement industrial zones as hubs of cooperation is transparent and disingenuous, deflecting attention from the real dynamic of dispossession and exploitation that defines the relationship between settlers and Palestinian workers.

Many of the goods produced in the settlements are exported to foreign trading partners, most significantly in the European Union. Many are labeled "Made in Israel," despite international laws specifically prohibiting that practice.

In 2012, Israel reported to the World Bank that exports from settlement industrial zones to the European Union totaled \$300 million in value annually.

The World Bank [put](#) this figure much higher – suggesting a figure of \$5.4 billion a year – "because Israeli companies often transfer raw materials and manufactured components across the border into internationally recognized Israel before export."

In fact, producers in the Occupied Territories are so dependent on foreign consumers that Barkan administrators estimate that the zone sends about 80 percent of its goods out of the region.

Israel's need to sell its goods in foreign markets highlights the [strategic importance](#) of the [boycott, divestment, and sanctions \(BDS\) movement](#), which calls on international consumers to boycott Israeli products, particularly those produced in the Occupied Territories. The illegal production of food, metal resources, and manufactured goods in the occupied West Bank is a tremendously productive and profitable arm of the Israeli economy. But it does nothing to benefit Palestinians. Instead, it reproduces the conditions of their destitution.

Opposing Israeli settlements in the West Bank isn't about calling for reconciliation or coexistence, and it certainly isn't just about ensuring the conditions for a two-state solution, as

Shapiro seemed to suggest.
Settlement is an economic project,
premised on the seizure of Palestinian
resources and the exploitation of

Palestinian labor.
Demanding an end to Israeli

occupation is about demanding an end
to the oppression of Palestine.

[Jacobin](#)

A Socialist Convergence in Philadelphia

11 June 2016, by Robert Caldwell

The last of the Cold War mental barriers against socialism have been breached. The youth of the United States raised in the global downturn have been frustrated with their lack of options under capitalism and oriented to Bernie's social democratic domestic programs, and are increasingly eager to learn about socialism. At the same time, the U.S. left is far too weak to provide a meaningful pole of attraction for those newly radicalizing or open to socialist politics.

Sanders campaigned furiously in California as his last big chance to build pressure for the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia, but his efforts fell short. Sanders supporters continue to point out the lack of democracy in state-sanctioned elections as well inside the (anti-)Democratic Party. Recent polls indicate that perhaps 25% of Bernie supporters—including some delegates—will not vote for Hillary Clinton. This militant minority, often referred to as "Bernie or Bust," have vowed to write Sanders in, or to vote for a left third-party candidate like the Green Party's Jill Stein.

Inside the July 25-28 Democratic National Convention (DNC), Sanders' delegates will be up against the largest barrier they have seen thus far. But the streets of Philadelphia will be full of street protesters orienting not only toward Bernie but also to the social movements, most notably Black Lives Matter, the demand for \$15/hour, and the Climate Justice movement.

Sanders supporters and the broader left will converge on Philadelphia beginning on the eve of the DNC and tens of thousands will attend a

number of events, including both permitted and unpermitted marches. The March for a Clean Energy Future will be held on Sunday July 24, followed by protests every day of the convention. The opening day of the DNC already has two marches slated, one by Bernie supporters at 11 AM and another, "March for Our Lives" at 3 PM called by Cheri Honkala and the Poor Peoples' Economic Human Rights campaign and followed by Jill Stein's "Power to the People" rally. Many of the marches have yet to receive permits and may see police repression, despite recent calls for the city to issue civil fines instead of arrests in so-called "nuisance" cases.

Because the days will be packed with marches and street actions, those wanting to build dialogue are focusing on building nightly events. "Socialist Convergence: carrying forward the political revolution" will be a four-evening series of panels and discussions after the daytime street actions in Philadelphia concurrent with the DNC. Solidarity has endorsed and is part of organizing the Convergence, which will be held nightly at the Friends Center. Other organizations involved include Philly Socialists, Philly Coalition for REAL Justice (the local Black Lives Matter group), the Philadelphia Green Party, Socialist Alternative, and the International Socialist Organization.

Left Elect, a network that Solidarity helped initiate in 2015 to bring together left third parties and local electoral phenomenon together, led us to our involvement in the Convergence. Left Elect hosted a successful conference of a couple of hundred left and independent

candidates and leaders in Chicago in May 2015. Already at that time, Left Elect participants held a variety of perspectives on candidates for the Presidential 2016 election: some critically supported Bernie Sanders' candidacy within the Democratic Party, while many others came together to support Jill Stein, the Green Party's presumptive nominee. Still others opted to run their own propaganda campaign. Given those challenges, the Left Elect Continuities Committee (Steering Committee) opted to prioritize three things in 2016: outreach and a social event at the Labor Notes Conference, participation at the Left Forum, and a presence at the DNC.

At the "Socialist Convergence" and other spaces in Philly the weekend before and week of the DNC, socialists should argue for an orientation toward movements rather than narrow electoralism. We should point folks to the Jill Stein campaign as the most organized electoral expression of the movements after Bernie, and the most viable left campaign independent of the capitalist class. We should also promote Left Elect and the idea of an "in-gathering" of those supportive of building left independent politics following this election cycle.

The Socialist Convergence is also an opportunity to promote the idea of ongoing and deeper cooperation between existing left groups to create a stronger left pole for those not currently in any left group. Certainly some of the folks organizing the Convergence have some form of ongoing left unity on their mind, but probably many more treat it as but one of many opportunities to put forth

their own specific platform and politics. While it is doubtful that a few nights of forums would be the basis for deep ongoing collaboration, optimism is needed. A broad segment of the far left is coming together to discuss ideas and actions. The far left is weaker organizationally and organizational distinctions are more amorphous than just a few years ago—but at the same time, the broad population is more open to socialism than in decades.

Solidarity members and non-sectarian socialists should use this opportunity

to meet folks in other formations or none, and to talk to them about prospects for a “next left” from below, as the latest experiment of a longstanding orientation to left regroupment/refoundation and the need for a “big tent” multi-tendency pole of attraction. We should listen keenly to their ideas for, and experiences in, building a socialist movement.

Building a left pole to bring around those not currently in any socialist organization is a tall order, but this is the task of the left. There are tens,

perhaps hundreds of thousands of people in the United States interested in finding out more about socialism, and the most advanced among them could help the usher in a political renewal. We on the left should be a bridge instead of a barrier to that path.

For more information about the Socialist Convergence, visit [the Facebook event page](#) or [the website](#).

June 11, 2016

Solidarity

When France moves, all of Europe shakes

10 June 2016, by Miguel Urbán Crespo

The Socialist Party government led by President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls is attempting to force through legislation, known as the El Khomri law, that would eliminate long-held workers’ protections. But the law has stirred a massive resistance—expressed in different forms, from the occupation of public squares called the “Nuit Debout” (Up All Night) to a revival of mass working class action, including general strikes. In a Europe where the ruling class has successfully imposed drastic austerity across the continent, and where the far right is growing in influence based on its racist scapegoating of desperate refugees and immigrants, the French strikes and protests show another direction.

Miguel Urbán Crespo is a founding member of Spain’s left-wing political party Podemos and now a deputy in the European Parliament. In this article that first appeared in Spanish in CTXT: Contexto y Acción and was translated by Todd Chretien, he looks at the importance of the French struggle and its possible repercussions in Europe.

If any country is associated with the “traditions of the oppressed,” as described by the German-Jewish

socialist philosopher Walter Benjamin, it is France.

From the French Revolution of 1789 to the general strike of May 1968—not forgetting the Paris Commune of 1871 and the antifascist Resistance during the Second World War—France was the site of political conflict par excellence. So it’s no accident that when Karl Marx listed the three sources for his ideas he named German philosophy, English economics and French politics. French history is replete with plebian uprisings and impatient workers, of conflicts that heat up with their own inner energy, that appear out of nowhere.

If it was not possible to predict Nuit Debout nor the strike wave led by the CGT [General Confederation of Labor, France’s largest union federation], we can analyze the reasons for the explosion and try to recover a strategic discussion, conducted in an internationalist key, taking the situation in France as our starting point.

Yanis Varoufakis [the former Finance Minister of Greece under the SYRIZA government] recently commented that

France was the only country in Europe in which neoliberal restructuring and counterreforms have not been successfully imposed.

It is necessary to develop this observation in several ways. On the one hand, it is clear that resistance against the counterreforms has, in fact, been more effective in France than in other European countries. The first great battle took place in 1995, featuring gigantic strikes in the public sector against cutbacks in Social Security proposed by conservative Prime Minister Alain Juppé.

Pierre Badiou, an important contemporary intellectual committed to the cause of the working class, as Jean Paul Sartre had been in his time, said of the strikes that they were the first (along with the Spanish general strike in 1988) to win a victory that, if not reversing the neoliberal turn marked by Margaret Thatcher’s defeat of the British miners in 1984-85, opened up a field in which it was possible to think about alternatives.

The antiglobalization movement that arose in subsequent years owed much to the 1995 strikes, which also served as the point of departure for France’s rejection of the European Constitution’s 10 years later.

Without a doubt, the struggle against neoliberalism has never been limited to trade unions. It has also been organized in the realm of politics and elections. But the 1995 victory contained a paradox: It was the left that organized the strike wave and mass protests, based on hundreds of united workplace committees of struggle. However, the left was not able to translate this into an organized movement with a political perspective. Thus, in the end, the neofascist National Front capitalized on mass discontent with a Europe run in the interests of the elites.

This legacy, which continued through various other upheavals in France, through to 2010, was unable to overturn neoliberal hegemony. As radical authors Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval have explained, neoliberalism cannot be reduced to a complex of regulatory rules, but also encompasses systematic social dynamics that impose themselves as a model of social relations. The structural exclusion of millions of Black or Arab people from "official" society is a direct consequence of neoliberalism's advance into the market and civil society.

The neoliberal advance has broken up defenses constructed by the working class previously to defend itself from capital. This remains the case even if some highly trained and organized sectors of the working class have managed to defend their standard of living—especially public employees who still occupy broad sectors of the economy that have been privatized in other countries.

Two outcomes serve to illustrate the contrast between the explosive resistance of French society and the underlying advance of the neoliberal model.

First, the union sustaining the current strike wave, the CGT, is a radical union whose main leader has come to personify opposition to Hollande. Philippe Martène, the CGT president, appears as a character plucked straight from a Robert Guédiguian film, French cinema's answer to the British filmmaker Ken Loach. At the same time, the CGT is a very weak union, having shrunk from 3 million to

only 600,000 members over recent decades.

On the other hand, the National Front has capitalized on discontent spurred by deindustrialization and the destruction of living communities built around manufacturing in which millions of workers had developed their own collective experiences. Despite having a certain base in the working class, the National Front has called for a hard line against today's strikes, thus exposing its reactionary character—but also the limits of a political left that has lost its connection to the working class.

If there is no obvious straight line between a person's class position and their ideology, it is also the case that France shows that ideas are shaped or conditioned by class relations, and this reality is critical for directing anger in one direction or another.

Based on all this, we must clarify how to read the events that are taking place in France.

It is curious how the mainstream left and right both are pitching their analysis in a "conservative" key. The right along with the social-liberal left, headed by Prime Minister Manuel Valls, insist on labeling the movement as a one "opposed to change." They depict a nostalgic movement tilting against a necessary modernization of French society that, naturally, requires liberalizing labor relations and wiping out the historic gains won by workers in the 1968 general strike.

By contrast, progress would take the form of settling accounts with history in order to recover a version of France's past utility for the elite. Valls and his Minister of Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs Emmanuel Macron appear in this twisted story as countercultural yuppies who are attempting to set society free by destroying a corporatist and reactionary subject—that is, union and workplace rights that are defined as "privileges" available to only a few.

Thus, the crisis of social democracy is assuming a particularly perverse form. The Socialist Party is divided between

those who realize that these measures will alienate them from their social base and those, like the prime minister, who are convinced that their historic mission is to destroy social welfare.

Meanwhile, when Pierre Laurent, the general secretary of the French Communist Party, declares to the youth of Nuit Debout, "I invite you to join the Communist Party," he only reveals the same conservative incomprehension—one unable to read today's struggle as a window opening to something new.

However, we can place our wager on a different reading. We might see what is happening as the sort of "leap," in keeping with the subversive thread that runs through French history.

This leap is full of potentials that must be explored. First of all, today's strikes put back on the table, despite all the fetishistic theories we've heard over recent years, the idea that the organized working class retains a specific strategic power capable of paralyzing a whole country by attacking the chain of value in transportation and energy production.

This strike is not merely a question of a specific industrial sector. Rather, it raises the question of who runs the country: the people who generate wealth through their labor or those who live off the work of others.

This is not a minor question, and it places on the agenda different tools and forms of struggle that correspond to different material realities and correlations of strength. In their various combinations (strikes, demonstrations, mass assemblies in public squares, etc.), we see expressed not only needs, but also potentials.

On the other hand, the movement has shown that parallel explosions are possible across different sectors that share common interests. This phenomena of shared interests is based on the creation of precarity and impoverishment of the middle classes, upon which Nuit Debout is based, and of sections of the traditional working class. This is true even if we must emphasize the ongoing failure to link

these struggles to the youth of African and Arab origins, concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods.

As social discontent is transformed into active struggle, into real experience, a combative political layer must emerge that is capable of preventing the National Front from posing itself as the main alternative to the political establishment.

Everything that is now happening in France can have profound repercussions throughout Europe.

Of course, I won't try to tell my comrades in France what to do, but I will end with a reflection that carries a certain universal validity, and I think is a lesson learned from experience in

other countries: It is important to discuss how to anchor discontent, giving it a political expression that goes beyond defensive demands, even as it is based on these demands, in order to construct a social bloc capable of articulating a new social project.

The French left, which is unfortunately very atomized and self-referential, faces a historic opportunity to recapture the central role that Marx assigned to it. To do this, as has been shown in other countries, it is critical to construct a political-social instrument that appears new, participatory and open.

Why not do this in the heat of the struggle? Why not discuss this in parallel with how to win today's strikes, how to stabilize structures of

struggle and convert them into spaces for organization, so that all the formidable energy on display today can form the basis of a tool that can be used to contest for power?

Of course, this is what we need. We must move forward in France in order to move ahead in the rest of Europe.

The best internationalist traditions have always been conscious that what happens in one country has repercussions in others. In order to change the world, we need friends in many countries. Therefore, building links with France and the struggles of the working people leads us to the most precise meaning of solidarity: Not only do they need us, but we need them.

socialistworker.org

Byelection postponed due to mass support for jailed socialist

9 June 2016, by **Sajid Ali**

The PMLN government, along with other mainstream political parties, are desperately trying to buy more time because of the massive support for Baba Jan in the by-election campaign for a seat in the assembly of the Pakistani-administered Himalayan territory of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Every section of Gilgit-Baltistan society, including youth, women, leftists and human right activists, have been part of rallies in support of Baba Jan.

Baba Jan has been in jail for more than three years on a life sentence on trumped up terrorism charges. His case was heard by a special anti-terrorism court in Gilgit, even though he has never been involved in any terrorist activities.

His only crime was to raise his voice for the compensation by the Pakistani state for the people of the Hunza

valley in 2011 devastating landslides which killed many people and left hundreds of families homeless.

Earlier Baba Jan's nomination papers were challenged in appellate Supreme Court of Gilgit-Baltistan by PPP ex-candidate Zafar Iqbal on grounds that Baba Jan has been convicted by an anti-terrorism court. The judges of supreme appellate court remarked that there was no legal ground on which Baba Jan's nomination papers could be challenged. They further added that unless the suppressed aspects of Baba Jan's case are unveiled by the anti-terrorist court, the decision on his nomination papers cannot be made.

The latest court decision is highly disputed by Baba Jan supporters and other human right activists across the whole country, including leading human rights organisations in

Pakistan. Socialist movements from her countries have also expressed their solidarity with the revolutionary leader Baba Jan who has become a global symbol of struggle for human rights.

The PMLN government's desperate election campaign includes cheap vote-buying tactics such as the announcement of special development packages in Gilgit-Baltistan by the prime minister is a serious violation of the electoral code of conduct. In spite of all this, the election commission has not taken any action against the ruling party.

Despite the PMLN's use of state machinery against Baba Jan, the moral, social and political victory that he has already won, is a big slap in the government's face.

May 31
Green Left Weekly

Temer's Black Thumb

9 June 2016, by **Ashley Dawson**

The conspirators “a motley crew of congress members, businesspeople, and military commanders” wanted to protect themselves from the ongoing “Car Wash” corruption investigation. Now that they have gained control of the government they’ve quashed the formal inquiry and have begun to roll back social gains in Brazil.

These developments will have dire consequences for working people in Brazil. But the coup is dangerous for another reason. It will likely open the door to a wave of destructive environmental policies.

Home to 65 percent of the Amazon rainforest, Brazil is on the frontlines of the global battle against deforestation. [Satellite data reveal](#) that nearly six thousand square kilometers “an area seven times the size of New York City” of the Amazon were cut down or burned during the year ending in August 2015.

This represents a 16 percent increase from the previous year and the second deforestation acceleration in three years “a major setback in global conservation efforts. Brazilian scientists say that 57 percent of the Amazon’s tree species will face extinction if current rates of land clearance continue.

Brazil’s economic crisis has pushed desperately poor people to illegally log timber and clear land for cattle and crops. At the same time, the country’s [powerful agricultural lobby](#) has long pressured the government to change the forestry code, to allow large infrastructure projects in the region, to cede control over the demarcation of indigenous reserves to congress, and to approve genetically modified “terminator” seeds.

The [Rousseff administration](#) also facilitated increasing deforestation by revising the forestry code in 2012, weakening Amazon protection and pardoning illegal deforesters, many of

whom are large corporate farming and ranching interests.

Rousseff also approved a raft of infrastructure projects, including the controversial Belo Monte dam, the third largest on the planet. In January, a Brazilian federal judge [denied Belo Monte](#) an operating license until the government follows through on promises to mitigate the dam’s environmental impact, which would inundate thousands of acres of rainforest and potentially displace twenty thousand people. Affected indigenous groups call the dam project a form of cultural genocide.

Under the Temer government these destructive changes to Brazil’s environment are almost certain to accelerate. Temer has appointed Senator Blairo Maggi “a soy magnate who has cleared thousands of hectares in his home state of Mato Grosso” as agricultural minister. This is alarming to say the least.

Before the coup was even confirmed Maggi had [circulated a bill](#) that would allow major infrastructural projects to proceed before the completion of impact studies on biodiversity, indigenous areas, traditional communities, and conservation areas.

The bill also prevents government environmental protection agencies from halting infrastructure projects once they begin.

Meanwhile, the farmers’ and ranchers’ lobby presented their “positive agenda,” which spells out the initiatives Maggi is likely to roll out, to Temer during the waning days of the Rousseff administration. Their demands include more funds for agribusiness “which already enjoys large subsidies” the abolition of the ministry of land reform, and the revision or elimination of indigenous reserve and *quilombos* demarcations.

Brazil’s destructive environmental turn is doubly significant because it comes at a time when extinction rates in the plant kingdom are already accelerating at an alarming rate. According to [The State of the World’s Plants](#), a new study from the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew in Britain, 20 percent of the world’s estimated 391,000 wild plant species are threatened with extinction.

And in the last twenty-five years, [an area twice the size of Texas was deforested](#). This is not just an issue for people who like flowers: globally, deforestation accounts for about 15 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions “more than the total combined emissions of all the world’s cars and trucks.

Remarkably, the Kew study is the first survey of global plant extinction rates. According to Kew’s director of science Kathy Willis, “We already have a State of the World’s . . . birds, sea-turtles, forests, cities, mothers, fathers, children, even antibiotics, but not plants.”

Willis goes on, “this is remarkable given the importance of plants to all of our lives” from food, medicines, clothing, building materials and biofuels, to climate regulation.”

According to the Kew report, the biggest factor threatening plant species is habitat destruction, which includes farming (30 percent) and deforestation for timber (20 percent) or construction materials (13 percent). Climate change is currently a smaller contributor in plant extinction (4 percent), but it is certain to grow significantly. For example, rising temperatures are already making coffee beans more susceptible to disease and, in some cases, impossible to grow in key countries like Ethiopia. But the news from the plant kingdom is not all bad. Approximately two thousand new species of plants are discovered every year, and, according

to the Food and Agriculture Organization's [2015 Global Forest Resources Assessment](#), the global rate of deforestation has slowed over the last several decades.

"Attention paid to sustainable forest management has never been higher," the report concludes. "More land is designated as permanent forest, more measurement, monitoring, reporting, planning and stakeholder involvement is taking place, and the legal framework for sustaining forest management is nearly universal."

Nevertheless, key steps must be taken to protect the world's dwindling botanical diversity. Most important for the Kew study's authors is the identification of sites called Important Plant Areas (IPAs) — based on factors like threats to species or habitats and exceptional botanical richness — that are in particularly urgent need of conservation.

The world is only just beginning to catalog — let alone protect — these

areas. There are currently sixteen countries in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East that have IPA designated areas.

Yet a quarter of European IPAs have no legal protection and no sustainable management plans. Many of these areas face imminent threats. Far worse, though, is the fact that there are no IPAs in tropical regions, which are of course the great hotspots of botanical biodiversity.

The destruction of tropical forests threatens the survival of many plant and animal species. The Kew report identified habitat degradation as the main threat to 85 percent of threatened plant species. Further, according to [a recent report from the WWF](#), eleven of the world's most important forests — all of them in tropical zones — are set for catastrophic deforestation over the next two decades.

The Brazilian Amazon is foremost among these vital but threatened forests.

Brazilian social movements have long recognized the interplay between capitalism and environmental destruction. They will keep fighting to preserve the country's natural resources and will challenge the recent legal changes permitting accelerated deforestation. But this fight will be much more daunting in the face of the coming political onslaught and the dismantling of Brazil's social gains.

Outside Brazil the Left can draw attention to the global supply chains that bring trees, palm oil, and soy products from endangered tropical regions to markets like the US, and pressure multinational corporations like [Siemens](#) and [GE](#) to abandon infrastructure projects like the [Belo Monte dam](#).

Now is the time to ramp up the fight against corporate attacks on the world's forests and the people who dwell in them.

[Jacobin](#)

United against state violence in Canada

8 June 2016, by **Brian Ward, Ragina Johnson**

Since September 2015, 100 members of the Attawapiskat First Nation—a community of only 2,000 people—have tried to commit suicide and one person has died. On one night alone, 11 members tried to take their own lives.

The occupation, which began on April 13, demanded that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visit Attawapiskat and called out the Canadian government's culpability for the deteriorating social conditions of First Nation people. Solidarity actions with Attawapiskat also took place in Regina, Saskatchewan; Vancouver, British Columbia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Gatineau, Quebec.

The Attawapiskat Nation is a remote nation, located on the shores of the

James Bay in Northern Ontario, that has been in the headlines in Canada consistently in reference to broken promises and government failures.

Attawapiskat gained international attention three years ago when Chief Theresa Spence engaged in a hunger strike to demand a meeting with former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Spence's action—along with anger over a budget bill that deregulated environmental protections of seas and waterways, attacked Indigenous sovereignty and attacked workers rights—sparked the Idle No More movement.

Idle No More (INM) brought together thousands of people from all over Canada, spread internationally and has come to educate a new generation

of activists about the connection between Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice.

Long before the outbreak of INM, the Attawapiskat Nation regularly protested lack of funding and resources for education, housing, infrastructure, health care and jobs programs.

In 2000, the Attawapiskat elementary school had to be closed due to exposure to a diesel fuel spill that occurred in 1979, but still contaminated the area where the school was located. The government time and again retreated from promises to rebuild the school, and classes were held in portable trailers.

An education battle continued over the next decade and a half, led by Attawapiskat children and spreading across First Nations. The movement demands were not only for the school to be funded and rebuilt in Attawapiskat, but also for the rights of First Nations people to quality education across Canada. The movement was powerfully captured in the documentary film *Hi-Ho Mistahey!*

Another key demand in Attawapiskat has been for quality homes. Some people live in crowded and poorly designed trailer homes, and a few families live in tents or sheds. Then there is unemployment, which hovers around 70 percent, and the incredibly high cost of food: anywhere from twice to four times higher than further south.

Many politicians, including liberals, have asked over the years why First Nations people in Attawapiskat "don't just leave" the area they have called home for centuries. Pundits regularly complain that it's just "too expensive" to get resources to such a desolate place.

But since 2004, when Ontario's first diamond mine was set up by De Beers Canada on and around Attawapiskat Nation lands, the company has had no problem flying in tons of equipment and spending almost \$1 billion to set up its operation.

De Beers' yearly profits total in the tens of millions of dollars, while the lack of infrastructure and funding for Attawapiskat continues—a hypocrisy not lost on this First Nation community. In 2009, members set up roadblocks to De Beers' mining operations to demand greater resources for their community.

These are the conditions that need to be brought to light to give context to the gut-wrenching stories finally reaching the media about suicide attempts involving children as young as nine.

This experience might be extreme, but the crisis for the Attawapiskat Nation is shared by Indigenous nations throughout Canada and the U.S. The suicide rate for First Nations in Canada is up to 12 times higher than

other Canadians. In the U.S., Indigenous communities face the highest suicide rate of any group.

Ever since Europeans first arrived, whatever treaties were made with Indigenous peoples were regularly broken. The Canadian government continues this history today with its drive towards more fossil fuel extraction, laying pipelines across the country—often times through Native land without consent.

Describing the April solidarity action in Regina, Warrior Publications reported that "the problems facing Attawapiskat are well known in Saskatchewan communities. Three First Nations in the province also declared mental health emergencies back in March. The problem is also rooted in Indigenous people not having control over their own communities."

Robyn Pitawanakwat, who organized the Regina protest, said: "The idea that we cannot administrate our own communities and our own funds is ridiculous. There are people who have never been to these communities deciding who gets the money, and it needs to stop."

In the last several years during which the Idle No More movement arose, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has spread, crossing the border into Canada.

Like INM, BLM is an international phenomenon. During the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, solidarity actions took place in Toronto connecting the murder of Mike Brown and the struggle for justice to local cases of racist police violence in Canada, such as the police killing of Jermaine Carby in September 2014.

Immigrant, Muslim, Black and First Nation communities face similar repression, violence and racial profiling in Canada as their counterparts in the U.S.

The international crisis for refugees fleeing war, occupation, climate change and poverty has had a particular impact in Canada. While Canada has taken in more refugees

than the U.S., it hasn't combatted the racism those immigrants then face in their new country.

Andrew Loku was born in Lire in the Kajo-Keji district of what is now South Sudan and emigrated to Canada to escape a civil war. He was described as a sweet man with an understandable history of mental health issues because of his experiences living in a war-torn country.

Loku was killed in a hail of bullets last summer when cops started firing within seconds after they showed up in response to reports that Loku was allegedly wielding a hammer during an argument over noise in his apartment building. When there was no indictment for the cop who shot Loku, protests broke out in what activists called Toronto's "Mike Brown moment".

This case is far from unique for the Black population of Canada, which faces systematic racism and de facto racial profiling, through a practice known as "carding" that is similar to U.S. police departments use of "stop and frisk." As Erica Violet Lee, an Indigenous rights activist with the Idle No More movement who has also built solidarity with BLM Toronto, told Democracy Now!:

I was actually in Toronto when there was the giant rally about Black Lives Matter after the death of Andrew Loku, and recognizing...these issues are interconnected. The fact that Black people on this land are subject to extreme police brutality is directly related to the fact that the North-West Mounted Police, now the RCMP, were started to police Indigenous bodies, to keep us on reserves, to keep settlers safe.

So this is the history of this land that we're living with, and I think that the general Canadian public doesn't understand the type of violence that we face every day. You know, it's scary to walk down the street as an Indigenous woman, as a queer two-spirit Indigenous person, and it shouldn't be.

There are a number of lessons that U.S. activists can learn from the way that First Nations, Indigenous and BLM Toronto activists are fighting together against the systematic and structural racism perpetuated by the Canadian state.

One lesson is that state violence and neglect towards oppressed populations means that our movements need to make demands to better material conditions where communities face substandard housing, schools and health care—because police violence is connected to dispossession and poverty.

Out of the occupation of the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada office in solidarity with Attawapiskat, activists made over 20 demands to improve the community, "including a youth center, elder camp, emergency mental health responders, firefighters and libraries," reported the National Post

Another lesson activists in the U.S. are all too familiar with is that change isn't automatic under a government led by more liberal political figures—and that reforms need to be demanded and organized around instead.

For example, the new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently apologized for the "great injustice" of Komagata

Maru, a 1914 decision by the Canadian government to turn away a boat of South Asian immigrants. But racism isn't just a thing of the past in Canada. It operates against today's immigrant populations—not only through racist policing, but in the recently passed federal budget that included minimal support for Indigenous youth.

Lastly, another lesson to be learned from the movements in Canada is how solidarity must be actively built among oppressed peoples if we don't want our movements to lose.

The need for solidarity has been central in the struggles in Canada, where Indigenous activists were a major presence in the 15-day occupation that protested the lack of accountability for the police murder of Loku.

#BlackLivesMatter co-founder Patrisse Cullors noted "the focus on Black and Indigenous solidarity as a key theme in BLM Toronto's work—a practice that's lacking in the U.S.," as the Vice website wrote.

Janaya Khan, a co-founder of the Toronto BLM chapter, explained in an interview for Vice:

We're deeply invested in dismantling the stolen land versus stolen labor narrative and recognizing that both of

those things sort of happened simultaneously. Mass incarceration is impacting our populations with the same sort of speed and is dangerous in the same way. [Indigenous allies] held it down in the space and what came out of it, and what will continue to come out of BLM Toronto is "Black lives matter on Indigenous land."

Khan went on to argue that because of Canada's relatively small Black population, its Black Lives Matter movement must be part of a larger struggle—"one where we recognize Black liberation as an integral pillar to liberation as a whole."

In the U.S. over the last couple years, movements like #MuslimLivesMatter and #NativeLivesMatter have sprung up both in solidarity with BLM and against other aspects of racist state violence—but they have sometimes been incorrectly accused of "appropriation" or "co-optation."

The actions in Toronto show how bringing together different groups that face police and state terror strengthens all movements—and allows for education about various aspects of oppression that can break down harmful divisions on our side. The collective action and solidarity between Indigenous movements and BLM in Toronto needs to be celebrated and repeated.

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Agreement between Podemos and Izquierda Unida for the elections of 26 June

7 June 2016, by **Andreu Coll**

Even though it is an agreement from above, even though this policy will strengthen in the short-term the party apparatuses of Podemos and Izquierda Unida, this orientation gives hope to broad popular strata, providing a new electoral breakthrough of the bloc around Podemos and increasing the pressure on the PSOE: either make a

bloc with the anti-austerity left or defend the policies of the Troika along with the PP and Ciudadanos.

Moreover, the pact between the group around Pablo Iglesias (after his break with the populist group of Errejón, supporter of a policy towards the "centre", more flexible vis-à-vis the

PSOE) and the leadership of Izquierda Unida (which is also divided by the long crisis of the organization) will strengthen the Eurocommunist political culture of the apparatus; but at the same time, it will lead to a more solid and militant base in the bloc (the apparatchiks attract each other, but so do the honest militants...). This is

the key to the possible dynamic: the central battle must be the building of unitary campaign committees.

The great fear

In response, the PSOE, the PP and Ciudadanos cannot hide their panic. The PP could be the main victim of the alliance, due to the nature of the Spanish electoral system, especially in less populated rural provinces where some seats in Parliament depend on a few thousand votes. As for the PSOE, it is aware that it is facing the most serious threat to its electoral hegemony on the left for 130 years. And Ciudadanos is unmasking its true reactionary nature by its attacks against the "communists", "Chavistas", etc.

In perspective

Even though, according to the polls,

the breakthrough of Unidos Podemos (the new electoral name) may be very considerable, that is not enough to win the elections and beat the PP. That said, a PP-Ciudadanos bloc will not be able to have a sufficient majority and will therefore need the PSOE. In any case, what is certain is that, whatever the electoral combination to prevent the coming to power of Podemos, the new government will implement a programme of savage cuts, especially if the battle for the withdrawal of the El Khomri law fails in France and there is no second wave of anti-austerity resistance in Southern Europe.

Movement, unity, outflanking

Anticapitalistas (section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state) had supported such an agreement in the

previous elections, while the leadership of Podemos (this was before the open conflict between Iglesias and Errejón) said that "the unity of the people" could not be a "cartel of left parties"... Today, our logic is to stick to the approach of breaking with the regime, with austerity and with capitalism, and to maintain the founding idea of Podemos: to be the party of the 15M, of the *indignados*.

All this in an approach based on the united front (no unity without movement, no movement without unity), and political independence: conduct our own campaign as part of the overall campaign, in particular in some key areas (audit and cancellation of the illegitimate debt, withdrawal of regressive labour laws, nationalization of the banks and the energy sector, revival of public services in education and health...).

Barcelona, May 19, 2016

A new beginning in France?

7 June 2016, by Julien Salingue, Ugo Palheta

The French Senate is set to begin debate on the El Khomri law on June 14, and unions and social movements are ramping up strikes and protests in preparation for the most important political confrontation in Europe since the Greek anti-austerity referendum last July.

Two members of France's New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), Ugo Palheta and Julien Salingue, co-authors of an introduction and postscript to a new edition of Daniel Bensaid's *Stratégie et Parti*, argue that the mobilizations are a new stage in the resistance in France, in an article published in *basta!* and translated by Todd Chretien.

When a social movement erupts, there is a natural temptation to judge it based on the terms of movements that preceded it—for instance, by comparing its slogans and the number

of people on protests. Even the new movement's participants may contribute to this tendency by adopting the postures and even the language of past uprisings, as Karl Marx pointed out in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, his famous account of the French Revolution of 1848.

But the historical significance of a movement and its successes—be they immediate or posthumous—are never reducible to the glorious memories they revive nor to the number of individuals they mobilized. Paying too much attention to these aspects often leads one to miss new features that herald unforeseeable upheavals and may reshape the map of what is possible.

In fact, the current movement—whose decline (if not death) was declared by the corporate media immediately upon

its birth—has yet to mobilize as many people as those who took to the streets in the defeated mobilizations against pension cuts pushed through by conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010.

Likewise, the victorious struggle in 2006 against the *contrat première embauche* (CPE, or First Employment Contract), which would have gutted employee rights for young workers, included student general assemblies and demonstrations more massive than what we have yet seen today.

So it can be argued that the movement against the new Labor Code—of which *Nuit Debout* is obviously an integral part—is not simply an extension of the cycle of massive struggles opened by previous victories, most critically those against neoliberal reforms proposed by conservative Prime Minister Alain Juppé in December

1995. Rather, it represents a new beginning: the dawn of a new sequence of social and political struggles in response to years of declining social movements.

A new beginning, but of what exactly? In sum, it is a radical challenge to the world that is imposed on us, and of the lives we lead, under the capitalist regime.

This contrasts to the mass mobilizations in France between 1995 and 2010 that were content to simply call into question one aspect or another of social and political retreat. These past protests were notably accompanied by the development of global justice rhetoric and the redeeming utopian plea that "Another world is possible."

But they failed to formulate a strategic project of rupture, and they could never really agree on the need to put an end to this world, one almost entirely shaped by and for capital. Today's movement has inherited this legacy, but it has also radicalized its oppositional and utopian edge.

In effect, awareness of police repression, governmental deafness and employer arrogance, which had all previously seemed the exclusive preserve of revolutionary militants, has now become the common sense of a movement that is winning over fresh segments of the population.

This new common sense includes the need for self-organization outside of, but not necessarily hostile to, traditional channels; it is anti-capitalist, going beyond a simple rejection of economic liberalism; it recognizes the strategic necessity of the general strike and the convergence of struggles between precarious young workers with university degrees and the youth in poor and immigrant neighborhoods; it seeks to unite all this with workplace struggles and environmental battles.

Finally, the movement exhibits a reflexive hostility toward the repressive forces of the state apparatus. These traits remain embryonic, and we cannot guarantee they will spread broadly in the future, but they are real and open up the

possibility of a future political bifurcation, and the development of anti-systemic forces.

Crisis of Hegemony of the Propertied Classes

This radicalization from below is developing in tandem with the radicalization of the propertied classes who profited from the 2008 financial crisis, and it is proceeding in relation to recent attempts to deepen, in the most brutal fashion, the neoliberal and authoritarian revolution initiated during the 1980s.

It is also rooted in a political crisis whose depth is generally not known: We are not dealing with a temporary disaffection of voters for their traditional political representatives, but a growing inability of the dominant parties—and classes whose interests they defend—to produce active consent by the people for their political choices. The traditional parties are unable to create organic links between themselves and significant segments of the subordinate classes. This speaks to the sort of crisis of hegemony analyzed by Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s and 1930s.

Therefore, it matters little if one is optimistic or pessimistic with respect to the current movement's immediate prospects, nor should one attempt to score points or teach lessons from the sidelines. It is better to appreciate what the mobilization has already achieved.

In particular, it has had the great merit of tossing overboard the disastrous idea of a "primary of the left," which can only mean increased candidate-driven personalization and de-politicization of politics, as well as confusion over the irreconcilable perspectives put forward by, on the one hand, the Socialist Party (and its satellites) and, on the other, the "left of the left," as we say in France.

The problem facing us should not be reduced to simply renewing the methods used for selecting our

masters, or substituting hip young political professionals—whose auditions before corporate boards serve to guarantee their so-called "modernity"—for the exhausted political bosses of the old parties.

The First Steps Toward De- professionalizing Politics

The practice of giving the old parties a facelift is dead, at least in its capacity to sustainably produce the illusion of gradual systemic change, never mind a commitment to militant party membership. It survives in a zombie state, its decay masked by clever communication advisers and a mainstream media riveted on the electoral calendar. From racist statements to financial scandals, to rhetoric and broken promises, everyone can see the mediocrity of servility and corruption of professional politics.

If the movement against the Labor Code and its capitalist assumptions have another virtue, it is to point to what can be called a "politics of the oppressed," a term used by the late revolutionary socialist Daniel Bensaid. Today, we are seeing the first steps of a process, still in its infancy, of a de-professionalization of politics, one which may allow the majority to take its own affairs in hand, heralding a possible eruption of a real democracy flourishing everywhere from our workplaces to our neighborhoods.

This potential presupposes a rupture inside the movement with those who have previously captured, for their own benefit, the power of the great majority; it means disrupting their monopoly over public affairs; it requires putting an end to politics that serve the accumulation of capital and which can only offer putrid nationalism as an alternative to globalized capitalism.

The world is coming apart at the seams and the radicalization of the propertied classes themselves threatens everything and everyone,

the environment and whole peoples are put in danger by a fire that is every day more oppressive and destructive.

Only popular risings that are at once

democratic and anti-capitalist, can lead humanity out of this impasse and resolve the political enigma bequeathed to us by the 20th century. That is, how can we build an alternative to a rotting capitalism without giving rise to despotic

regimes based on the domination of an unaccountable bureaucracy?

June 6, 2016

socialistworker.org

Fear and dissent in Okara

6 June 2016, by **Ammar Ali Jan**

In one of the most extreme examples of state high-handedness, the local administration in the Okara district has imposed a severe crackdown on the Anjuman Muzareen Punjab (AMP), a peasant group that has been resisting state-led evictions from the Okara Military Farms since 2000. The AMP, much like other organisations resisting state violence in rural Punjab, had developed legal, media and political networks over the last 15 years which it could mobilise each time the intensity of violence increased.

Yet, the movement is no longer able to rely on such support. Since late 2014, the entire top leadership of the AMP has been arrested (five office-bearers) and charged with ‘anti-state’ activities. Over 4000 unarmed villagers across the district have also been charged with terrorism, with periodic arrests and harassment continuing at checkpoints and through police incursions into the villages. Ten days back, over one hundred women and children from the farms were arrested. Some were charged with terrorism, a treatment never before meted out to women, even at the peak of repression under the Musharraf regime. However, despite large mobilisations by the AMP and a persistent campaign of civil disobedience against state repression, their defiance has been met by a haunting silence from civil society, political parties, and most notably, the media.

Such indifference to the peasants’ plight is linked to the rather lesser

known fact that the current operation against the peasantry was launched by the local administration under the cover of the ‘National Action Plan’, which demands media censorship and limits the possibility of public dissent. How a policy formed in response to an unimaginably gruesome murder of school children is being cynically deployed by the local administration to arrest peasants, prevent them from harvesting their crops, and steal their buffaloes in itself speaks volumes about the disconnect between policy formulations and their actual implementation. The significance of bringing a peasant movement into the ambit of an anti-terror policy, however, has more severe consequences for redefining what is considered to be acceptable political behaviour.

The most common and public accusation levelled by district authorities against the AMP revolves around the group’s alleged links to the Indian intelligence apparatus. Okara is currently littered with banners placed by the city administration warning citizens against the widespread presence of “RAW agents” and demanding vigilance as a national duty, giving the impression that the city is about to witness an imminent fall at the hands of our eastern neighbour. Yet, the accusations of Indian support for thousands of tenants, including women and children, fits into a larger history of absurd allegations against political opponents in Pakistan. Popular political parties such as the Awami League (East Pakistan), PPP, MQM,

ANP and Baloch nationalists have all been accused of being RAW agents, a narrative that makes little analytical contribution other than unintentionally projecting RAW as the most popular political organisation in the country.

The idea that rural Punjab is a bastion of Indian support is an outrageous proposition that no one truly believes. Yet the narrative’s function has been rather strategic in eliminating socio-political dissent in an era where an intense agrarian crisis and a schizophrenic movement of capital (for example in the land market) threaten to economically and socially displace millions of precarious communities into oblivion. When such an economic rationale intersects with a state rationale that views dissenters as nothing more than foreign intruders into the national body, we witness the recurrent and paranoid forms of violence unleashed against vulnerable segments of society.

Here lies the political significance of the Okara tenants’ movement. For over a decade, the AMP has consistently refused to be obliterated by the ruthless logic of the current system, disrupting the homogenising fantasies of ‘development’ and ‘nationalism’ parroted by state officials. They have thus far successfully resisted government repression through peaceful acts of civil disobedience, inspiring a number of young political activists in Punjab.

It is this spirit of defiance that remains the primary target of state violence, cloaked in the language of national

security. By denying legitimacy to their dissent through the invocation of a foreign conspiracy, the administration aims to remind the economically marginalised classes of their place in society – which today means nothing more than being perpetually disposable.

It is no wonder then that the state has no language to understand popular movements – from Baba Jan's campaign in Gilgit-Baltistan to the Katchi Abadi resistance in Islamabad to the peasants' movement in Okara – other than through the metaphor of foreignness. 'RAW agent' has become an imprecise term for local administrators to describe any social phenomena that appears inassimilable into state ideology, or whose popularity exceeds that of the local state. Moreover, it remains a potent weapon to de-humanise thousands of citizens, who are no longer seen as mothers, daughters, children, etc undergoing persistent humiliation at the hands of the local administration, but are awkwardly lumped together under the category of 'traitors'.

The fact that the state has been able to induce a perpetual fear of popular agitation in the minds of the country's

upper-middle classes means that there is a large constituency ready to consume the insecurity sold to them by the state, reducing the possibility for empathy with the peasantry from urban centres.

Being a defiant peasant in Okara today is a very lonely experience, since there is a virtual boycott of the movement by the media and political parties, who previously used it as cannon fodder in their opposition against Musharraf. Yet, the AMP has maintained organisational unity and refused to accept the humiliation of evictions desired by the local administration. The broader political significance of this episode, however, is the questions it raises on the place of dissent within a legitimate political community.

One of Pakistan's primary tragedies has been the state's exaggerated fears of conflicts in society, and its impossible (and violent) desire to overcome them through force. In such a worldview, fear becomes the only basis for constructing a political community, and violence becomes the sole method for ensuring its reproduction.

Yet, to become a republic (and Pakistan is one on paper), we must acknowledge that any social formation is ridden with conflicts, and that the task of politics is not to circumvent the question of social antagonisms through a recourse to 'technocracy' or emergency measures, but to construct institutional frameworks for their contestation and partial resolution. This is more pertinent in a society as monstrously unequal as Pakistan, where only acceptance of a permanent struggle over rights and resources can provide us with a semblance of stability and aid in developing more durable relations between the citizenry and the Pakistani state.

Thus, the challenge posed by the tenants' movement in Okara is about more than merely making visible the suffering currently faced by Punjab's peasants. It demands us to examine the possibilities of reimagining a politics that embraces social plurality as a pre-condition for socio-economic transformation, rather than believing fantasies of total consent. The task of imagining such a future is as difficult as it is urgent today.

[The News](#)

Spontaneous strikes open a second round in the fight against right-wing government

5 June 2016, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The mobilisations are directed primarily against proposed laws that promote 'flexicurity' being put forward by the Minister of Employment and Labour. As with Valls and Hollande in France, the Christian Democrat Kris Peeters wants to take the battle into the organisation of work: annualisation [17] of working time (up to 45 hours / week), temporary contracts for an unlimited period of time, re-employment of the long-term sick ... But the discontent in the population is general: it is also about extending the time taken to

reach pension age, exclusions from the right to claim unemployment benefit, and other regressive measures that contrast with gifts to the rich and the bosses.

Facing the neoliberal steamroller, the wave of struggles in the autumn of 2014 highlighted the exceptional strength of the Belgian trade union movement and its ability to present an alternative. Three months of mobilisation nevertheless ended up being derailed, with union leaders unilaterally deciding to stop

everything "to give a chance for dialogue." This achieved absolutely nothing. Will we relive the same scenario? That is the question facing many trade unionists.

The union apparatus remains mobilised primarily to defend dialogue with the state and employers, allowing them to collaborate with austerity by damage limitation and keeping their control over the working class. But the government wants more: intoxicated by its success and enjoying the atmosphere created by the terrorist

attacks, it not only wants to transform the trade union tops into transmission belts for austerity but also push TU representation in businesses onto the ropes by outlawing picketing and removing the right of workplace representatives to object to the flexibilisation and casualisation of labour. This is a frontal attack, inspired by Thatcherism.

In response, the union dialogue strategy is in crisis and this is shown at two levels, which are combined: the return of spontaneous walkouts, on one hand, and the widely differing negotiating positions at all levels of union structures, on the other hand.

Air traffic controllers spontaneously withdrew their labour for several days after the attacks, denouncing their working conditions. French speaking prison guards have been on strike for five weeks already to protest against the lack of staff. French speaking train drivers have joined them since May 25 against a management diktat that wants to extend their working hours with loss of pay. Spontaneous actions have formed a common front which has led the Walloon CGSP (FGTB section in the public sector) to adopt a resolution that gives official support to all actions beyond May 31 [18]. There

is talk of a strike to the finish. The dynamic which is typical for the Belgian Labour movement, by which the radicalisation at the base is reflected in trade union bodies, has started.

For now, this dynamic is unfolding almost exclusively in the public sector in the south of the country, where there is an atmosphere of an impending general strike to drive the Michel government [19] from office. As a result the polarisation between left and right in unions is sharpening and is developing a communitarian twist. If the more right wing trade union apparatus in Flanders is not dragged along in turn, there is a fear that some union sectors might be torn apart on communitarian lines. This would have serious consequences for all workers. In particular, such a split would bring the ruling class closer to its strategic objective: the dismantling of social security - possibly combined with it being split on community lines, which has already been demanded by the liberal-nationalist NVA.

The government is betting on the North-South divide to push through and inflict a major defeat on the working class. It remains deaf to the calls of some of the bourgeois press for moderation. Far from making

concessions, "recognising its mistakes" and seeking to "bring a smile to workers (and all Belgians)," as it was recently urged to do by the financial daily L'Echo, those in power are sticking to their guns, even threatening to sanction strikers. This is a dangerous game. Because if the control over the rank and file by the trade apparatus is stronger in the north of the country, the movement of 2014 and the big demonstration of May 24 [20] show that workers' anger is no less than in the South.

Nearly two years after the farce of December 2014 [21], the fighting spirit of the sections of workers in struggle in areas opens up the possibility for workers to get pay back. Will the chance be taken? This largely depends on the initiative of trade unionists already fighting Barriers in trade union structures are numerous (and the PTB, with its line of tail ending official structures, is making no attempt to overcome them. But the pressure is rising: making an about-face, the head of the Flemish rail workers of the CGSP has just joined the call for strike action for the strike call on 31st May. If the dominoes were to continue to fall this way, the social climate could change completely, and even very quickly.

? â€˜I Just Wanted to Be Free': The Radical Reverberations of Muhammad Ali

4 June 2016, by **Dave Zirin**

The reverberations. Not the rumbles, the reverberations. The death of Muhammad Ali will undoubtedly move people's minds to his epic boxing matches against Joe Frazier and George Foreman, or there will be retrospectives about his epic "rumbles" against racism and war. But it's the reverberations that we have to understand in order to see Muhammad Ali as what he remains: the most important athlete to ever live. It's the reverberations that are

our best defense against real-time efforts to pull out his political teeth and turn him into a harmless icon suitable for mass consumption.



When Dr. Martin Luther King came out against the war in Vietnam in 1967, he was criticized by the mainstream press and his own advisors who told him to not focus on

"foreign" policy. But Dr. King forged ahead and to justify his new stand, said publicly, "Like Muhammad Ali puts it, we are allâ€"black and brown and poorâ€"victims of the same system of oppression."

When Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island, he said that Muhammad Ali gave him hope that the walls would some day come tumbling down.

When John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists on the medal stand in Mexico City, one of their demands was to "Restore Muhammad Ali's title." They called Ali "the warrior-saint of the Black Athlete's Revolt."

When Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) volunteers in Lowndes County, Alabama launched an independent political party in 1965, their new group was the first to use the symbol of a black panther. Beneath the jungle cat's black silhouette was a slogan straight from the champ: "WE Are the Greatest."

When Billie Jean King was aiming to win equal rights for women in sports, Muhammad Ali would say to her, "Billie Jean King! YOU ARE THE QUEEN!" She said that this made her feel brave in her own skin.

The question is why? Why was he able to create this kind of radical ripple? The short answer is that he stood up to the United States government... and emerged victorious. But it's also more complicated than that.

What Muhammad Ali didâ€”in a culture that worships sports and violence as well as a culture that idolizes black athletes while criminalizing black skinâ€”was redefine what it meant to be tough and collectivize the very idea of courage. Through the Champ's words on the streets and deeds in the ring, bravery was not only standing up to Sonny Liston. It was speaking truth to power, no matter the cost. He was a boxer whose very presence and persona taught a simple and dangerous lesson: "real men" fight for peace and "real women" raise their

voices and join the fray. Or as Bryant Gumbel said years ago, "Muhammad Ali refused to be afraid. And being that way, he gave other people courage."

My favorite Ali line is not him saying, "I hospitalized a rock. I beat up a brick. I'm so bad I make medicine sick" or anything of the sort. It was when he was suspended from boxing for refusing to be drafted into the Vietnam War. Ali was attending a rally for fair housing in his hometown of Louisville when he said:

"Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on Brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No I'm not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would cost me millions of dollars. But I have said it once and I will say it again. The real enemy of my people is here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality.... If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd join tomorrow. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I'll go to jail, so what? We've been in jail for 400 years."

Damn. This is not only an assertion of black power, but a statement of international solidarity: of oppressed

people coming together in an act of global resistance. It was a statement that connected wars abroad with attacks on the black, brown and poor at home, and it was said from the most hyper exalted platform our society offered at the time: the platform of being the Champ. These views did not only earn him the hatred of the mainstream press and the right wing of this country. It also made him a target of liberals in the media as well as the mainstream civil rights movement, who did not like Ali for his membership in the Nation of Islam and opposition to what was President Lyndon Johnson's war.

But for an emerging movement that was demanding an end to racism by any means necessary and a very young, emerging anti-war struggle, he was a transformative figure. In the mid-1960s, the anti-war and anti-racist movements were on parallel tracks. Then you had the heavyweight champ with one foot in each. Or as poet Sonia Sanchez put it with aching beauty:

It's hard now to relay the emotion of that time. This was still a time when hardly any well-known people were resisting the draft. It was a war that was disproportionately killing young Black brothers and here was this beautiful, funny poetical young man standing up and saying no! Imagine it for a moment! The heavyweight champion, a magical man, taking his fight out of the ring and into the arena of politics and standing firm. The message was sent." We are still attempting to hear the full message that Muhammad Ali was attempting to relay: a message about the need to fight for peace.

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The Philippines' New Strongman

4 June 2016, by [Alex de Jong](#)

He's known for his profanity-laden speeches, misogynistic jokes, and promises to give the police a free hand

to murder suspects. But he also proclaims himself to be a socialist and the [first leftist president](#) of the

Philippines.

What does his success represent? Is his rise really anything like the change

that he promises? And what does it mean for the Philippine left?

Oligarchy in the Philippines

To understand Duterte's success, we have to look past his self-styled image as the leader of a popular uprising. Instead, we must place him in the context of Philippine economics and politics.

The Philippine economy depends on profit from rents and the relative weakness of the state. The Philippines' underdeveloped industrial base and impoverished agricultural sector mean that rent is a major source of wealth.

Capitalists compete with each other to gain influence in the state apparatus, or even capture parts of it, to control markets and gain access to resources. Together, rent-seeking and competition for control of the state produces structural corruption which, in turn, produces institutionalized impunity.

Philippine capitalism is controlled by a ruling class [Alfred W. McCoy](#) has described as an "oligarchy" made up of "a cluster of families, knitted together by ties of blood and marriage," who combine "political power and economic assets to direct the nation's destiny."

A small number of these families, who started in in agriculture, have dominated the Philippine oligarchy since the colonial period.

When Spain opened Manila to trade in the second half of the nineteenth century, it produced a capitalist agricultural sector focused on international markets.

Spain attempted to build a centralized bureaucracy to control the elite Filipino families, but it failed miserably, instead provoking a rebellion that ended after the United States took power.

The United States introduced a degree of local autonomy into the country's regions and elections, allowing the landed elite to secure their political dominance. As McCoy writes, US

policies "created a new class of provincial politicians and a national legislature that opened state resources for privatization by established and emerging families."

Patron-client relationships became the backbone of Philippine politics: vertical connections ran from wealthy, landed politicians to less influential families in urban areas and then further down to the villages. Political parties became clusters of upper-class families and their clients, traditionally centered in Manila.

[The Marcos dictatorship](#) upset this arrangement. The United States supported Marcos because it thought a stronger, more centralized state would absorb nationalist challenges to its hegemony and ensure that the Philippines remained a stable pillar of US imperialism in Southeast Asia.

But this attempt at a passive revolution largely failed because of the ruling clique's predatory nature: they "privatized" the Philippine state to an unprecedented degree, further alienating the populace in the process.

After Marcos was overthrown in 1986, the Philippines reverted back to the "oligarchic democracy" described above, but with a few important differences. The Marcos interlude broke the previous existing two-party system, and new players rose to the top. A range of parties flourished.

But just as before, these parties did not fight for a coherent political platform: instead, they organized networks of patrons and clients.

Since the nineties, this system has not been fundamentally threatened, but the governments it has produced have often been unstable, challenged from below and riven by internal rivalries.

Meanwhile, a growing population and the state apparatus have significantly altered the traditional patron-client relationships. Increased use of violence and more dispersed forms of clientelism now supplement the paternalist patron-client relationships.

The line between politicians' personal property and public funds is thin as they need to distribute government jobs and contracts or to buy votes to

win support. The farther one gets from Manila, the more blatant these practices become.

All of this makes successful electoral campaigns exceedingly expensive: a politician's affiliation with tycoons and wealthy families is more important than platform substance. The kingmaking families might have *haciendero* roots but have branched out in finance, mining, construction, and other branches of the economy.

Exacerbating this situation, Philippine [campaign-financing laws](#) do not put limits on personal or corporate campaign donations and politicians do not have to reveal their backers until after the election.

The popular classes aren't ignored in campaign spectacles: politicians reach them with outright vote-buying, gifts, bribes, and campaign sorties filled with spectacle, but little substance. What is promised is almost never delivered: in this campaign, every candidate said they would end [contractual labor](#), though the chances of them going against the interests of the oligarchy in this way are slim.

The Humble Servant

Duterte's political career has flourished because of the oligarchy. He is related to the Durano and Almendras families, who have been prominent political figures in Duterte's birth region, Cebu, for decades.

The Dutertes themselves, writes Michael Cullinane in *An Anarchy of Families*, had "long been a significant political family in Danao," a city in Cebu province. Duterte's father, Vicente G. Duterte, was an attorney, mayor of Danao, and, after succeeding Alejandro Almendras, governor of Davao province from 1959 to 1965. This is where his son would build his political base.

After the [1986 People Power Revolution](#) brought down Marcos, Rodrigo Duterte became vice mayor of Davao City. He ran for mayor two years later and held the position for

ten years.

Almendras, by then a seasoned politician and logging magnate, as well as former Marcos cronies like Manuel Garcia, Elias Lopez, and Ricardo Limso supported Duterte's first steps into politics.

When Duterte reached the three-term limit for mayor, he became a member of the House of Representatives. He returned as mayor of Davao City three years later. He reached the limit again in 2010, so he became vice mayor, trading positions with his daughter, Sara Duterte-Carpio, who became mayor in his place.

In Davao City, Duterte cultivated his image as a humble servant of the people. But pre-election revelations about his personal wealth should surprise no one.

When it came out that Duterte has an undeclared bank account worth over \$4 million, he waved it away, saying it was from gifts from his "[wealthy friends](#) ." What wealth he did declare has shown remarkable growth: for the last nineteen years, it grew an average of 132.6 percent annually.

We should understand Duterte as a larger-than-usual version of the strongman, a not-unusual figure in Philippine politics. Political scientist Patricio Abinales's [work on Mindanao](#) describes the strongman as a regional representative of more powerful, Manila-based actors. Strongmen amass power through clientelist networks, control over vital enterprises and, "most important of all, a monopoly of the means of coercion and violence."

In this analysis, Rodrigo Duterte is an "outsider" in Manila, the representative of a less powerful, more provincial layer of the Philippine elite. Some of his allies, like proposed minister of finance Carlos "Sonny" Dominguez, also come from Mindanao-based clans or studied together with Duterte.

But after the elections, other establishment parties and turncoats from the incumbent government quickly joined Duterte's coalition, anxious to preserve their access to

power and public resources.

Leftist trappings aside, this is the clearest way to understand Duterte: a regional boss who managed to strike it big by winning the presidency, pushing aside a sector of the traditional high elite. The most significant change his election promises is that Manila's elite has been partially replaced by another, more provincial segment of the country's oligarchy.

Money and Murder

Duterte's camp managed to win by harnessing a wave of anger and dissatisfaction dispersed over different social classes.

He could not have won without his base in Davao City. Davao City is relatively thinly populated, with 1.45 million residents occupying 2,444 square kilometers. It is a commercial hub and by far the most important city on Mindanao, the second-largest island of the Philippine archipelago. Mindanao's economy is mainly agricultural, and it remains on the periphery of Philippine social and political life.

Now heralded as an example of good governance, in the mid-1980s Davao City was a battlefield.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), were at the height of their power. The NPA was testing urban warfare tactics in Davao, trying to develop methods to bring their [rural guerrilla war](#) into the cities.

But by the time Duterte became mayor, CPP influence in Davao City had collapsed. The government used an anticommunist militia, [Alsa Masa](#) (Risen Masses), made up of former army and police personnel, local thugs, and defectors from the NPA and supported by military commanders and local businessmen, to keep them out. They succeeded in getting rid of not only the underground left and the guerrillas, but also the legal, above ground left groups.

Alsa Masa was primarily active under Duterte's predecessor, but according to a 1988 report by Erik Guyot of the Institute of Current World Affairs, Duterte supported the anticommunist vigilantes. He supposedly gave them money and declared, "the peace and order situation has greatly improved with the advent of the Alsa Masa."

Today, Davao City is called "the safest city in Southeast Asia," and Duterte's perceived success in fighting crime there was central to his presidential campaign.

But his "tough stance on crime" is a euphemism: under his mayorship, a death squad nicknamed the [Davao Death Squad](#) or DDS murdered hundreds of people and became a fixture of the city. Just like Alsa Masa, the DDS is made up of former NPA fighters and local toughs, operating under the protection and with the cooperation of local authorities.

According to a [Human Rights Watch report](#) , "local activists say death-squad killings of alleged drug dealers, petty criminals, and street children in Davao City started sometime in the mid-1990s."

The report cites the Coalition Against Summary Execution (CASE) and the Tambayan Center for the Care of Abused Children (Tambayan) who claim the number of death-squad killings in Davao City increased dramatically in the second half of the 2000s "seemingly in response to increasing crime rates as the city grew.

CASE documented 814 death-squad killings in Davao City between 1998 and early 2009. The [victims](#) were members of the urban poor, mostly suspects in petty street crimes like drug use, small-scale drug dealing, or cell phone theft.

Duterte has denied DDS's existence, but made it clear he supports the extrajudicial killing of suspected criminals. He has even boasted of the number of people he has supposedly killed himself.

The murders have not been unpopular. They are seen by many as a practical response to an ineffective judicial

system and corrupt law enforcement. This belief is shared by many on the Philippine right more generally, who support police violence, including summary executions, as a “solution” to crime.

Beyond Davao, Duterte enjoys national popularity as a “crime-buster.” Many working-class Filipinos believe crime is spiraling out of control, an impression fed by the media’s sensational focus on particularly gruesome cases. But according to a poll by Social Weather Stations, Duterte voters come disproportionately from the wealthier layers of the population, who are attracted to his promise to eradicate street crime.

They are willing to accept increased state violence and to ignore the fact that Davao City’s safety is mostly fictional “based on manipulated statistics and without consideration of the city’s most vulnerable residents” in the hope that Duterte will repeat his reported success on a national scale.

To many of his admirers, Duterte is a like a patriarchal figure who protects “but also punishes” his inferiors. His strongman persona appeals to those conservatives who believe that the only thing wrong with the existing rules is their enforcement.

His supporters complain that Filipinos “lack discipline” and look to him to impose respect for order on the population at large. His proposals to implement a nationwide curfew, to ban smoking in the street, and to limit the sale of alcohol all fit this sensibility.

The fact that so many wealthy Filipinos support Duterte may be surprising. After all, it was elites that benefited most from the Aquino government. He implemented the kind of policies that have broad support in the more affluent parts of Philippine society, declared fighting corruption a priority, and succeeded according to neoliberal measures.

Philippine GDP grew by record numbers during his presidential term. By local standards, the Aquino government was exceptionally stable,

facing serious threats neither from the popular classes nor from other oligarchic factions.

But affluent Filipinos supported Duterte in the election, rejecting [Mar Roxas](#), the incumbent government’s candidate.

How did the Aquino government’s credibility break down so much so that Duterte could sweep the elections? One answer is that Aquino’s relative successes bred impatience, which was exacerbated as he came to be seen as a less and less effective leader.

This is not to say that the popular classes did not support Duterte. Philippine sociologist and political activist Walden Bello [cites](#) Duterte’s “railing against corruption and poverty, his obvious disdain for the rich” the *coños* as he called them “and above all, his coming across as “one of you guys’ that acted as a magnet to workers, urban poor, peasants, and the lower middle class.”

The Aquino government’s successes mainly benefited the wealthy, and the government came across as arrogant and out of touch when it ignored the popular classes’ criticism.

Roxas was plagued by similar weaknesses. As scion of one of the country’s most prestigious families (he is the grandson of Manuel Roxas, first president of the independent Philippine republic), he was too closely associated with the government and appeared too much like the career politician and privileged son of the high elite that he is to appeal to the dissatisfied electorate.

In a debate with Roxas, Duterte played up his ordinary-guy persona by making fun of the privileged policy wonk.

He said he would end the conflict between the Philippines and China over parts of the South China Sea (or West Philippine Sea) by personally planting a Philippine flag on the disputed atolls. Seeing his opponent’s stunned reaction, Duterte added he would get there on a jet ski.

This outsider flair has always played for him. Support for Duterte is

especially strong in his home region of Mindanao because his proposals directly address their grievances with Manila and seem to offer an end to decades of unrest.

His proposals for a more decentralized and federal system of government respond directly to those who feel neglected and exploited by what they call “imperial Manila.” Further, he supports autonomy for Muslim Filipinos.

The [Muslim rebels](#) in Mindanao renounced their original goal of secession long ago and now demand autonomy. Duterte’s opposition to military operations against them shows that he is more sympathetic to their complaints than traditional Manila oligarchs.

Finally, he promises to reopen peace talks with the CPP. NPA activity is largely concentrated in Mindanao and, after decades of “armed struggle,” many residents see that the government cannot make the insurgency disappear by simply pouring in more soldiers. But members of the high elite “who see the Maoist insurgency as the work of evil ideologues manipulating ignorant peasant folk” still believe that “godless Communism” needs to be crushed.

People believe Duterte can make peace with the Maoists because he developed good personal relationships with them in the eighties. Despite his association with former Marcos cronies, his political allies back then included Leoncio “Jun” Evasco Jr, a former CPP leader, and the late Erasto “Nonoy” Librado, secretary general of Kilusang Mayo Uno-Mindanao, the trade union movement associated with the pro-CPP “national-democratic” milieu.

He developed a live-and-let-live relationship with the guerrillas by not supporting military operations against NPA operations concentrated in the regions bordering Davao.

The legal national-democratic organizations have been relatively soft in their criticism of Duterte, treating him instead as a kind of ally. Much of the critical research on the DDS does

not come from the national-democratic human rights groups but from more broad left-liberal ones.

Duterte manages to balance the country's far right and the Maoists. Since 2001, he has endorsed parties from the national-democratic bloc while also voicing his admiration for Ferdinand Marcos and calling for his burial in the cemetery for national heroes.

Many of Duterte's supposed contradictions make more sense once he is put in his regional context. He can be a Filipino nationalist while supporting a decentralized government, calling for Muslim autonomy, and promoting peace with the CPP.

His strange combination of machismo, misogyny, and support for gay marriage makes sense when you understand the long tradition of a visible, but strongly delineated and non-threatening, homosexuality in Mindanao.

Mix-and-Match Elections

Duterte declared himself a socialist and the first leftist president of the Philippines "but there is little reason to believe this is anything more than demagoguery. The policies of his presidency seem to be more of the same.

Barely confirmed as the winner, Duterte made it clear that he intends to follow the main lines of Aquino's economic policies. Capital has responded favorably: a few days after the election, [Bloomberg](#) reported that Duterte "is reinvigorating financial markets in the Philippines with his transformation into a business-friendly leader."

His initial economic statements, as well as the suggested names for his cabinet (mostly establishment figures, many of whom were part of previous administrations), drew praise from the financial giant [JPMorgan](#), which declared that "financial markets will welcome the explicit commitment of the incoming administration in

keeping the current macro-economic policies."

In fact, it seems that Duterte will liberalize the Philippine economy even more than Aquino or Roxas would. He wants to remove the constitutional limit on [foreign ownership](#) of firms in the Philippines, to organize more Special Economic Zones, and to lower corporate taxes.

The Left, mostly unable to gain a foothold in an electoral field dominated by clientelism and corruption, has not been able to successfully oppose this.

After the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, the national democrats organized the [Partido ng Bayan](#) (People's Party), but after two disappointing elections, the party "practically dissolved itself." The situation has not improved much in the intervening years.

In 2010, two well-known national-democratic candidates, Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza, ran for Senate, but they did not finish among the winning twelve candidates.

Maza came in twenty-fifth with 3.6 million votes, while Ocampo received 3.3 million votes to finish in twenty-sixth place. The only national-democratic senatorial candidate in 2016, Neri Colmenares, gathered almost 6.5 million votes, but came in twentieth, failing to win a seat.

The Philippine left has had more success in the so-called party-list elections. Fifty-seven seats in the House of Representatives (20 percent of the total) are set aside for party lists, which are supposed to represent geographically dispersed and marginalized groups who would otherwise not be represented. Filipinos can vote for one of the party-lists in addition to specific candidates.

The first party-list elections took place in 1998 and saw the Philippine left's return to Congress. Several socialist and social-democratic groups, such as Sanlakas and Akbayan, managed to win seats.

The national democrats returned to electoral politics in 2001 with the organization of [Bayan Muna](#) (Nation

First). Since then, they have overtaken other leftist forces in the party-list elections and organized a variety of lists targeting different sectors.

But the Left is struggling here as well. The predatory elite have discovered that the system can be used to access government resources and have organized their own party lists.

In fact, several of the most electorally successful lists have little to do with the marginalized groups they supposedly represent. Instead, businessmen, former high-ranking government officials, and members of political families use them to get elected.

One way the Left has tried to overcome the hurdles put up by the oligarchs is through alliances with established bourgeois parties. But these alliances require the Left to make sweeping political concessions.

This was the road chosen by [Akbayan](#), which was originally created as an alliance between different socialist and social-democratic groups. It has been one of the more successful left-wing electoral formations.

But in 2010, it allied with Benigno Aquino and his Liberal Party. During the Aquino government, Akbayan moved closer and closer to the government, committing itself to the 2016 government candidate "no matter who it would be.

Akbayan's alliance seems to have paid off, at least for Ana Theresia Hontiveros, its senatorial candidate. After toning down her leftist profile and becoming almost indistinguishable from a liberal reformist, she finally made it to the winning twelve. But Akbayan itself fell from fifth (in 2013) to thirteenth in this year's party-list elections.

Dissatisfied with his party's unconditional support for Aquino and his Liberal Party, Akbayan's best-known representative, [Walden Bello](#), resigned his congressional seat in 2015. Commenting on his party's poor performance this year, Bello said; "I don't want to rub it in at this point but since I've been asked, I think the loss of over two hundred thousand votes

from 2013 and then slipping from fifth to thirteenth [was probably due to the party's] identification with the Liberal Party . . . "

Results for the national-democratic Bayan Muna were also disappointing. The party got its start in 2001 with the support of then-president [Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo](#) . "The CPP apparently was able to secure support from the Macapagal-Arroyo clan that helped Bayan Muna receive the most number of votes for the Party List and the maximum of possible seats," writes Dominique Caouette in his 2004 study of the CPP. But this year Bayan Muna fell to fourteenth place (from third in 2013).

The national-democratic bloc regularly makes alliances with bourgeois politicians founded on basis of written political agreements. But nobody really expects the politicians to uphold these documents.

What matters is the transactional nature of the agreement: the national democrats provide their grassroots supporters' votes in exchange for campaign resources and publicity. The alliances do win congressional seats, but do little to build an independent socialist movement because it links the Left to their senior partners.

It has also led to unexpected alliances, such as in 2010, when national-democratic candidates shared the platform with Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr, the proud son of the late dictator who was then running (successfully, as it turned out) for Senate.

This year, however, there was an interesting experiment that could offer another way forward. After resigning his seat, Walden Bello ran as an independent. Although he still considers himself an Akbayan member, the party did not support his campaign.

Bello also refused money from the oligarchs, turned down support from religious leaders, and did not form alliances with the established parties. Instead, the campaign relied on the support of social movements and progressive groups.

The number of votes Bello gathered was small: just over one million. But Bello's independent candidacy and progressive platform can become a first step toward something bigger.

As always, the underground layers of the national-democratic movement, the CPP itself, and its diplomatic front, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) did not officially endorse any candidate, calling for "revolution, not elections."

But one prominent Maoist had some nice things to say about Duterte. [Jose Maria Sison](#) , the founding chair of the CPP and still the main ideologue of Philippine Maoism, declared in pre-election interviews that a Duterte presidency would be the best option for "national unity." He also expressed optimism about the reforms the new government could bring. In a first for Philippine presidential campaigns, Sison and Duterte talked (via Skype) a few weeks before the elections.

Makabayan, the aboveground political alliance of national democrats, declared its support for presidential candidate Grace Poe. But media reports claim that part of their movement did support Duterte.

Peter Tiu Lavina, a Duterte spokesperson, criticized the national-democratic support for Poe, claiming that "at least their units in Mindanao which were more grounded did not go with the selfish, myopic and opportunist posturing of its national higher organs."

CPP units gave Duterte's image as a peace-builder another boost by handing over prisoners of war to him personally while his election campaign was in full swing. Duterte claims Sison, who has been living in the Netherlands in exile for the last few decades, looks forward to coming home once peace negotiations are reopened. Duterte has also offered the CPP several cabinet positions, an offer Sison welcomed as "magnanimous."

Luis Jalandoni of the NDFP said the proposal is "a big step towards unity and will remove the shackles of oppression and exploitation." The NDFP even suggested Duterte could be the Philippines' Hugo Chávez.

But Duterte's proposals put the CPP in a difficult position. After years of cultivating ties with the CPP units in Mindanao, he has sympathy among them. If they refuse his request for support, Duterte could try to drive a wedge between the Mindanao units and the party leadership.

But if the CPP accepts his offer, they risk ending up as apologists for a bourgeois government. Sison's suggestion that the proposed cabinet positions go to qualified "patriots," who are not necessarily CPP members, would put some distance between the party and the government.

Duterte's plan to reopen peace negotiations poses similar dilemmas. The CPP has always insisted that armed revolution is the only way to solve the country's problems and claims their guerrilla army is on the verge of escalating to a new, higher level.

The new government however wants the Maoists to give up [arms](#) . Refusing the offer to negotiate would cost the CPP support, but they need more mass support to force the government to make meaningful concessions.

It is telling that Duterte offered posts in social affairs to the national democrats while leaving the real core of state power, such as finance and the military, in the hands of establishment representatives.

It is perhaps still too early to tell what kind of "revolution" Duterte will bring to the Philippines. One thing that seems certain is that citizens can expect experiments with draconian law-and-order policies. Duterte has said he wants to reintroduce the death penalty "by hanging."

His history in Davao City shows he does not care for suspects' civil rights. The [poorest](#) , most vulnerable parts of society will pay the highest price for this. Police violence is already rampant. Now the cops have a president who thinks they should be able to act without consequences.

The situation may seem bleak from the outside. A Duterte presidency will not tackle the impunity, poverty, and inequality that plague the country.

Only a strong left can do this. The Philippines already has a relatively powerful left, but it is dispersed over a large number of political groups, movements, and social organizations.

Translating this social weight into political representation is difficult, as the recent election results proved. But the building of an independent, socialist left is long overdue, and there

are many committed activists who can make it a reality.

28 May 2016

[Jacobin](#)

A battered austerity regime returns to power in Dublin

3 June 2016, by **JM Thorne**

The broad outlines of the Irish process will be familiar across Europe. Grinding austerity has stoked popular anger, eroded political structures and led to a greater instability. However, the absence of a working class party means that austerity continues, though a great cost to the stability of capitalist rule.

One former casualty of the workers anger was Fianna Fail. Their programme of populist nationalism had made them the party of government for most of modern Irish history but they were decimated for bankrupting the country. One consequence of the absence of a convincing opposition is that Fianna Fail has returned in this election. It was the turn of the traditional alternate government of a right-wing Fine Gael supported by the Labour party, to be smashed up and Labour ground into the earth.

There was an obvious way to resolve the crisis. The two opposition parties of the Irish civil war, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, could form a national government. Both were keen to avoid this as it would confirm a widespread sentiment that there was only one party of capital and point up the need for a working class party.

It is also worth noting that the election was fought on the claim of sustained Irish recovery. If this were true then the capitalists would be fighting for a place in government to bask in the new era of prosperity. The fact that most parties fought to avoid office

tells us everything about their own belief in an ongoing recovery.

Confidence and supply

In the event the two parties agreed a "confidence and supply" arrangement that would allow a minority Fine Gael government to operate while allowing Fianna Fail to reserve for itself the safer seats on the opposition benches. Another set of protracted negotiations produced a programme for government and the signing up of a gaggle of independents to provide the number of votes that allow the daily operation of the government.

When the dust settled and the new government was elected Michael Noonan, architect of the last five years of austerity, emerged yet again as the minister for finance. He remarked complacently that the various deals and manoeuvres had no budgetary significance. That is that Irish capital, despite a few bruises, is proceeding with the next round of austerity.

No-one has as yet drawn attention to the "right2change" union leaders and leftists who pushed an electoral alliance as the mechanism that would defeat austerity.

Semi-colonial state

The details of the various agreements illuminate the nature of Irish society. The confidence and supply

arrangement between the major capitalist parties began with a declaration that the new government would remain within the fiscal space allowed by the Troika. The other major agreement was that both will stand with the Lansdowne Road agreement that enforces continued austerity, with job speedup and wages cuts in the public sector.

Irish capitalism will continue to act as agents for imperialism with their chief aim the continued impoverishment of the working class. Hardly surprising that public support for the new government, on its first day in office, hovered around 20%!

The full programme for government involved a suspension of contentious water charges and a rejigging of unpopular taxes. It was spiced with a range of bribes in terms of resources for constituencies aimed at winning the votes of independent TDs, beefed up with government appointments for those who signed up.

The reality of Ireland's semi-colonial status is evident. Ireland, with 1% of the European population, took responsibility for 42% of the banking debt. The finance minister declares that the government would not dream of asking Europe to honour promises to reduce the debt. All economic plans are within the fiscal space allowed by the Troika.

Internally civic society is bound together by a dependent nationalism, leavened by endless corruption. Basic services such as health and housing

lag far behind advanced capitalist economies and are now in ruins following years of austerity.

Political patronage

Everyone knows that basic services are not guaranteed and that political patronage may be required to gain access to them. Known criminals are elected and re-elected in the hope that the "cute hoor" can steal some resources for their constituents.

TD's selling their vote to achieve advantage for their region is considered commonplace. One TD got improvements to a regional airport. Another asked for a cardiac hospital (he got his way, with the figleaf of a review of medical need). The former health minister remarked in despair that these deals made impossible a national health service. He is undoubtedly right, but given that the health service is the most expensive and inefficient in Europe and is in a state of collapse, the free-for-all for resources is to be expected.

So capitalism continues in a more unstable form. The government is a patchwork of conflicting interests, held aloft by the abstention of the main opposition party. On the opposition benches Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein jostle to present themselves as defenders of the people while presenting identical policies. The socialist groups are pushed to the sidelines. They were unable to join in the jostling for government and were restricted to the fantasy task of keeping Fianna Fail honest on the issue of water charges.

Water

Fianna Fail, who originally began the water privatisation process, were aided in their recovery by calling for a suspension of charges and the abolition of the water company. Part of their agreement with Fine Gael is to kick the issue down the road, with a 9 month suspension of charges.

The issue will continue to cause problems for government. Popular opposition is based partly on exasperation with endless austerity,

growing more acute as workers are told the economy is in recovery. Alongside this exasperation was endless bribery, corruption and outright theft in the setup of Irish water and the use of public money to install water meters - a corruption that is everywhere and that goes on with impunity.

There is no easy way out. Europe insists that Ireland must privatise water, but is unlikely to enforce the regulations, relying on financial pressure. A decision to reverse water privatisation would add significantly to government costs. The total cost fits exactly into the fiscal space under government control. However continuing with water on the state books would weaken Ireland's credit rating and absorb monies needed to mitigate other elements of austerity and maintain social peace. In the discussion ahead the capitalists will not be slow to ask which aspects of housing, health and education should be sacrificed. An opposition unwilling to step outside the Troika budget will have little in the way of an answer. Sinn Fein have squared the circle of opposing water privatisation while staying within the troika programme by pleading exceptionalism - water is so important to life that it must remain a public resource. What then of the right to Housing? health? Education? Decent wages?

The narrow space of Troika rule

Water privatisation is a single part of a much wider process of selloff and the demolition of public resources. A big ideological element of the offensive is the argument that there is no alternative - and in fact there is not within current Irish society and the financial constraints of the Troika.

The capitalist class are foursquare behind water privatisation. They fear working class mobilization and hope to defuse anger with a fudge that preserves the privatisation process. Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein want to pose as an opposition, but have signed up very firmly to responsible budgets inside the terms set by Europe.

And a perfect storm is coming. The books were cooked in a ploy to win Fine Gael election victory and will have to be adjusted downwards.

Economic indicators show a fallback in the Global and European economies. Yet the trumpeting of Irish economic recovery has led workers to believe that wages cuts negotiated by the union leaders will be reversed. They are especially concerned about "pulling the ladder up" - setting lower rates of pay for new entrants to the workforce. Bitter industrial disputes are building up in transport, education and retail, with more disputes to come.

A major crisis is emerging in health. The service has been cut to the bone. Every year major expenditures have to be added to the health budget simply to prevent total collapse. Some services, such as mental health, have effectively been withdrawn. A recruitment crisis is growing as staff choose migration rather than accept the wages and conditions on offer.

Teaching unions in the secondary sector are seeking to step outside the extra hours imposed on them by the Haddington Road agreement. The issue is explosive, because the agreement contains an emergency finance act that allows government to withhold pay and pensions from non-compliant workers. The clause is a massive scabbing mechanism supported by the Congress of trade unions and would expose the role of the leading bureaucrats is suppressing workers resistance.

Housing

Yet looming over all these issues is the housing catastrophe. Workers are caught between NAMA, the agency in control of property bought with the workers money to save speculators, and the ruling class, comprising many landlords and property speculators.

The role of NAMA is to garner foreign exchange by selling off property at knockdown prices to New York's vulture capitalists. The recovery has seen working class disposable income shrink while the rich use their gains to fuel a housing boom that puts both

housing and rental properties out of their reach. Single people are forced onto the streets. Every day sees another family pushed into emergency accommodation in a single-room bedsit.

Last year 75 social housing units were built in the Irish state. The ruling class of landlords and speculators are petrified by the scale of the threat but can see no solution from inside the cage of their own class interests. Proposals include making houses smaller, more tax breaks for speculators and tearing up housing regulations. Former labour minister Alan Kelly claims that a comprehensive solution would breach the constitutional right to private property.

The first initiative of the new government is to announce a major housing development in Dublin. Yet it is no different from past projects. Public land is to be handed over to private developers for open-ended development. The developers will make hand over fist and the scheme

will contain hotels and retail developments. Only 10% of houses will be reserved for social housing. The big new idea is to scrap all democratic accountability and fast-track the development so that only developers and state officials are involved.

In case we had forgotten the endemic government corruption, a report into Garda malpractice reverses an earlier report. The Garda commissioner did nothing wrong and neither did the minister. The Garda did nothing wrong but there were problems with systems and resources. The whistleblower did nothing wrong but may have overstated the problem. However the sleepy-gas backfired when it emerged that the new commissioner and the Garda generally had fun a campaign of slander and vilification against Garda McCabe, who made the complaints.

Crisis of perspective

Yet a crisis of perspective paralyzes the socialist groups. They have sunk everything into winning a few Dail seats only to find that they are largely irrelevant inside the chamber. They are not prepared to sell their votes to the capitalists or to sanctify Sinn Fein as the nucleus of a new left party, yet the only role open to them is to operate as the “right2change” group – Sinn Fein in dray, back by the left union bureaucracy and the socialist groups providing cover. Their own pretence at unity has proved a hollow sham. In the multiple crises facing Irish workers electoralism and reformism are wearing thin.

Outside the Dail real struggles are broadening and intensifying. In education, health, transport and retail stores workers are moving into confrontation with the bosses. Housing is a timebomb ready to explode. The militants who struggle in the workplaces and the communities must be convinced of the need for a unified working class movement, of the need for a working class party.

After the demonstration against Michel-De Wever: now we must continue

3 June 2016, by **Thomas Weyts**

The demonstration of the joint trade union front on May 24 once again saw huge numbers taking part. As usual, it is difficult for anyone to count exactly, but we were certainly at least 60,000. A real success, especially when we know that the demonstration was launched at relatively short notice, in the midst of the campaign for the social elections. [22]. Furthermore, it took place in a political and social climate that is still marked deeply by the aftermath of the terrorist attacks (on March 22). A climate in which the union leaderships had put, so to speak, all actions on hold, thus demobilizing, not to say demoralizing, many members and activists.

The demonstration comes at a time when the Michel-De Wever government seems weakened. After the attacks in Paris and Brussels, it tried to use the passivity of the union leaderships, which cancelled all actions and passively submitted to the repressive security policy, to launch its attacks on our social and democratic rights with greater intensity. But security, security policies and the beating of the war drum also have a price: millions of euros more for the police and for new fighter planes, but at the same time, massive budget cuts for prison staff, airport workers, etc., which did not go by without meeting opposition. So there was quickly a new series of

strikes and social actions.

The right-wing parties of the government are not doing well in recent opinion polls either. The N-VA (right-wing Flemish nationalist party) would suffer significant losses if elections were to be held now and the other parties of the majority of the other parties would also experience serious setbacks. In Wallonia and Brussels, it would be especially the PTB (radical left) which would gain ground; in Flanders it would unfortunately be the Vlaams Belang (Flemish far right) which would gain strength, although it would mainly be a question of a rightwards movement, from the N-VA to the Vlaams Belang.

The "left" as a whole, SP.A (social democrats), Greens and PvdA (Flemish PTB), would also progress in Flanders, which is of course remarkable news. But there is still clearly a lot of work ahead to build everywhere a credible left political alternative, firmly rooted and clearly anti-capitalist.

Down with the Peeters Law

The trade-union leaderships, with Rudy De Leeuw at their head, proclaim everywhere that the goal par excellence of the present actions is to block the "Peeters Law" aimed at lengthening the duration of working time. A victory against these plans would certainly be good, and would give a boost to social resistance. But even around this after all quite limited objective, we have to give ourselves the means of achieving it.

The government would in fact like to push through parliament a lot of legislation on this subject, preferably already in the summer months before the parliamentary recess. To rely solely on new actions in September (another demonstration of the joint trade union front) and October (another 24-hour strike, this time with the support of the CSC-SAC and CGSLB-ACLVB) is not enough. The FGTVB has called for another demonstration on June 24, but the leaderships of the CSC-ACV (Catholic union confederation), with the exception of the French-speaking workers of the CNE, and the CGSLB-ACLVB (liberal trade-union confederation) do not at present want to support this strike call.

Do the CSC-ACV and CGSLB-ACLVB think then that the government will change its mind with a demonstration? Or are a couple of technical concessions from Peeters at the bargaining table enough for them?

It can be said that statements such as those of the president of the FGTVB (socialist union confederation), Marc Goblet, do not inspire us with much confidence. To say on RTBF on the evening of the demonstration that anything that Peeters is proposing can already be done today, but as long as

it is "negotiated with the unions," is in itself perhaps quite true, but as a perspective, the "negotiated" maintenance of a lengthening of the duration of working time and flexibility is very thin gruel for most of us.

What about the demand for the reduction of working time without loss of pay and with compensatory hiring, as it was put in the list of demands of the joint trade union front before the demonstration? This demand cannot be only for propaganda or to keep us happy, but must become again a real perspective in our struggle, to which we are committed, all of us together. And what about the demand for removal of all the anti-social measures that we have been saddled with in recent years by Michael De Wever and before that, the Di Rupo government (against which we also conducted actions!)?

Save our public services

The fact that many union leaders are only putting forward the Peeters Law as the central point also threatens to abandon much of the public services to their fate. In fact, workers in the public services are not only faced with these measures, but also with wide-ranging cuts in their services, a new attack on their pensions and much more.

Prison guards, railway workers, air traffic controllers at Zaventem airport... have already taken action several times in recent weeks, with or without the support of part of the leadership of their unions. The French-speaking prison guards have continued courageously to strike for weeks; the day after the demonstration, strikes broke out spontaneously on the railways at different places, against the management of HR-Rail which already wants unilaterally to make its employees work longer, without waiting for Peeters.

What are the socialist CGSP-ODOC, the Christian trade union confederations and the Free Trade Union of the Civil Service VSOA

waiting for to link up all these movements and converge towards a generalized movement? For the improvement of working conditions in all the public sectors. For an urgent and indispensable refinancing of all equipment in public facilities (railways, post, education, prisons...)? In short, for resistance against all the neoliberal demolition policies?

On May 31, there will be strikes in various public services. There will also be demonstrations and/or rallies of activists in Brussels, Wavre (home of Prime Minister Michel) and Ghent. Unfortunately, these actions are uncoordinated: the CSC-ACV is bringing its members (French and Flemish speakers) to Brussels, ACOD (Flemish CGSP) is conducting an action in Ghent and the Francophone CGSP is going to Wavre. So far (as of May 26), the leadership of the ACOD in Flanders has, unlike its counterparts in Wallonia and Brussels, not yet managed to come out with a clear call for a strike on the railways on May 31, although spontaneous actions are starting.

As for the promised solidarity between different groups of workers, there is so far not much sign of it; the regional and central union leaderships are not calling on workers in the private sector to express their support or to testify support or take part in the day of action by the public services. It is not too late to bring about change on this aspect, but time is really starting to be short!

Build the general strike

The recent spontaneous movements and the success of the last demonstration prove once again that people, and above all the active forces of the workers' movement, have had enough. Enough of taking blows without being able to counter them with the necessary resistance, enough of seeing day after day our social achievements demolished. Demonstrating, and even a new united strike in June, will not suffice for long. We must dare to draw the lessons of the strike movement in 2014.

To only plead for a "real social consultation," as do De Leeuw and Leemans, after having themselves realized for the hundredth time that with the present right-wing governments and the employers, it makes no sense to negotiate. It is not just wasting the time of the union members and activists but frankly taking them for fools.

No, we must dare to build a general strike. A general strike movement is more than just a national 24-hour strike. It is a movement that dares to go to the end, until the demands are granted. "Until the finish." A movement that will also experience ups and downs, where one sector that is already in action will draw in the other, where new forces mobilize for the first time, with all their illusions and imperfections but also with fresh ideas and a new approach.

A movement where there must also be a big place for the active involvement of the rank and file, including the least organized, with democratic decision-making, as broad as possible, by members and activists of the unions, and not only at leadership level. From now on, general assemblies at all levels, from the workplaces to joint action by different sectors, with democratic votes on further actions and on the list of demands!

Let us add to this that we must not only make our voice heard within our unions, and certainly not passively wait for slogans from above, but take our own initiatives wherever possible, in workplaces and sectors. The prison guards, railway workers and air traffic controllers have given us an example here. All struggles do not lead to victory, but not to fight inevitably leads to a defeat!

Traps and ambushes, but we can avoid them

Easily? Surely not, there are plenty of dangers and pitfalls on that path. We can quote a few of them:

- We have already spoken above of the risk of division between the private

and public sectors. The best approach is to start together, and along with unifying demands that help everyone to move forward, also take up the specific demands and aspirations of all sections of the working population. Besides that, we also need to go all out for active solidarity, as wide as possible, with everyone who is already in action at a particular time.

- The danger of division and even splits between different communities [23] within the trade-union movement. However, we still want to make it clear here that this danger seemed the least during the action plan at the end of 2014, when we were seriously in action in Flanders as well as in Wallonia and Brussels. It is precisely the different approach of the unions themselves at the negotiating table, where everyone hopes to win "their" crumbs, each with another strategy (to the extent that there is one) that increase enormously the risk. A new common battle around comprehensive demands can again make this danger retreat to the background or even eliminate it.

- It is clear that besides the fact of the unremitting attacks on the unions, at least in certain parts of the media but also by politicians, the euro began to fall, and some people are again arguing in favour of a more subtle attack. There is again a chance for a great movement of social resistance, an explosion that might be more difficult to channel this time. It is certain now that for very many trade unionists, it has become clear that the restarting of negotiations after the 2014 strikes did not work, on the contrary. Most workers are rightly, immensely attached to their union; that does not mean they are attached to their present union leaderships. And even less to their failed strategy of negotiating at all costs, which has brought only defeats and a retreat on the social terrain.

So here and there people also call for the restarting of the dialogue, or even for small concessions around a form of tax on large fortunes (mainly in the CD and V). We cannot fall into the same trap as we did after the movement of 2014 and be drawn into a new round of negotiations for crumbs, or even a new "tax shift"

which ended up by being carried out completely on the backs of people.

Are our union leaderships again hanging around the table? Only under democratic control, day after day, by members and activists who must have the last word, not just the central leaderships. Stop or "suspend" actions? Only if the demands are won, and after the agreement of the rank and file!

Michel-Peeters-De Wever: back off

Such a strike can in our opinion only be built by us around the demand "Down with the Peeters Law." Such a movement will inevitably raise the question of the withdrawal of all austerity measures, from the raising of the retirement age to the attacks against the index and attacks against the unemployed, the sick and pensioners. And also the demand for real wealth tax, the abolition of military spending and the need for an alternative environmental energy policy.

Such a movement must also take seriously into account and dare to put on the table the demands of women for real equality and an end to all forms of discrimination, the demands of asylum seekers and undocumented people for of society.

To harden in this way, the trade union movement must, as well as taking action on the social terrain, work on a political response to the entire policy of the right, in all its aspects.

For us, and for tens of thousands of militant trade unionists along with us, it has already been clear for a long time: with the right, there is nothing to negotiate except the weight of our chains. This government must fall, by our struggle from below. Let us actively win to this idea our colleagues and the large majority of the unions, as well as movements like Hart boven Hard and everything that is a victim of austerity policies.

Harassment of women in trade-union demonstrations: Enough is enough!

As in previous demonstrations, during this one women demonstrators were again attacked, sexually, physically and verbally. That the men involved were sober or completely drunk changes nothing; such behaviour cannot be tolerated. It is high time for unions to make clear to their members that this is not allowed, and to take the necessary measures against members and activists who behave in this way. It is also urgent to devote

much more attention to this question in union education courses. It is totally unacceptable that many women do not feel safe, or feel less safe than men, during union activities, and are thus at risk of being pushed out of the movement.

Small-scale clashes and Commissioner Vandersmissen

At the dispersal of the demonstration in the neighborhood of the Gare du Midi, there were some clashes with the police. As reported by the police themselves, few trade unionists were

involved. The Antifascist Front and the French investigation group Résistance again noticed a number of infiltrators from the far right, just as was the case with small-scale clashes after other union demonstrations.

As is known, the Brussels Commissioner Vandersmissen was wounded in the head. We have no sympathy for this individual who once again, on May 24, behaved in a very provocative manner, as we saw on different video images. We hope therefore that he will as soon possible be able to take things easy as he gets older, with early retirement or in another job where he can do less damage with his sympathy for the far right and his tough approach to his profession.

May 27, 2016

What does the success of People before Profit candidates mean?

2 June 2016, by John McAnulty

The results was generally welcomed by political commentators as showing that the Irish peace process had come of age and that the Stormont assembly had matured to the point where it could accommodate a socialist presence.

The candidates responded to the publicity with a great deal of bombast. Eamon McCann sang the internationale and announced that the new movement was neither Orange or Green, but a socialist movement gathering votes from across the sectarian divide.

It was not long before these claims were challenged. A Sinn Fein supporter carried out an analysis of transfer patterns and showed that the PBP vote came almost exclusively

from disaffected Sinn Fein and SDLP voters. It was part of a wider pattern of dissatisfaction among nationalist voters which involved a fall in the overall vote and an increase in votes for independents. Evidence of vote transfer from unionist supporters was vanishingly small.

SWP members defended their organization, arguing that the vote did not invalidate their non-sectarian policy.

Electoralist alliances

That won't wash. The SWP proclaimed their neutrality on the Irish national question while at the same time

targeting over many years the two most deprived nationalist constituencies in North. The Socialist Party, with their own front, Labour Alternative, stood in unionist areas with derisory results.

So behind the bombast was a very carefully crafted and exclusively electoral strategy. When we see that the vote came, not on the back of working class upsurge, but on the back of a substantial defeat for the working class and the imposition of the Fresh Start austerity programme, it is necessary to investigate further.

Unlike the majority of socialist electoral gains these gains for the SWP were not based on an upsurge in struggle - rather the reverse. What brought victory was a series of

alliances. Election statements were aimed at specific constituencies, but each had less to say than met the eye.

Don't mention Sinn Fein

The main constituency was dissatisfied nationalist voters and this was addressed by statements on the Casement park scandal, where planning and safety regulations had been set aside to force through a GAA superstadium. Gerry Carroll decried "poor administration" but stopped well short of exposing the sectarian sharing out of spoils and rampant corruption involved in the deal.

In addition in both constituencies there was a substantial republican vote. The republican groupings do not stand candidates for Stormont, but are willing to lend their votes. They got almost nothing in return - a vague statement of concern about prisoners - but the intervention of Bernadette McAliskey in support of the PBP campaign was decisive in ensuring this vote.

Finally the PBP campaign appears to have been the only campaign to voice opposition to the Fresh Start austerity offensive, but PBP clarified their opposition by saying they would work with UNITE and UNISON trade union leaderships around campaigns such as local mental health. As both union leaderships have signed up to Fresh Start, the statement amounts to nothing more than dancing in the cracks inside an austerity budget.

Minimalist

Programme

These positions translate into a minimalist programme for the new MLAs. Asked to accept that his election was due to Sinn Fein's failure to alleviate levels of deprivation in West Belfast, Gerry Carroll managed to answer without mentioning Sinn Fein. In fact there are few direct criticisms. Those who see PBP as a left opposition to Sinn Fein are clearly unaware of the level of collaboration between the groups on both sides of the border.

However the key alliance in the electoral jigsaw is the alliance with the left of the trade union bureaucracy. Both Carroll and McCann are closely involved with the trade unions. They can be said to be on the left, but hardly be called a left opposition.

So when, in his first speech in Stormont, Eamonn McCann criticises the Stormont executive for not fighting hard enough against the cuts, he reinforces the Sinn Fein narrative that the cuts are "British cuts" and the trade union narrative that we can pressure and persuade "our politicians" to protect us from austerity and that the best thing is to keep lobbying and avoid confrontation.

Sinister mantra

But the most sinister mantra is the claim that PBP are neither Orange nor Green, but socialist. This is quite a shift to the right for a group that historically defended the democratic

validity of the call for a united Ireland.

Again it is a reflection of the ideology of the trade union bureaucracy - a neutrality on the national question that in a heartbeat becomes capitulation to Loyalism and the promotion of sectarian gangsters to be accepted as representatives of the Protestant workers they oppress.

So the task of socialists becomes one of polishing their non-sectarian halos. Sectarianism is yet again some form of disease from which "all sides" suffer equally and the socialists are blind to the material base of sectarianism in the structures of the Assembly they sit in and in the background sponsorship of the British state.

A SWP spin doctor has had the bright idea that this election can be compared to the election of two of Socialist Democracy's progenitor People's Democracy councillors during the hunger strikes. In terms of politics the current programme comes closer to the rise of the old Northern Ireland Labour Party. There was room for the NILP in the old Stormont as long as it remained stable. When that political structure began to decay it vanished like smoke.

Today the excitement around the new political formation was over in days as yet more crises and instability hit Stormont. A major part of that instability is the disenchantment among nationalist workers. The refusal of the two PBP MLAs to recognise the base on which they were elected and to declare unrelenting hostility to the institution they sit in is an obstacle to the task of building on that resistance.

A tale of two South Africas

2 June 2016, by **Tom Bramble**

The freeway out of Johannesburg heading north to Tshwane (Pretoria) is a top-quality road lined on both sides by beautiful parks and grand houses.

Twenty minutes out of town, the houses give way to expansive air-conditioned shopping malls, smart office parks and warehouses.

All the big international brands are here. Cranes dot the skylines. The cars on the road are late model, and the drivers speed along unhindered at 75

miles an hour. Although the drivers are for the most part white, a minority are Black, some of the 4 million or so who have broken through the class barrier since the fall of apartheid. Their numbers have doubled in the past decade.

Turning off the freeway about half an hour short of Tshwane, you enter a different world. You've encountered the first "informal settlement." Here you witness life as it is for millions of South Africans and migrants from elsewhere across the continent, living in shacks put together from corrugated iron sheets.

Now, the main means of transport is on foot along dusty, broken-up roads, with large pools of fetid water, uncollected garbage and piles of burning rubbish on each side. The air-conditioned malls are replaced by "spaza shops," run out of people's homes where people with a few rand try to make a go by selling cheap goods to their impoverished neighbors.

Further along, into Tembisa, the informal settlement gives way to the township proper. Here you may find a few privately owned brick houses mortgaged to the banks, a KFC and a string of more modern-looking shops.

But these are outnumbered by the tiny four-room, apartheid-era "matchbox" houses—two bedrooms, one kitchen, one living room, shower and toilet outdoors—and the so-called RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses, little more than tiny cabins, which have been built in

large numbers since 1994. Try as you might, you won't see more than one or two white faces in Tembisa, the region's largest township.

On the drive back to Johannesburg we were stuck in traffic as the minibus taxis, packed tight with passengers and held together with duct tape and fencing wire, jostled for space on the road with pedestrians going home—little wonder that 100 pedestrians are killed each week on the roads of South Africa.

But alongside the narrow road was another road, half built, the beginning of an extra two lanes to aid the flow of traffic. This has been under construction for five years, testimony to the shocking waste and corruption caused by the ANC's decision to outsource public construction of roads and houses to the private sector.

Outsourcing has been a gold mine for the new layer of grasping "tenderpreneurs," sometimes beneficiaries of "black economic empowerment," who grease the palms of ANC politicians to win the contract knowing that they can recoup the money once the paperwork has been signed. As for the road itself, well that can wait until they've spent the money.

None of this is new. Anyone with eyes to see has noticed for years the slow progress to end the yawning gap inherited from apartheid. The 1994 settlement has brought emancipation to a few. But for the majority of

Blacks, not much has changed—10 million live in extreme poverty, and household incomes are one-sixth of those of whites.

And with the economy staggering under the impact of the mining bust, hundreds of thousands of workers are threatened with retrenchment, adding to the millions already unemployed. Meanwhile, those who dominate ownership and control of the big mining companies, banks and industrial corporations remain lily-white for the most part.

What is new, however, is that things are stirring politically. The ANC government is deeply factionalized, with two wings at war with each other over the spoils of office. Divisions at the top are creating space for movement below.

The police shooting dead 34 striking platinum miners at Marikana in August 2012, on the orders of senior figures in the ANC government, marked the start of a new period in South African politics. Unions are breaking from the grip of the ANC.

On the campuses, there is every reason to expect that last year's wave of student protest will not be the last. In a context where the results of majority rule have fallen far short of the high hopes of 1994, workers and students are now getting back on their feet, organizing and demanding their rights.

May 05 2016

[Red Flag](#)

“Only a government led by Unidas Podemos can fight the Troika”

1 June 2016, by Miguel Urbán Crespo

The candidate of the extreme right has come very close to being elected president in Austria

It is something unprecedented in Europe. It would have been the first far right head of state since the 1930s, which led us to very dark stages of our

history. It is like Gramsci said, the old is dying and the new is not yet born, and in this chiaroscuro monsters are born. And we are seeing monsters in

Europe. The FPÖ- is in the same European parliamentary group as the Front National, the Northern League, the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders and other xenophobes and racists. In one of the presidential debates in Austria a Muslim citizen asked Norbert Hofer how he should vote; and the candidate recommended that he should not vote, that it was not convenient. It is very illustrative.

How can the extreme right aspire to the presidency in a country such as Austria, with all the connotations that has, in the Europe of the twenty-first century?

There are Austrian and European elements. In Austria there was a process of de-Nazification as in Germany although not very intense. Already in 1949 the predecessor party of the FPÖ- headed by ex-leaders of the Austrian SS won 11% of the vote. Another factor is the crisis of the traditional parties and especially of the social democratic parties, that is the crisis of the European project as we have known it up to now. That political space that social democrats have abandoned by moving to social liberalism, accepting policies of austerity and attacks on civil rights are being occupied by an amalgam of forces from the margins of the system.

And how can it be that the space abandoned by social democracy is occupied by the extreme right?

The electoral program of the FPÖ- is not positioned against the welfare state. It defends it for Austrians. And they confront the popular classes, historically voters for social democracy, with newcomers who are a little worse off.

Are there any other alternative parties that can reach these popular classes?

The polarization that we have seen in Austria means that for the first time neither socialists nor conservatives are in the second round. Unfortunately in most countries the space is occupied by the extreme right thanks to a Europe that has invested in cuts and inequality and has for years practiced a policy of xenophobic borders. It has been the perfect

breeding ground. But where there have been processes of social response in the street to the crisis and the cuts the extreme right has not had political space. And progressive options of change in favour of the social majority occupy that space. That is why in Portugal or in Spain there are not extreme right parties with representation.

In Greece there is, for example.

The far right in Greece has risen by barely a point since the 1990s. The triumph of the extreme right in Europe is to have penetrated public policies. If Marine Le Pen was asked about her greatest achievement she would say Manuel Valls without any doubt, because the PS has assumed much of the logic of Le Penism. In France the only political alternative to Le Pen is called Nuit Debout. They are the only ones that do not try to turn their discourse to the extreme right and they are posing a different alternative. Le Pen knows this and is attacking them more than François Hollande.

In Hungary, the Jobbik party, which organizes raids against immigrants and border control patrols, can exceed 20%, Denmark has adopted a law that allows expropriation of the jewellery of refugees with the support of the Social Democrats, in Norway the Christian Democrats govern with the support of the party of Anders Breivik.

The European institutions are still tying exit from the crisis to austerity policies. This Monday we knew that Mariano Rajoy committed in a letter to undertake further cuts if he is back in government after the elections. Can Spain withstand other 8 billion euros in cuts?

The Eurogroup spoke of 10 billion a month ago, we do not know what to expect. The problem is that people cannot endure further cuts. They are always asking for efforts from the popular classes and never speaking of investing more. Because all of them have their money in Panama.

What government in Spain will say "no" to the troika?

A government headed by Podemos and IU, by Unidas Podemos is today the only one that can say no to the troika. We must have a government that goes to Brussels not to negotiate that its friend Cañete [24] become Commissioner but that we do not have 9 billion euros in cuts. We must insert the theme of the EU in the electoral campaign, it has very little weight in the national debates.

Is this something that only happens in Spain?

I went to Italy to be in Lampedusa and Sicily visiting detention centres and I was able to go Naples to accompany the mayor in his electoral campaign and Europe is very present in the public debate. In Greece, Portugal, countries of our environment, too. We don't talk about it. Not raising TTIP is an error and Podemos and IU are going to try and raise it. The people have to vote knowing that to choose the PP, PSOE or Ciudadanos is to vote in favour of TTIP or CETA [free trade agreement with Canada] and that we will have further cuts. Ciudadanos, PSOE and the PP could make a joint logo and present themselves. I thought that they would after the agreement between PSOE and Ciudadanos [laughs]. Just look at Grupo Prisa, which says that PP and Podemos radicalize and that PSOE and Ciudadanos reach agreements. There is a sector of the oligarchy in this country that is very comfortable with a new more neo-liberal right which agrees with a Socialist Party that has ceased to be so, at least in its leadership. It would have been interesting if members of the PSOE had been asked what their preferred agreement was.

There was a referendum and agreement with Ciudadanos was approved.

It was all that was on the table; two options were not put. But beyond that I would like to know what the Socialist Party activists think about the TTIP, about 9 billion euros more cuts and with whom they believe they can cope better with this, with Podemos or with Ciudadanos. In fact, only in the ECB do I hear good things about Ciudadanos, it's incredible.

We spoke before of the polarization in Europe and in Spain we are going into a similar campaign. Podemos is sending this message: us or the PP. Do you think this campaign will work?

The Ciudadanos-PSOE agreement was a deferred grand coalition because right now with what was happening with the PP it is very complex to reach an agreement with Rajoy. But although there are three ballots they represent the same economic prescriptions in Europe and Spain. Another thing is that the social base of the PSOE does not represent this. Podemos cannot be understood without a historical rupture of the electorate and the bases of the PSOE.

Is the union with IU an electoral strategy or does it go beyond that?

Today it is an electoral strategy and I would like it to be more than an electoral strategy. But this will be after June 26. Before the last election there was already a great effort, expressed in the confluences which already involved IU in Galicia and Catalonia. Before the second round of elections the alarm that was provoked by the Ciudadanos-PSOE agreement shows what some have been saying - that the leadership of the PSOE does not govern for their base but for a minority. This has been clear. What government is going to resist another letter like that which the ECB [European Central Bank] sent to Zapatero in 2010?

Does the prime minister have to be a supporter of Podemos?

The prime minister should be from Podemos, if not there is no guarantee of endurance. And even then there is no guarantee without two central elements. The first is pressure from below, popular power. There has to be collective responsibility so nobody buckles and accepts the blackmail of the powerful and the EU. The second, not be alone. We cannot go alone into this battle.

And with whom will you go into this battle?

The Portuguese Government has already called the bluff of the

Eurogroup by reducing the cuts demanded. Let us hope that we do not go alone with government but with popular movements like Nuit Debout and others that may arise and that pose a different alternative. It is the idea of Plan B that we are promoting, so that people see that there could be a European response to the blackmail of the institutions. Disobedience to the treaties of the EU as we know it is the only way to build a different Europe, of peoples and of solidarity. That is why on May 28 in almost all the capitals of Europe we are going to demand a roof, dignity, work and the non-payment of illegitimate debt.

You said that the goal of Podemos must be to create "popular power". What for?

To resist the troika and to be able to carry out the programme. Pablo [Iglesias] has always said - although you achieve power not you cannot always implement your programme. To avoid this we must try to make power not only something a prime minister has, but rather something the people have. And that the responsibilities are not just those of one person with a ponytail, however wonderful - that is not fair or reasonable for him or for everyone else. That was one of the elements that 15M highlighted.

Returning to the question raised before, over and above the electoral process we are interested in the campaign having a process of synergy of the people of Podemos with those of the confluence, with IU, Compromís and others and with a lot of people that will be appealed to so as to make a campaign that is going to be historic. And that is not ending on June 27, so that people cease to be spectators and become actors. There has to be a convergence after June 26.

But an organic convergence?

No, you have to create spaces of meeting of construction of this popular power that go beyond the party structures. It is the best formula so that when Unidas Podemos wins the elections it can be a part of the program.

The step toward a popular

movement would mean reforming the structures of Podemos, which were established in Vistalegre as a machinery for electoral battle with an agile leadership compared to a more horizontal process. Are you heading to a Vistalegre II, that "mythological animal" in the words of Álex Errejón?

We should have the most appropriate organization to build popular power and not to win elections. For me there is no contradiction, and I believe that the best way to win elections is to build popular power and it was what we proposed with Pablo Echenique in the document "Summing up Podemos". Vistalegre died when Echenique became secretary of the Organization. We are now at an impasse.

And what model do you propose?

What I see is that the document "Summing up Podemos" also had problems. There is no perfect system until it is put into practice. We have to be flexible enough to change what does not work. Sometimes we have highly complex models and the bigger an organization is the more simple the organizational model should be. There is a need to promote participation, the model has to serve to empower and not to take away power from the rank and file. Vistalegre tried to convert a popular movement into a party and now the challenge is to stop being a party and be more of a movement.

Errejón and Iglesias have also spoken about Podemos becoming a popular movement. What are the differences?

Now the whole world is saying we were right. We spoke of territorial decentralization and now there is talk of territorial decentralization; we said that the closed lists were a bad idea and to some extent they have been removed; we said that winner takes all was not logical and we are going to have more proportional lists; now the whole world speaks of taking care of the local circles. I am not going to fight for things that we agree on. There will have to be an opening to other factors such as the currents of opinion that exist in Podemos and it is logical that they can express

themselves not as a struggle over posts but as political differences under a common umbrella.

Should there also be assemblies at the level of the autonomous regions?

The debate is whether they will be before or after. In Catalonia they have a management committee and could do it before, as Cantabria, La Rioja, Galicia or the Basque Country have done.

And in Madrid?

In Madrid we do not have a management committee, in part because of the PGM (Podemos Ganar

Madrid) list.

There has been a vision and wisdom because the important thing was to look out and not turn inwards. It is logical that there should be a citizen's assembly in Madrid to settle what the best organization is.

In what terms?

I would like to have a debate on ideas. What we want to do for Madrid. What we want to build in Madrid. How we want to organize in Madrid. We have spoken of some resigning and others not, but what are the political differences? Mine was the only candidacy with a project for Madrid. I would like the others to have one.

Will you head a list again?

The people will decide. It is not a personal decision but a collective one because when you run a lot of people get involved. And a lot of people must decide. We will see what the situation is but I have always been willing to work for Madrid. Normally Madrid is confused with the state and this is very pernicious because there is never a project for Madrid. I personally believe that is a challenge.

This interview was conducted by Aitor Riveiro and was published on May 24, 2016.

[Eldiaro](#)

Stability proves illusive in the North of Ireland

1 June 2016, by John McAnulty

But in words ascribed to former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan setting out the inherent uncertainty of political life: "Events, my dear boy, events." No sooner was the last vote cast than local politics began to spiral out of control yet again.

The central item on the agenda was the continuation of a grim and unmoving sectarian division. As in every election, the Democratic Unionist Party had played the Orange card with the slogan "Keep Arlene as first minister". Only Unionist unity around the DUP can prevent the Catholic Martin McGuinness becoming first minister. To bring this message home DUP leader Arlene Foster appears nowhere without a British crown in her lapel.

The second big issue of the campaign was the economic programme within the "Fresh Start" agreement. This outlines eye-watering austerity and includes sharp cuts in welfare payment, 20,000 job losses in the

private sector, privatisation and a mass transfer of public funds to transnationals through a reduction in corporation tax.

Neither sectarianism nor austerity were discussed in the election. As a result it was mind-numbingly boring and generated waves of apathy.

Misrepresentation

Sectarianism is ignored because the reality is constantly misrepresented by the media and liberal commentators. Foster and the DUP are presented as ill-mannered, gauche and out of tune with modern times. Their boorishness is unimportant because the offices of 1st minister and deputy 1st minister are equal. It doesn't matter who has the title.

This flies in the face of reality. A Sinn Fein 1st minister would throw the political system into deep crisis. The whole facade hangs on the primacy of unionism and, to placate their right, they demonstrate this regularly.

Unionists oppose the settlement and dream of the day they can expel Sinn Fein. Bribery and patronage keep them in line, but any serious restriction of sectarian privilege would lead to moves to collapse the executive. The main concern of the British is to keep the Assembly afloat, so they resolve disputes in favour of Unionism.

In contrast Sinn Fein are heart and soul behind the settlement. They believe that constant conciliation will win over the unionists. The collapse of the executive would see the collapse of their political strategy and all their claims to have won gains from the settlement. They would quickly find themselves targets of the wrath of Dublin, London and Washington.

This basic inequality explains why the Stormont executive doesn't work. It is not an instrument of shared government, but a mechanism for sharing sectarian spoils, with the major party consistently questioning the need to give the nationalists

anything. It also explains the slow gavotte of local politics, with the unionists moving right and Sinn Fein dragged behind. A recent example on the eve of the election was the DUP, with the acceptance of Sinn Fein, blocking funding for coroner's courts to look into historical killings. The DUP will not accept criticism of state forces and these issues will not be resolved.

So the explanation of sectarianism as a meaningless holdover from the past is an ideology designed to prevent protest and reflects the satisfaction of the Catholic middle class with the gains they have made. The circumstances of the working class have hardly changed, but this causes no concern.

Anti-austerity?

A similar mechanism explains the silence around the Fresh Start agreement. Sinn Fein tried to preserve an "anti-austerity" stance by protesting the welfare element of an economic programme designed to slash public sector services and jobs and cut corporation tax. When the British threatened to close down Stormont they endorsed the package, telling their supporters that they were "British cuts" and that they had won a hardship fund to protect them.

Fresh Start was initially opposed by Trade union leaders. However the occasional strikes and demonstrations are only decoration on a fixed mechanism for lobbying the Stormont administration. For them also the threat of suspension was enough to bring them to heel. In addition the bureaucracy are frantic supporters of the political settlement. In their statement of capitulation the union leadership argued that Stormont was so important that the workers had to sacrifice themselves to preserve it.

As is standard, the remaining republican organizations proved unable to mount any serious challenge, either politically or

militarily, to the northern state despite the advantage of the 1916 centenary. For its part the state demonstrated its determination to suppress that tradition by the mass arrest of an IRA funeral colour party on the day of the vote.

Change source

There was one potential source of change. The election saw the arrival of a spectrum of mostly youthful left candidates - a mixture of long established groups standing young candidates and new youthful formations. All are anti-sectarian, which is a cause for hope. However all these are children of the peace process and their horizons constrained by the colonial and sectarian environment they live in. Sectarianism is seen as individual bigotry rather than inherent in the state structures. The candidates failed to make an impression with the exception of a substantial vote and two seats for the SWP/People before Profit front.

More to be said about PBP vote in separate article, the main element of the election was not their vote alone, but that vote within a sharp fall in the electoral support of the nationalist parties. This change is not a rejection of the political settlement. Disgruntled older Sinn Fein and SDLP voters enthusiastically supported the settlement and young voters have known nothing else. Failure to achieve the goals of peace is seen mostly as incompetence and corruption on the part of Sinn Fein. Alongside nationalist discontent is a growing recognition by the smaller unionist and nationalist parties that, in the way of all coalitions, it is they who suffer when public discontent grows. As a result they have jumped ship and left the all-enclosing coalition that constituted the administration to form an opposition.

Phony war

What nationalists are protesting is the failure of the system, and specifically of the nationalist politicians, to produce any change. Their anger is deepened by rampant corruption. The change is potentially of major significance. Sinn Fein have had their chance to demonstrate the success of a reformed Stormont. They have failed. Now a fall in the vote is transforming into a willingness to vote against them.

However there are many weaknesses. There is a wide acceptance of the democratic credentials of the Stormont executive and a belief that protests and lobbying can obtain liberal and economic reform. The fact that policy is decided by sectarian deals and that the DUP have an absolute veto is never discussed.

In the same way the sectarian nature of the state is never confronted. It is seen to be enough to assert individual opposition to bigotry. The need to tear down the material basis of sectarianism and the state structures that sponsor and enforce it, is not recognized.

The anti austerity campaign is seen as being carried on by common action with the trade union bureaucracy, even though they have accepted the constraints of the Fresh Start agreement.

Stormont can easily accommodate what is already being labeled a "naughty corner" for its opponents. What it cannot do is grant their demands or see them grow to a size that would see a major collapse of Sinn Fein's political base and disrupt the sectarian carve up of the state. At the same time the opposition would need to confront the nature of the state to pose a more serious threat.

However we are in the phony war phase of the struggle against austerity. The fact that Sinn Fein has received such a slap in the face gives hope for the future when they physically enforce the coming offensive on the working class.