



IV498 - July 2016

IV498 - July 2016 PDF

31 July 2016, by **robm**

PDF magazine of IVP 498 July 2016 available to download

[here](#)

Class "justice": Baba Jan and his comrades sentenced to 40 years in prison!

31 July 2016, by **Jan Malewski**

Despite what the severity of the sentence seems to imply, Baba Jan and his comrades are not activists who took up arms against the state. They simply raised their voices for the fate of thousands of people of the Hunza Valley who were displaced as a result of a climate disaster in January 2010 and protested against corruption and against the violent repression that had been unleashed against the victims demonstrating in August 2011.

"An institution that is neither fair nor neutral"

In the words of the Asian Commission on Human Rights (AHRC) on June 16: "the date of the verdict raises suspicions regarding its fairness and impartiality. Baba Jan was a candidate

in the by-election, scheduled for May 28, 2016, to the Legislative Assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan in the Hunza-6 district. Three days before the vote, Baba Jan's campaign team, including regional AWP leaders, had held a massive rally in support of his candidacy, also bringing together large numbers of women and young people.

"The same day, Zafar Iqbal of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which had ruled the region before the present government of the Pakistan Muslim League "Nawaz" (PML-N), had asked the Supreme Court of Appeal to disqualify the candidacy of Baba Jan because he had been convicted by an anti-terrorism court. As is well known, Zafar Iqbal is colluding with his PML-N rival in the Hunza-6 district, who is the son of the current governor, belonging to a family traditionally dominant in the region.

"Ignoring the fact that the Court of Justice had already acquitted Baba Jan, the Court of Appeal decided that the elections would be postponed until the government's appeal against the acquittal was reviewed. This was unexpected, because the electoral court had ordered the candidacy of Baba Jan to be accepted, allowing him to stand despite being in prison.

"The verdict of the Supreme Court of Appeal is a blatant act of sabotage of his electoral campaign, aimed at favouring his political rivals of the PML-N, which is in power. Baba Jan is being punished because he represents and expresses the interests of the working class of Gilgit-Baltistan. This legal prejudice, favoring the ruling elite, is an attempt to sabotage the will and aspirations of the people, who sympathize with Baba Jan and support him. The judiciary, which should be a bastion of equality and fairness, thus

permits the denial of human rights. How can the people of Gilgit-Baltistan expect justice from an institution that is not fair and neutral?" [1]

Baba Jan and his comrades owe their incarceration to the so-called "anti-terrorist" law, adopted in 1997 and since amended several times to further strengthen its repressive character. Under the heading of "terrorism", this legislation includes the most diverse acts, including "sparking civil unrest." Aziz Siddiqui, of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, summed it up in these words in 2012: "This is a recipe for making an innocent person a suspect and a suspect guilty - or even dead. The law virtually imposes guilt." [2]

Emergencies and corruption

The story of the imprisonment of Baba Jan and his comrades began in winter 2010 in the Hunza Valley, surrounded by the Karakoram Mountains, on the territory of Gilgit-Baltistan, a region that is not de jure part of Pakistan, but which is de facto controlled by Islamabad.

The Pakistani government refuses to officially recognize this region as part of the country, in the hope of including it in a possible referendum on Kashmir, a region disputed between neighbouring India and Pakistan since the end of British rule, whose population, according to a UN resolution never put into practice, should have decided its own fate by a vote. Since the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are predominantly Muslim, the Pakistani state counts on their votes to tilt the majority in Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan in its favour.

Meanwhile, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan do not have Pakistani constitutional rights, have no elected representatives in Islamabad, have only an autonomous Legislative Assembly, which is in reality only consultative reality, and a government with half of its eight members and the chief minister (governor) appointed by Islamabad. Its judges and court presidents are appointed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The border with

China is a strategic region. The Hunza Valley is also the main gateway between China and Pakistan and the launching of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which runs through it - a project valued at \$46 billion - whets the appetites of the already highly corrupt administration. Colonial control of this region guarantees impunity for those who make the decisions there.

On January 4, 2010, a massive landslide in Hunza Attabad blocked the river and led to the formation of a lake, threatening the villages of the valley. Twenty people were killed, dozens injured. The fields and orchards were flooded. Baba Jan, then a member of the Labour Party Pakistan [3] launched a national campaign to make people aware of the situation, warning that entire villages would be decimated unless urgent action was carried out by the government and humanitarian actors. His warnings were ignored.

The Chinese government, which had managed successfully a similar situation in 2008, offered help. In vain. The contract was given to the Pakistani military construction company, which promised that the debris of the landslide would be cleared away quickly. But water accumulated over weeks to form a lake 23km long, completely submerging four villages. It took two hours to cross by boat. The lake destroyed the homes of about a thousand people and made them refugees. It affected around 25 000 people at least by cutting off all communication with the rest of the country. The situation was out of control and draining the lake was a much more delicate prospect.

Repression

For three months, the population of the valley demonstrated in the streets until the government announced financial compensation for each of the most affected families. But a quarter of them received nothing, the compensation probably ending up in the pockets of corrupt officials.

On 12 August 2011, 25 of the 457 families who had received no compensation blocked at Aliabad the

Karakoram Highway, the main route linking Pakistan to China. The police decided to disperse the protesters to allow passage for the Chief Minister Mehdi Shah, who had come to visit. Without any warning, they opened fire on the crowd, killing the young Afzal Baig, who was 22 years old, and his 50-year old father, Sherullah Baig, who tried to protect him. The whole valley rose up in protest, clashing with police, burning a police station and a prefectural office. For four days, the population took control of the town of Aliabad.

To calm the population, the authorities falsely claimed that proceedings had been initiated against the murderous police and provided financial compensation to the bereaved families. They took the opportunity to prepare the repression of progressive milieux, so as to impose silence about the events. A week later, on 19 August, 36 people were arrested (including ten members of the LPP, six of them being detained). A new wave of arrests began on 16 September with 33 new arrests, including Baba Jan. Arrested on terrorism charges, they were severely tortured by a team of police investigators and the secret services.

Meanwhile, the judicial inquiry ordered by the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan for the murder of the protesters has up to now made absolutely no progress. The police officer responsible for the death of two unarmed protesters has been promoted to the rank of superintendent, while hundreds of people displaced by the disaster of Lake Attabad continue to live in camps.

Prisoner and popular leader

In prison, Baba Jan began the struggle to improve the conditions of prisoners and to promote harmony between Shiite and Sunni prisoners, held separately and not having the right to meet (even in prison, the administration practises divide and rule!). He held meetings with the leaders of the two communities of prisoners and convinced them to fight

together for their rights. As a "reward", Baba Jan and four of his fellow party members were separated from other prisoners and tortured. They were severely beaten, their feet were crushed and prison officials denied them medical treatment.

A vigorous campaign for their release then developed in Pakistan and around the world. Intellectuals like Noam Chomsky and Tariq Ali took up the defence of Baba Jan and his comrades. Finally, in October, 2012, Baba Jan was released on bail. But some of his comrades - especially Iftikhar Hussain, tortured at the same time as Jan - were still imprisoned. Once released, Baba Jan, now a member of the leadership of the newly formed AWP, remained active in organizing the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, continuing the struggle by peaceful means, organizing mass demonstrations over the question of the price of wheat in early 2014, protesting against the privatization of natural resources in the region and their sale to Chinese capital.

This was too much for the corrupt local establishment. In September 2014, an anti-terrorism court sentenced Baba Jan and eleven other activists to 71 years in prison under three different charges, all related to the riots of Aliabad. The court did not take into account the judicial inquiry into the killings that caused the riot. Only five other accused, who were members of the PML-N or had agreed under pressure to join it, were acquitted. Learning the news of his sentence on September 25, 2014, Baba Jan, who was still at liberty, decided to surrender to the authorities. He has been in prison since then.

In April 2015, another court quashed two of Baba Jan's three convictions. In May 2015, still in prison, he announced his candidacy for the election of the Assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan on the AWP list. During the two week campaign, led by activists of the AWP and without the presence of Baba Jan, who was still in jail, the Hunza Valley witnessed historical scenes: thousands of people were in the streets with the red and white flags of the AWP, the campaign was fully funded by its supporters, there were thousands of women - an unprecedented phenomenon in this region where women's suffrage is not respected and the doors of politics are closed to them. In the end, the candidate of the ruling party, Mir Ghazanfar Ali - a member of the former royal family that kept the region under its boot for nearly 1,000 years - won the election. He controlled the administration and enjoyed the support of the majority of local capital, and could thus not only finance his campaign, but also impose his presence in the media and the polls. But Baba Jan, with over a third of the votes, came second, beating the candidates of the dominant historical parties - the PPP, the PTI - and all the others.

When Mir Ghazanfar Ali became governor of the territory in April 2016, a by-election was called to replace him. Everything was tried by the election administration to stop Baba Jan standing, but ultimately the Court of Electoral Justice accepted the nomination of the detainee. This time the opinion polls predicted that he would win. The local elites could not tolerate the presence of a spokesperson of the population in the local assembly, even if such an elected representative had only the right to

speak and no right to decide. To prevent his victory, the elections were postponed. And Baba Jan had to be convicted in order to prevent him from being elected.

The case of Baba Jan and his comrades is a damning indictment of the domination of Gilgit-Baltistan by a coercive neocolonial regime that brutally represses any whisper of resistance. But even by putting its opponents in jail, this administration will not succeed in silencing or controlling the movement of working people that they have helped to build in this region. The conviction is not accepted by the people, as evidenced by the popularity of the slogan "Teri Jan, Meri Jan, Baba Jan, Baba Jan! ("Baba Jan is dear to you, he is dear to us!"). In Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan, the AWP has launched a mass campaign to overturn the unjust decision of the court. The campaign demands the immediate release of Baba Jan and his comrades, the withdrawal of the false accusations, the publication of the judicial inquiry, still kept secret, into the murder by the police of Afzal Baig and Sherullah Baig in 2011, as well as putting on trial the police officers responsible and stopping the prosecution of those who defend human rights in Gilgit-Baltistan.

To force the Pakistani regime to back down, we must develop international solidarity. Because only a global campaign can worry the ruling elites in Pakistan and force them to respect human rights. In the past, international solidarity saved our Peruvian comrade Hugo Blanco and forced the release of South African leader Nelson Mandela. In the same way we can free Baba Jan from the clutches of his torturers.

The Great Rip Off

29 July 2016, by **Brian Ashley, Dick Forslund**

This is the sensational conclusion of a very recent study undertaken by

UNCTAD on the issue of trade misinvoicing - a key method for

illicitly exporting capital out of a country with severe consequences for

financing much needed development, reducing poverty or in the case of South Africa, dealing with debilitating mass unemployment.

The study, "[Trade Misinvoicing in Primary Commodities in Developing Countries: The cases of Chile, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia](#)" (is by Professor Lonca Ndikumana, University of Massachusetts, Amherst for UNCTAD's Commodity division, and was released in Nairobi Kenya on 18 July.

The study provides empirical evidence on the magnitude of trade misinvoicing in the case of primary commodity exports from five natural-resource-rich developing countries: This sample comprises four resource-dependent developing countries and South Africa - a more diversified exporter of primary commodities.

Estimates of trade misinvoicing have been primarily based on bilateral trade data published in the Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), providing aggregate values of imports and exports between a country and its trading partners. However, this study breaks new ground by providing an analysis at more disaggregated sector and product levels. The analysis additionally uses data published in the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics (UN Comtrade) Database, which provides time series on imports and exports broken down by product, country and trading partner.

There are substantial levels of trade misinvoicing in all five countries covered by the study, but the patterns vary substantially across countries, products and trading partners.

Given the historical importance of gold exports to the South African economy, the study is extremely alarming. It is as if the sanction busting practices of the apartheid government before 1994 simply stayed in place. But today it is tax revenues, local investment and, not least, wages of gold mine workers that are 'busted'.

Of course this is very much about tax revenue and the current account deficit, where more foreign currency

is going out than coming in, creating dependency on borrowing and speculative financial inflows for a government that shuns capital controls. But we shall return to the issue of stakeholders - other than SA and all African governments - hurt by the staggering rip off. Let us first give some highlights from the UNCTAD study, where platinum and silver was under invoiced by \$2.3 billion between 2006-2014 and, in fact, a further \$2.3 billion between 2000-2005, even if exports were three times greater for that period.

Misinvoicing within SA's gold sector is however even more staggering. Gold exports from SA, says the UNCTAD report, is not simply about undervaluation of exports. It is "rather a case of pure smuggling of gold out of the country".

"The most striking feature of the gold sector in South Africa is the huge discrepancy between the amounts recorded in that country's official trade statistics and those reported in its trading partners' records. According to South Africa's data, the country's cumulative gold exports were \$34.5 billion from 2000 to 2014, whereas according to trading partner data for that period they were more than three times higher, at \$116.2 billion. This is indicative of massive export underinvoicing." In fact, the study reports, the physical volume of exports (using the data from SA's partners) and export underinvoicing are in "perfect correlation". "This suggests that export underinvoicing is not due to underreporting of the true value of gold exports, but rather to pure smuggling of gold out of the country. Total misinvoicing of gold exports to South Africa's leading trading partners was \$113.6 billion over the 15-year period." At an average exchange rate of R9 per dollar, this corresponds to over R1 trillion.

More bizarre and requiring further investigation is a phenomenon illustrated by Hong Kong. According to the South African data, Hong Kong's share in South Africa's gold exports to its trading partners fell from 90 per cent in 2010 to a mere 2 per cent (!) in 2011. Yet, the data from all SA's trading partners show that Hong Kong's share of the same trading partners gold imports from

South Africa actually rose from 4.6 per cent in 2010 to 22.3 per cent in 2011! For South Africa, the study only finds so called "overinvoicing" for iron export to Japan and the Netherlands. In such a case the value of exports from SA to a trading partner is higher than the import value recorded for SA by that trading partner.

It is only with Netherlands that the study finds a net "overinvoicing" situation. For the period 2000-2014 SA overinvoiced iron export to the Netherlands by \$1.4 billion. The report laconically concludes that "a large proportion of iron ore exports from SA to the Netherlands ... does not appear to have ever docked in the Netherlands". This can be because of the iron being smuggled into the Netherlands. It can also be that the buyers' residence is incorrectly reported: It could be that the SA company is selling the iron to partner companies in tax havens even if they report something else.

To solve the overinvoicing enigma, the report recommends studies at company level. This is currently quite difficult given the lack of access to financial records of TNC subsidiaries. Nevertheless, this study brings us nearer to this possibility, because, for the first time, we now have a study of misinvoicing, commodity by commodity for South Africa.

Why underinvoicing?

One motive for corporations to underinvoice the value of exports from SA can of course be to avoid tax. This is common cause. The companies in question avoid tax on profits and royalties. And indeed: individual beneficiaries who control the set-up avoid personal income taxes.

Lower taxes on profits and lower royalties - a tax on the sales regardless of profits earned - are clearly very important. But it can also be seen as a profitable side-effect of the more over-arching motive, which simply is to move massive amounts of dollars out from South Africa. This is where 'wage evasion', as a concept, becomes important.

Against the background of the UNCTAD report, it is possible to argue that all mineworkers could be paid a decent living wage of at least R12500; all that is needed is for these illicit outflows to stop.

Underinvoicing in the platinum sector amounted to \$4.6 billion between 2000-2014, or \$300 million per year. At an exchange rate of R12 to R14 per dollar, the misinvoicing factor alone allows for a monthly wage increase of between R1100-R1300 per month for 190 000 permanent and contract

workers in this sector. We have then first simply assumed that 28 per cent of every \$100 in illicit outflows was used for other purposes than wages, as per the corporate income tax rate. Even when personal income tax and VAT is taken into account, the underinvoicing potentially affects worker wages more than tax revenues.

In the gold sector between 2000-2014, \$113.6 billion left the country through underinvoicing. These particular illicit gold sector outflows averaged a staggering \$7,6 billion per year. In the

same vein, and at an exchange rate of R12 to R14 per dollar, the misinvoicing factor alone allows for a monthly increase of R54 500 to R63 600 for every worker.

We don't think the 100 000 gold sector workers will demand that magnitude of wage increase. Such windfalls are only for CEOs. Isn't there a class action going on for another 200 000 former gold mining workers who became sick from silicosis? They, too, could do with a bit of this money.

Neoliberalism Is a Political Project

28 July 2016, by David Harvey

Cornel West [speaks of](#) the Black Lives Matter movement as “an indictment of neoliberal power”; the late Hugo Chávez called neoliberalism a “[path to hell](#)”; and labor leaders are increasingly [using the term](#) to describe the larger environment in which workplace struggles occur. The mainstream press has also picked up the term, if only to argue that neoliberalism [doesn't actually exist](#).

But what, exactly, are we talking about when we talk about neoliberalism? Is it a useful target for socialists? And how has it changed since its genesis in the late twentieth century?

Bjarke Skårland Risager, a PhD fellow at the Department of Philosophy and History of Ideas at Aarhus University, sat down with David Harvey to discuss the political nature of neoliberalism, how it has transformed modes of resistance, and why the Left still needs to be serious about ending capitalism.

they use it. In its most systematic usage it might refer to a theory, a set of ideas, a political strategy, or a historical period. Could you begin by explaining how you understand neoliberalism?

I've always treated neoliberalism as a political project carried out by the corporate capitalist class as they felt intensely threatened both politically and economically towards the end of the 1960s into the 1970s. They desperately wanted to launch a political project that would curb the power of labor.

In many respects the project was a counterrevolutionary project. It would nip in the bud what, at that time, were revolutionary movements in much of the developing world – Mozambique, Angola, China etc. – but also a rising tide of [communist influences](#) in countries like Italy and France and, to a lesser degree, the threat of a revival of that in Spain.

Even in the United States, trade unions had produced a Democratic Congress that was quite radical in its intent. In the early 1970s they, along with other social movements, forced a slew of reforms and reformist initiatives which were anti-corporate: the [Environmental Protection Agency](#), the Occupational Safety and Health

Administration, consumer protections, and a whole set of things around empowering labor even more than it had been empowered before.

So in that situation there was, in effect, a global threat to the power of the corporate capitalist class and therefore the question was, “What to do?”. The ruling class wasn't omniscient but they recognized that there were a number of fronts on which they had to struggle: the ideological front, the political front, and above all they had to struggle to curb the power of labor by whatever means possible. Out of this there emerged a political project which I would call neoliberalism.

Can you talk a bit about the ideological and political fronts and the attacks on labor?

The ideological front amounted to following the advice of a guy named [Lewis Powell](#). He wrote a memo saying that things had gone too far, that capital needed a collective project. The memo helped mobilize the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable.

Ideas were also important to the ideological front. The judgement at that time was that universities were impossible to organize because the

Neoliberalism is a widely used term today. However, it is often unclear what people refer to when

student movement was too strong and the faculty too liberal-minded, so they set up all of these think tanks like the Manhattan Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Ohlin Foundation. These think tanks brought in the ideas of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman and supply-side economics.

The idea was to have these think tanks do serious research and some of them did "for instance, the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#) was a privately funded institution that did extremely good and thorough research. This research would then be published independently and it would influence the press and bit by bit it would surround and infiltrate the universities.

This process took a long time. I think now we've reached a point where you don't need something like the Heritage Foundation anymore. Universities have pretty much been taken over by the neoliberal projects surrounding them.

With respect to labor, the challenge was to make domestic labor competitive with global labor. One way was to open up immigration. In the 1960s, for example, Germans were importing Turkish labor, the French Maghrebian labor, the British colonial labor. But this created a great deal of dissatisfaction and unrest.

Instead they chose the other way "to take capital to where the low-wage labor forces were. But for globalization to work you had to reduce tariffs and [empower finance capital](#), because finance capital is the most mobile form of capital. So finance capital and things like floating currencies became critical to curbing labor.

At the same time, ideological projects to privatize and deregulate created unemployment. So, unemployment at home and offshoring taking the jobs abroad, and a third component: [technological change](#), deindustrialization through automation and robotization. That was the strategy to squash labor.

It was an ideological assault but also an economic assault. To me this is what neoliberalism was about: it was

that political project, and I think the bourgeoisie or the corporate capitalist class put it into motion bit by bit.

I don't think they started out by reading Hayek or anything, I think they just intuitively said, "We gotta crush labor, how do we do it?" And they found that there was a legitimizing theory out there, which would support that.

Since the publication of A Brief History of Neoliberalism in 2005 a lot of ink has been spilled on the concept. There seem to be two main camps: scholars who are most interested in the intellectual history of neoliberalism and people whose concern lies with "actually existing neoliberalism." Where do you fit?

There's a tendency in the social sciences, which I tend to resist, to seek a single-bullet theory of something. So there's a wing of people who say that, well, neoliberalism is an ideology and so they write an idealist history of it.

A version of this is [Foucault's](#) governmentality argument that sees neoliberalizing tendencies already present in the eighteenth century. But if you just treat neoliberalism as an idea or a set of limited practices of governmentality, you will find plenty of precursors.

What's missing here is the way in which the capitalist class orchestrated its efforts during the 1970s and early 1980s. I think it would be fair to say that at that time "in the English-speaking world anyway" the corporate capitalist class became pretty unified.

They agreed on a lot of things, like the need for a political force to really represent them. So you get the capture of the Republican Party, and an attempt to undermine, to some degree, the Democratic Party.

From the 1970s the Supreme Court made a bunch of decisions that allowed the corporate capitalist class to buy elections more easily than it could in the past.

For example, you see reforms of campaign finance that treated

contributions to campaigns as a [form of free speech](#). There's a long tradition in the United States of corporate capitalists buying elections but now it was legalized rather than being under the table as corruption.

Overall I think this period was defined by a broad movement across many fronts, ideological and political. And the only way you can explain that broad movement is by recognizing the relatively high degree of solidarity in the corporate capitalist class. Capital reorganized its power in a desperate attempt to recover its economic wealth and its influence, which had been seriously eroded from the end of the 1960s into the 1970s.

There have been numerous crises since 2007. How does the history and concept of neoliberalism help us understand them?

There were very few crises between 1945 and 1973; there were some serious moments but no major crises. The turn to neoliberal politics occurred in the midst of a [crisis in the 1970s](#), and the whole system has been a series of crises ever since. And of course crises produce the conditions of future crises.

In 1982-85 there was a debt crisis in Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, and basically all the developing countries including Poland. In 1987-88 there was a big crisis in US savings and loan institutions. There was a wide crisis in Sweden in 1990, and all the [banks had to be nationalized](#).

Then of course we have Indonesia and Southeast Asia in 1997-98, then the crisis moves to Russia, then to Brazil, and it hits Argentina in 2001-2.

And there were problems in the United States in 2001 which they got through by taking money out of the stock market and pouring it into the housing market. In 2007-8 the US housing market imploded, so you got a crisis here.

You can look at a map of the world and watch the crisis tendencies move around. Thinking about neoliberalism is helpful to understanding these tendencies.

One of big moves of neoliberalization

was throwing out all the Keynesians from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1982 – a total clean-out of all the economic advisers who held [Keynesian views](#) .

They were replaced by neoclassical supply-side theorists and the first thing they did was decide that from then on the IMF should follow a policy of [structural adjustment](#) whenever there's a crisis anywhere.

In 1982, sure enough, there was a debt crisis in Mexico. The IMF said, "We'll save you." Actually, what they were doing was saving the New York investment banks and implementing a politics of austerity.

The population of Mexico suffered something like a 25 percent loss of its standard of living in the four years after 1982 as a result of the structural adjustment politics of the IMF.

Since then Mexico has had about four structural adjustments. Many other countries have had more than one. This became standard practice.

What are they [doing to Greece now](#) ? It's almost a copy of what they did to Mexico back in 1982, only more savvy. This is also what happened in the United States in 2007-8. They bailed out the banks and made the people pay through a politics of austerity.

Is there anything about the recent crises and the ways in which they have been managed by the ruling classes that have made you rethink your theory of neoliberalism?

Well, I don't think capitalist class solidarity today is what it was. Geopolitically, the United States is not in a position to call the shots globally as it was in the 1970s.

I think we're seeing a regionalization of global power structures within the state system – [regional hegemons](#) like Germany in Europe, Brazil in Latin America, China in East Asia.

Obviously, the United States still has a global position, but times have changed. Obama can go to the G20 and say, "We should do this," and Angela Merkel can say, "We're not doing that." That would not have

happened in the 1970s.

So the geopolitical situation has become more regionalized, there's more autonomy. I think that's partly a result of the end of the Cold War. Countries like Germany no longer rely on the United States for protection.

Furthermore, what has been called the "new capitalist class" of [Bill Gates](#) , [Amazon](#) , and [Silicon Valley](#) has a different politics than traditional oil and energy.

As a result they tend to go their own particular ways, so there's a lot of sectional rivalry between, say, energy and finance, and energy and the Silicon Valley crowd, and so on. There are serious divisions that are evident on something like climate change, for example.

The other thing I think is crucial is that the neoliberal push of the 1970s didn't pass without strong resistance. There was massive resistance from labor, from communist parties in Europe, and so on.

But I would say that by the end of the 1980s the battle was lost. So to the degree that resistance has disappeared, labor doesn't have the power it once had, solidarity among the ruling class is no longer necessary for it to work.

It doesn't have to get together and do something about struggle from below because there is no threat anymore. The ruling class is doing extremely well so it doesn't really have to change anything.

Yet while the capitalist class is doing very well, capitalism is doing rather badly. Profit rates have recovered but [reinvestment rates](#) are appallingly low, so a lot of money is not circulating back into production and is flowing into land-grabs and asset-procurement instead.

Let's talk more about resistance. In your work, you point to the apparent paradox that the neoliberal onslaught was paralleled by a decline in class struggle – at least in the Global North – in favor of "new social movements" for individual freedom.

Could you unpack how you think neoliberalism gives rise to certain forms of resistance?

Here's a proposition to think over. What if every dominant mode of production, with its particular political configuration, creates a mode of opposition as a mirror image to itself?

During the era of Fordist organization of the production process, the mirror image was a large centralized trade union movement and democratically centralist political parties.

The reorganization of the production process and turn to flexible accumulation during neoliberal times has produced a Left that is also, in many ways, [its mirror](#) : networking, decentralized, non-hierarchical. I think this is very interesting.

And to some degree the mirror image confirms that which it's trying to destroy. In the end I think that the trade union movement actually undergirded Fordism.

I think [much of the Left](#) right now, being very autonomous and anarchical, is actually reinforcing the endgame of neoliberalism. A lot of people on the Left don't like to hear that.

But of course the question arises: Is there a way to organize which is not a mirror image? Can we smash that mirror and find something else, which is not playing into the hands of neoliberalism?

Resistance to neoliberalism can occur in a number of different ways. In my work I stress that the point at which value is realized is also a point of tension.

Value is produced in the labor process, and this is a very important aspect of class struggle. But value is realized in the market through sale, and there's a lot of politics to that.

A lot of resistance to capital accumulation occurs not only on the point of production but also through consumption and the realization of value.

Take an auto plant: big plants used to employ around twenty-five thousand

people; now they employ five thousand because technology has reduced the need for workers. So more and more labor is being displaced from the production sphere and is more and more being pushed into urban life.

The main center of discontent within the capitalist dynamic is increasingly shifting to struggles over the realization of value “ over the politics of [daily life in the city](#) .

Workers obviously matter and there are many issues among workers that are crucial. If we're in Shenzhen in China struggles over the labor process are dominant. And in the United States, we should have supported the [Verizon strike](#) , for example.

But in many parts of the world, struggles over the quality of daily life are dominant. Look at the big struggles over the past ten to fifteen years: something like [Gezi Park in Istanbul](#) wasn't a workers' struggle, it was discontent with the politics of daily life and the lack of democracy and decision-making processes; in the uprisings in Brazilian cities in 2013, again it was discontent with the politics of daily life: transport, possibilities, and with spending all that money on [big stadiums](#) when you're not spending any money on building schools, hospitals, and affordable housing. The uprisings we

see in London, Paris, and Stockholm are not about the labor process: they are about the politics of daily life.

This politics is rather different from the politics that exists at the point of production. At the point of production, it's capital versus labor. Struggles over the quality of urban life are less clear in terms of their class configuration.

Clear class politics, which is usually derived out of an understanding of production, gets theoretically fuzzy as it becomes more realistic. It's a class issue but it's not a class issue in a classical sense.

Do you think we talk too much about neoliberalism and too little about capitalism? When is it appropriate to use one or the other term, and what are the risks involved in conflating them?

Many liberals say that neoliberalism has gone too far in terms of income inequality, that all this [privatization has gone too far](#) , that there are a lot of common goods that we have to take care of, such as the environment.

There are also a variety of ways of talking about capitalism, such as the [sharing economy](#) , which turns out to be highly capitalized and highly exploitative.

There's the notion of [ethical capitalism](#) , which turns out to simply be about being reasonably honest instead of stealing. So there is the possibility in some people's minds of some sort of reform of the neoliberal order into some other form of capitalism.

I think it's possible that you can make a better capitalism than that which currently exists. But not by much.

The fundamental problems are actually so deep right now that there is no way that we are going to go anywhere without a very strong anticapitalist movement. So I would want to put things in anticapitalist terms rather than putting them in anti-neoliberal terms.

And I think the danger is, when I listen to people talking about anti-neoliberalism, that there is no sense that capitalism is itself, in whatever form, a problem.

Most anti-neoliberalism fails to deal with the macro-problems of endless compound growth “ ecological, political, and economic problems. So I would rather be talking about anticapitalism than anti-neoliberalism.

23.07.2016

Source [jacobin](#).

Federalism might be an Option, but Inclusiveness is a Must

27 July 2016, by [Joseph Daher](#)

The Asad regime and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces [popularly known as “the Coalition” (al-I'tilaf)] have both stated their opposition to this announcement, while Washington, despite its support for the PYD, and Turkey have both declared they would not recognize this federal entity. The Syrian revolutionary streets also stood against federalism, as was evident

from the many placards raised in demonstrations on Friday, March 18 and the following, considering it as a step towards separatism and division.

According to a [survey](#) conducted between November 2015 and January 2016 by the independent Syrian-led civil society organization [The Day After Tomorrow \(TDA\)](#), respondents in both regime (86.7%) and opposition-

held areas (67.4%) agree on rejecting federalism, while proponents of federalism almost reach a consensus in Kurdish-led Self-Administration areas (79.6%) [4]. These results show that a Kurdish-Arab divide exists and that the first imperative regarding any future political system in Syria is dealing with the “Kurdish issue”, although it is not the only requirement as this article will show.

The objective here is to raise a discussion on the kind of political system that could best serve the interests of the underprivileged classes to guarantee democracy and social justice and, at the same time, address the Kurdish issue in Syria. The issue of this article is therefore not to concentrate on the current federal system of Rojava - Northern Syria as that would require another article.

The Kurdish Issue

Although there have been some recognitions of the Kurdish issue, the far majority of the Kurdish parties - and actually of the Kurdish population in Syria as well - are not satisfied by the way most Arab opposition political parties consider the Kurdish issue as simply and uniquely a citizenship issue.

In other words, the Arab opposition believes that Kurds are normal Syrian citizens who have been deprived of some of their rights and that the problem is therefore limited to the single issue of the census in 1962, which resulted in around 120.000 Kurds being denied nationality and declared as foreigners, leaving them, and subsequently their children, denied of basic civil rights and condemned to poverty and discrimination [5].

There were between 250,00 and 300.000 stateless Kurds in the beginning of the revolution in March 2011, roughly 15 percent of the estimated two million total Kurdish population in Syria. The far majority of the opposition political parties have not been ready in any way to recognize the Kurds as a separate "people" or "nation" and are not ready and willing to listen to demands for federalism and administrative decentralization. The demand for a federal system in Syria is a demand of the quasi majority of Kurdish parties in the country despite their political differences and rivalries.

We have to understand that the demand for a federal system by the Syrian Kurdish political parties is rooted in decades of [state oppression](#), and this since the independence of the country in 1946, on a national basis

(policies of quasi systematic discrimination against Kurds, policies of colonization in the framework of the "Arab Belt" and cultural repressions at all levels), but also has socio-economic consequences as we will see later in the text.

The majority of the Syrian Arab opposition did not address or even acknowledge this reality, mirroring the regime's position. . The Turkey-backed Syrian National Council (SNC) and, other representatives of the opposition to the regime met in Istanbul in mid July 2011 to establish a "National Salvation Council." The Kurdish representatives [walked out](#) of the conference in protest after the other delegates refused their request to change the name of the country from the Syrian Arab Republic to the Republic of Syria.

The first chairman of the SNC Burhan Ghaliun refused the [Kurdish National Council](#) (KNC, a coalition of Kurdish parties close to the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government)'s main demand for federalism in a post-Asad Syria, calling it a "[delusion](#)". Ghaliun also infuriated Syrian Kurds by comparing them with "[immigrants in France](#)" in November 2011, implying their exteriority to Syria.

In December 2011, the SNC offered to recognize the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group in the new constitution and to solve the Kurdish issue through "the elimination of oppression, the compensation of victims, and the recognition of Kurdish national rights within a Syria of united land and people." However, talks between Ghaliun, KNC head [Abdul Hakim Bashar](#), and Iraqi Kurdistan president Mas [ud Barzani](#) in Erbil in January 2012 ended in an impasse. The KNC sought "political" decentralization, which means formal autonomy, but the SNC refused to discuss more than "administrative" decentralization.

In late February 2012, all Kurdish parties in the SNC - with the exception of the Kurdish Future Party, headed by Fares Tammo - suspended their membership and joined the KNC after Ghalioun's renewed commitment to discuss only administrative decentralization.

Tension between the KNC and the SNC increased considerably following the latter's publication of its statement "National Charter: The Kurdish Issue in Syria" in early April 2012. The document eliminated language recognizing a Kurdish nation within Syria that had been included in the final draft statement of the "Friends of Syria" meeting held in Tunisia in February 2012. This resulted in the withdrawal of the KNC from unity talks with the SNC and Turkey being accused of excessively influencing the SNC's policy.

Nonetheless, the KNC joined the Coalition on August 27, 2013. Since the Riyadh Opposition Conference in December 2015 [the KNC is also part of the High Negotiation Committee in Geneva](#). This did not prevent however, the continuation of chauvinist attacks or comments on Kurds generally from Coalition members.

For example, on March 29, 2016, the chairman of the opposition's delegation in Geneva, former general As^{ad} Al Zo ^{ubi}, said on Orient television that "the Kurds made up 1% of the population and they only wanted to get their papers during the era of president Hafez al-Asad to prove they are ^hhuman beings'."

At the same time, the Coalition has provided no guarantees regarding any possible federal or decentralized state in a future Syria, rather characterizing these solutions as undermining the unity and integrity of the Syrian territory and people and therefore being unacceptable.

In general, no solution for the Kurdish issue and an inclusive Syria can be found without recognizing the Kurds as a proper "people" or "nation" in Syria and providing unconditional support to the self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere; this clearly does not mean being uncritical of the policies of the leadership of the PYD or any other Kurdish political party.

It is the unity of the Syrian people, including Arabs and Kurds, on the basis of a democratic and inclusive program that will allow their liberation and emancipation against the counter-revolutionary forces of the Asad regime and the Islamic

fundamentalists.

To eliminate from the discussions the Kurdish issue under the assumption that it allows more unity within the opposition and less problems is actually a recipe for division and lack of confidence between the various components of the Syrian people.

Socio-Economic Injustice

The other issue around a decentralized or federal state is related to the redistribution of wealth and socio-economic injustice in the country. For context,, Syria's economic growth, which was on average 5% during the years preceding the beginning of the uprising [6], has not benefited the underprivileged classes; in fact, inequalities in terms of wealth have continued to increase.

For example, according to a [UNDP report](#), between 1997 and 2004, the Gini coefficient [7] rose from 0.33 to 0.37. In 2003-2004, 20% of the poorest accounted for only 7% of total expenditure, while 20% of the richest were responsible for 45% of the latter. A trend which has continued to grow up to the outbreak of the revolution.

Economic growth during both Asad regimes was chiefly rent-based, depending on oil export revenues, financial assistance received or offered because of a particular political position [8] and capital inflows including remittances. This rent-based growth was anti-developmental in many ways.

The new agent of investment under the Asad regimes encouraged artisanal and low quality investment in services, real estate, transport and family-based projects that served private as opposed to public interests [9].

The abovementioned UNDP report revealed that, on the eve of the uprising in March 2011, the unemployment rate stood at 14.9% according to official figures, and 20-25% according to other sources. [The youth unemployment rate](#) was

48%, six times higher than the rate of unemployment among adults.

In 2007, according to the same UNDP report, the percentage of Syrians living below the poverty line was 33%, approximately seven million people. 30% of the population was just above this level. Even the regime-controlled Syrian General Federation of Trade Unions deplored in 2009 that " the rich have become richer and the poor poorer (...) (and) low income earners who make up 80 percent of the Syrian population are looking for additional work to support themselves [10]."

This increase in poverty and social inequalities had also gender consequences as for example the rate of unemployment among young women was nearly four times that among young men in 2007 [11].. Women had lost around 50% of their total jobs between 2001 and 2007, and the gender gap in access to employment was also greater in rural than in urban areas [12].

Neoliberal policies have satisfied the upper class in Syria and foreign investors, especially from the Gulf monarchies and Turkey, which were not hostile to the Asad regime prior to the revolution, at the expense of the vast majority of Syrians, who have been hit by inflation and the rising cost of living, while public services and investments (health system, education, housing) were diminished considerably [13].

In this framework, regional structural injustices existed indeed before the uprising in 2011 and were increased with the accelerated neo-liberal policies of the regime of Bashar al-Asad. On the eve of the upheaval, the proportion of poor people was higher in rural areas (62%) than in urban ones (38%). Poverty was more widespread, more rooted and more marked (58.1%) in the north-west and north-east (the provinces of Idlib, Aleppo, ar-Raqqa, Deyr az-Zawr and al-Hasakah), where 45% of the population lived [14]. Just over half (54.2%) of all unemployment was found in [rural areas](#).

In addition to this, before the beginning of the popular uprising, the geographic concentration of business

was as followed:

Governorates distribution for micro enterprises (less than 5 workers):

- Damascus and Rural Damascus: 27.36%
 - Aleppo 21.72%
 - Homs 9.93%
 - Hama 6.06%
 - other governorates 34.93% (10 other governorates)
- while governorates distribution for small enterprises (between 5 to 14 workers)
- Damascus and Rural Damascus: 29.40%
 - Aleppo 41.55%
 - Homs 5.89%
 - Hama 4.70%
 - other governorates 18.46% [15].

Foreign private investments were also concentrated in the two cities of Damascus and Aleppo in unproductive sectors (real estate, tourism, services such as bank insurances companies), while other regions and rural areas were left out of any kind of economic development and of provision of services.

In addition to this the most impoverished areas of the country were the areas mostly populated by Kurds such as in the north-eastern Jazirah. The Jazirah was the region with the highest level of illiteracy rate and poverty, hosting 58% of the country's impoverished population before the occurrence of the 2004 drought.

In 2010, poverty increased considerably reaching 80 per cent of the Jazirah inhabitants, as the impact of four consecutive droughts since 2006 had been dramatic for both small-scale farmers and herders. [16]. . In addition to this, the Jazirah region produced two thirds of the country's grains (and 70% of wheat) and three quarters of its hydrocarbons. Despite the industrial underdevelopment of the Jazirah, and the scarcity of industrial installations in the region, which accounted for only 7% of the overall sector, this plain was nevertheless important. For example, 69 per cent of Syria's cotton was produced in the region, but only 10 per cent of cotton threads were spun there [17].

Of course, all ethnic groups in the area, Arabs, Syrians-Assyrians, and

Kurds, suffered from economic marginalization.

There are other examples of social inequality linked to areas inhabited by Kurds before the uprising in 2011. Unlike other informal working class areas in Damascus, the Zorava neighborhood was not provided with schools or public dispensary, while many other essential services were not available as well [18].

In the city of Qamishli, Kurdish suburbs were still largely suffering from lack of sewers, potable water and electricity, while Christian and Arab neighborhoods had been improved and upgraded (paved roads, electricity, street lights, refuse collection) in the 2000s [19].

The issue of wealth redistribution in society and across the different regions will have to be tackled in any future political system in Syria. On this perspective, the Coalition's economic policies are problematic because they support the same neoliberal policies along the lines of the Assad regime in contradiction with the interests of the underprivileged classes. We must not forget that the popular revolution in Syria began as a result of social economic injustices and widespread poverty, in addition to political issues.

The socio-economic injustices in the society and across regions must be linked to the democratic issue, and more particularly to the participation

of local populations in the decisions of society at all levels: municipalities, governorates and the state. The experiences of the "liberated" areas and local popular councils are in this perspective something to maintain in any future Syrian democratic state. Participation from below of the underprivileged classes in managing their societies at all levels has actually been the most significant element in the revolution.

According to the abovementioned TDA survey, the population actually wants to maintain this experience, as we can see in its support for some form of decentralization in a way "to endorse the allocation of broad competencies to local authorities, and this support explicitly increases in opposition-held areas (if) compared with regime-controlled areas. It seems that the absence of the state in opposition-held areas has contributed to increased support for decentralization, and the spread of positive perceptions about it (...) (especially) the idea that it enhances 'participation in governance' tops the list of advantages."

Conclusion

The basis for any future democratic Syria must include indeed the democratic and social empowerment of the underprivileged classes to manage their own societies.

In this perspective, a possible

decentralized and/or federal state could best answer some of the issues discussed in the article, notably by respecting the principle of self determination of the Kurdish population in providing more tools and power to manage their affairs, on one side, and in trying to correct regional social injustices, on the other. Such an option would also strengthen participation from local population in decision making processes.

However, the implementation of a decentralized or federal state is not a guarantee per se to achieve an inclusive and democratic system. Indeed, all future options in Syria, whether federal, decentralized or else, will need to take into account these issues in a secular political framework encouraging the participation from below of the underprivileged classes and in which democratic and social rights of all Syrians without gender, ethnic and religious discriminations are guaranteed. This means notably providing the underprivileged classes with the rights to organize politically in their workplaces, society, and neighborhoods, to defend their interests.

The issue at core is to protect the freedom and dignity of the people as the popular movements have demanded since the beginning of the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010-2011, including in Syria, against authoritarian and unjust regimes.

[Syria Untold](#)

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

26 July 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 LBGTQ 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 stepâ€”the Democratic Party Convention, the election of a new president, the inauguration of the new presidentâ€”the movement is likely to lose its shape, its energy, and its adherents. Everywhere one heard the cry for national organizationâ€”yet whether or not that will happen remains unclear. The People's Summit did not point the way forwardâ€”perhaps the alternative will arise out of the demands in the convention in Philadelphia and the protests outside.

June 21, 2016

[New Politics](#)

End the repression - for self determination

24 July 2016, by **Radical Socialist**

The violence this time was sparked off by state response to the public protests at the killing of Burhan Wani, described by Indian state and media as poster boy of the Hizbul Mujahideen. Wani was the latest in a series of "terrorist killed in encounter". In many of these cases, the killings have been extremely dubious. Some reports (e.g., by the PUCL) about Wani's killing suggest he was shot dead from a distance of four feet in a case of cold blooded murder. Two other persons accompanying Wani were also killed by a special team of the security forces. Such cold blooded killings camouflaged as "encounter" in an alleged gun-fight is unacceptable in a democracy. This followed previous such cases and sparked widespread outrage.

The response of the state has been to intensify shootings, killings, and other violence. Over forty people have been killed so far, and over 300 injured till date. The unprovoked indiscriminate firing, teargas shelling and lathi-charge on a mob gathered for Wani's last rites, is a gross violation of the law and a human rights excess, or would be in any democratic country.

Indiscriminate repression by the Indian state is experienced by Kashmiris in their day-to-day lives. Secular and democratic forms of protest have been brutally silenced over the years. Certainly, terrorism exists in Kashmir. But unless the conversation is shifted from terrorism to the causes of terrorism, India can only go on increasing the size of the armed forces and the numbers killed, maimed, raped, without any just peace. The 22 year-old Wani, belonging to one such group became, in his death, a symbol of the Kashmiri aspiration for freedom and resistance against state oppression. Thousands of mourners gathered on the fateful weekend could relate to his death, as death of their own kin who took up arms for the cause of freedom. The

eruption witnessed in the last week in the valley, unlike the portrayal in the media is not a make of any foreign power. This represents popular anger, and a refusal to put up with the military dominated national integration practiced by India.

It is important to point out that under the present regime, while the actual behavior of the military and the police has not changed the degree of ideological pressure in India to accept this has grown. Thus, television channels have been used to silence all dissent on Kashmir. The social media has been widely used to propagate not merely hatred, but slogans of annihilating the Kashmiri people, forcible population transfers to turn them into minorities in their own land, etc. Rapes and sexual violence of all sorts have become commonplaces in Kashmir. The quarter century old Kunan Poshpora rape case drags on in a far away court. It is not even allowed to be brought to the Srinagar High Court. Sexual violence in a war like context is not about sexual desire. When 125 soldiers enter a village, separate the men from the women, and sexually assault 50 women aged between 13 and 60, clearly we are seeing a military practice. But while huge numbers of rapes are claimed by women, there is not a single conviction. Justices B.S. Chauhan and Swatanter Kumar, during the hearing of the Pathribal fake encounter at the Supreme Court in 2012, had said to armed personnel: "You go to a place in exercise of AFSPA, you commit rape, you commit murder, then where is the question of sanction? It is a normal crime which needs to be prosecuted, and that is our stand."

But the executive and legislative wings of the state have flatly ignored this occasional intervention by the judicial win role. India asserts that Kashmir is an integral part of India, something proved by the fact that elections are periodically held.

Residents of the Valley have lost all faith in these claims, at least since the late 1980s. Kashmir's right to self-determination, conceded verbally in 1948, has been systematically ignored. By holding elections, India has falsely claimed that high voter turn-out during such elections is an indicator of the ebb in the demand for Kashmir's freedom. However, the political demand for self-determination has remained deeply etched in the popular consciousness of the people. Imposing draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Power's Act that give the impunity to state forces to kill, exposes the role of the Indian state that uses brute force to subjugate people in the valley.

Under the garb of protecting territorial integrity and national security, excesses and abuse of state power in Kashmir by the Indian state continue unabated. While, the Indian state cries foul over Pakistan's sponsoring terror in Kashmir, it conveniently ignores the state terror that the people in the valley are subjected to.

The rise of Hindutva ideology has added another dimension. Every Kashmiri Muslim is seen as a de facto terrorist. While crocodile tears are shed about Kashmiri Pandits, they are retained in the same position, even by the BJP, because their prime value lies in responding to all criticism about AFSPA, fake encounters, etc with a one line query: "What about the Pandits?" Given that in Pakistan occupied Kashmir too, opposition to spurious governments imposed from Islamabad are met with violence, it is clear that Kashmiris see themselves as a distinct nation.

We do not find it necessary to endorse this or that particular party or leadership. Nor are the people of Kashmir waiting for endorsement, and still less guidance or direction from India. As Indians, our responsibility is

to mobilize people, to demand from the Government of India:

â€¢ Repeal the Armed Forces Special Power's Act.

â€¢ Stop all forms of violence including sexual violence.

â€¢ De-militarise Kashmir.

â€¢ Restore freedom of the press inside Kashmir.

â€¢ Conduct a thorough investigation into the excesses carried out by military, para-military and police forces.

â€¢ Exemplary punishment to those found guilty.

â€¢ Affirm the right to self determination.

â€¢ Immediate relief measures for the survivors of state violence.

July 16, 2016

The "War" against Daech: a military strategy doomed to political failure

23 July 2016, by Joseph Daher

In Syria, the United States, as well as other Western states, have been concentrating their military actions against Daech, while a change of the authoritarian Assad regime is not at all on the agenda, and actually never was. In addition to this, on June 30, the Obama administration proposed a new agreement on Syria with the Russian government that would deepen military cooperation between the two countries against Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, in exchange for Russia getting the Assad regime to stop bombing groups of the FSA with contacts with the USA. The allies (Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi'a fundamentalist militias) of the regime continue on their sides their military assistance to Damascus to eliminate all forms of armed opposition, democratic (Free Syrian Army) and reactionary (Jabhat al-Nusra and Daech) while continuing their crimes and abuses against Syrian civilians. The raids of the Russian aviation on June 25 against the town of al-Kouriyé, southeast of the city of Deir Ezzor, for example, have killed 31 civilians, while 16 others died without anyone knowing if they were civilians or jihadists.

The only political groups that will benefit from these bombings are effectively the two sides of the counter revolutions: the Assad regimes on one side and the reactionary Islamic and

Jihadist political forces. The Assad regime as we have seen since Russian intervention in October 2015 benefited from these bombings militarily with the weakening of various armed groups, but more particularly FSA groups in various regions, which were the real targets of the Russian intervention rather than Daech or Jabhat al-Nusra, while civilians also suffered enormously from these bombings. At the same time, Assad forces have actually continued its attacks on various areas of the country, especially on the besieged liberated areas of Aleppo, but moreover the regime sees another opportunity to regain "legitimacy" with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism. On the other side, if the bombing really target Daech and Jabhat al Nusra, it will probably weaken them on the short term military, but will also most likely to prove counterproductive for the Syrian revolutionaries upholding the objectives of the revolution by increasing the popular support for Daech and Jabhat al-Nusra and other reactionary forces, driving even more recruits to their ranks, by describing themselves as the only serious group fighting the "infidel" Assad regime and Russia and Western "Crusaders". These bombings also occur while the various Western international powers did and are not envisaging any action against the Assad regime, which continues its murderous war against

the Free Syrian people. We have seen as soon that the truce, even partial, was implemented, the democratic popular movement started once again its demonstrations against the regime, but also challenged jihadist forces such as Jabhat al-Nusra. The people of the city of Maaret al-Nuuman have been resisting Jabhat al-Nusra for more than 100 days now. The only solution to put an end to both the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces is to empower the democratic popular movement and FSA democratic groups upholding the objectives of the revolution and uniting the various components of the Syrian people to challenge sectarianism and racism.

In Iraq, the fight against Daech is led by the Iraqi army and its elite groups, but also by Shi'a fundamentalist militias supported politically, economically and militarily by the Islamic Republic of Iran and especially hated by large sections Sunni populations in Iraq because of their crimes and abuses against them and their sectarian discourses and practices. Some Pasdaran's senior officials of the Iranian regime and senior commanders of Iraqi Shi'a fundamentalist militias have actually appeared often on the front lines of fighting and participate in military elaborations with the generals of the Iraqi army in the offensive against Daech. At the End of May 2016, the

head of the Revolutionary Guards' elite Quds Force, Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, was spotted visiting Shi'a fundamentalist paramilitary forces fighting alongside the Iraqi army to drive Daech out of the Sunni city of Falluja, prompting harsh criticisms from various Iraqi Sunni political forces in the country. In the beginning of June 2016, it was reported that a 17-month U.S. effort to retrain and reunify Iraq's regular army has failed to create a large number of effective Iraqi combat units or limit the power of sectarian militias, according to current and former U.S. military and civilian officials. The Iraqi military operations command of Salahuddin province, north of Baghdad, is dominated by a Shi'a fundamentalist militia leader, Abu Mehdi Mohandis, Mohandis who serves as the chief state administrator for Shi'a fundamentalist paramilitary forces. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned him in 2009 for allegedly attacking U.S. forces in Iraq. He was also convicted in absentia by Kuwaiti courts for the 1983 bombings of the U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait. The Fifth Iraqi Army Division in eastern Diyala province is considered to be under the command of the Badr group, a powerful Shi'a fundamentalist militia and political party with strong ties to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. In Baghdad, U.S. military officers estimate that 10 percent to 20 percent of the 300 officers who run the Iraqi military's Operations Command have an affinity or association with either the Badr militia or the Shi'a religious leader Muqtada al Sadr.

The solution to end the jihadist reactionary forces of Daech cannot only be military and especially not with forces such as the Shi'a Fundamentalist sectarian forces supported by the IRI and with a government led by the Dawa Party, which has been characterised under the former Prime Minister Maliki between 2006 and 2014 by sectarian and authoritarian that alienated the great majority of the Iraqi Sunni population, while repressing democratic popular movements challenging the whole sectarian and bourgeois regime. The new Prime

Minister Abadi from the same party, Dawa, despite rhetorical propaganda, has not made any radical changes regarding this situation. These are all elements that played an important role in fuelling the development of Daech in Iraq. These two actors, Shi'a fundamentalist sectarian forces and Daech, feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated in order of hoping to build a social and progressive popular movement opposing sectarianism enabling Iraq to end a nightmare that has lasted too long. This has actually been expressed by large sections of the democratic popular movement that erupted in Iraq in the summer 2015 challenging the Iraqi sectarian political regime with slogans such as "the parliament and the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin", "Daech was born out of your corruption".

In Libya, the Western states supported the formation of a unity government, who are trying to bring together the various Libyan parties, with two priorities as stated by them: the fight against Daech and "illegal immigration". The political and socio-economic issues are virtually ignored, while the unity government is hardly able to extend its authority throughout the whole territory, particularly in the east, in Cyrenaica, where four ministers of the unity government resigned on July 1st. In this eastern part of Libya, militias and units of the Libyan army remain loyal to unrecognized authorities, under the command of the controversial General Khalifa Haftar. Several European countries have already pledged tens of millions of euros in support for the unity government.

This is not to mention the support of Western states, to the Egyptian regime headed by the dictator Sissi who continues its violent crackdown against all forms of opposition, from leftist movements to the Muslim Brotherhoods. The massive repression of the Egyptian regime has indeed created new numerous Daech members in the country. Similar support for other dictators and authoritarian governments in the region has similar consequences such as in the case of Saudi Arabia and

other Gulf monarchies. On this issue, the war between on one side the Saudi kingdom and the other side Al-Qaeda and Daech must not however make us believe that their fundamentalist and reactionary ideologies would fundamentally be different. A number of Saudi jihadists takes as references the earlier texts of Wahabism, which are the sources of official Islam in the country, and other authors of Wahabi references, but with different interpretations.

In all these cases, it is simply not enough to put an end military to all capacities for violence of Daech, only to see its reappearance in the future as was the case in the past, but to address the socio-economic and political conditions that enable and enabled its development. We have to remember that Daech is a fundamental element of the counter revolution in the Middle East that has experienced unprecedented growth as a result of the crushing of popular movements by the authoritarian regimes. The interventions of regional and international states have greatly contributed and continue with their policies to the development of Daech. Finally, neo-liberal policies impoverishing the popular class together with the repression of democratic and trade union forces are of course also a key element in the development of Daech, which has been able in some cases to capture the frustrations of certain parts of the popular classes.

Western regimes will not change their strategies regarding the region, our duty as international solidarity movement is to oppose these policies and to support democratic and non sectarian popular movements, which continue across the region despite significant setbacks, defying both authoritarian regimes and fundamentalist religious movements such as Daech or Jabhat al-Nusra. It is these means that can stop these two forms of barbarism, instead of repeating the same mistakes of the past contributing to their rebirths.

July 5 2016

[syriafreedomforever](#)

For Jill Stein and Independent Politics

22 July 2016, by **Solidarity National Committee**

Sanders and his army of supporters promised to carry on to the Philadelphia convention, fighting for “progressive planks” in the party platform. But with his long-awaited (and ultimately inevitable) endorsement of Hillary Clinton for president, Bernie Sanders has folded up his challenge in the name of “doing everything possible to defeat Donald Trump.”

The Sanders campaign always embodied a contradiction. Within the parameters of a rigged two-party system, running for the Democratic nomination gave this avowed “democratic socialist” ballot access and a place in the debates. Yet it also meant, as Sanders openly stated from the outset, that he would support the party nominee—and there was never any doubt about who that would be. Although we understand why many of his supporters are disappointed, this is not a surprising outcome, and it poses the question, what next?

Like many on the left, Solidarity welcomed the energy and hope for change that the Sanders campaign inspired. If you’re not familiar with Solidarity, we’re a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization. Our members in a number of unions and cities have participated in the Labor for Bernie project, which we see as an important vehicle for making political discussion the property of union members, not just the top leadership.

Now, however, the hard fact is that the inspiration of the presidential primary campaign is giving way to a sordid race between the cynical corporate centrism of Hillary Clinton and the ugly, racist economic nationalism of Donald Trump. In today’s particularly vicious climate, it’s essential for all of us to unite in defending Black Lives Matter against the racist slanders and assaults that the right wing is promoting. The attack on BLM is effectively a license

for the continuing brutalization and murder of African American people and communities.

Certainly, part of the strategy for keeping the “political revolution” moving is keeping the movements active—the struggles for racial and reproductive justice, the Fight for \$15, solidarity with immigrant communities, and resisting homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia. The important gains that the LGBTQ struggle has made need to be defended and extended.

Despite the best efforts of Sanders’ supporters, the Democratic platform includes almost none of this. The drafting committee has rejected the calls to block the Trans Pacific Partnership (which a majority of the population hates), to end fracking (even on federal land!), and to support the Palestinian people’s struggle under Israeli occupation. There was no reason to expect anything different from a party of corporate capital and imperialism. To put a brave face on these defeats, much is being made of “the most progressive Democratic platform in history.” To put it bluntly, most of this language—except perhaps for raising the minimum wage, in stages—consists of vague generalities that will be rapidly forgotten.

Cornel West and Jill Stein; Dr. West endorsed the Stein campaign after Bernie Sanders conceded and endorsed Hilary Clinton.

If you believe that a better choice is possible, a movement for political revolution also needs an electoral expression. In this election, the best expression at the national level of what all of us have been fighting for is the Green Party campaign of Jill Stein. Solidarity supports that campaign as a way to support the political revolution in 2016.

Looking not only toward November

but also beyond, especially to Bernie Sanders’ supporters who reject the dead-end option of Hillary Clinton, we urge you to consider that you need more than a different candidate: you need a different party. Hillary Clinton, after all, did not “hijack” the Democratic Party. She represents exactly what the Democratic Party really is: Wall Street connections, militarism, and all. There was no way that Bernie Sanders was going to be the Democratic nominee.

This reality explains why Jill Stein’s support has been growing. So are local independent political organizations, campaigns and ballot initiatives. We urge a vote for Jill Stein, but more than a one-time “protest vote,” solid independent political organization is a necessity. It’s going to be a long road, and there isn’t a magic success formula for creating a working class-oriented party in the United States that can be the voice of social movements. But at this point one thing should be clear: the trap of voting for one after another “lesser evil” corporate candidate will only leave us with worse and more barren choices.

The Democratic Party wants Sanders’ supporters’ votes—not their demands to break up the banks, get rid of superdelegates, dump the TPP, and end the obscene one-sided U.S. support for Israel’s war against the Palestinian people. “Vote and shut up,” is the Clinton campaign’s message to Sanders’ base. There has to be a better way, or else we’ll never see anything better than the miserable non-choices the corporate party “duopoly” has to offer.

If you want a “political revolution” that goes beyond empty promises, the time to break with the capitalist parties is now. As the Jill Stein campaign states:

“A movement for democracy and

justice is sweeping the planet — from Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring to the Black Lives Matter movement. People are rising up to halt the neoliberal assault, calling for an America and a world that works for all of us. While our movement is winning important victories – notably for living wages and against fossil fuel infrastructure – the economic elite have only tightened their grip. People are realizing that if we want to fix the rigged economy, the rigged racial injustice system, the rigged energy system etc., we must also fix the rigged political system...

“Jill Stein’s Power to the People

agenda reflects many of the domestic policies of the Sanders campaign – income equality, climate justice, free public higher education, Medicare for All, immigrant rights, racial justice and an end to mass incarceration. In other areas, Stein goes much further than Sanders, calling for the cancellation of student debt, full public financing of elections, and the creation of public banks.

“The groundswell for Donald Trump was created by the economic misery of NAFTA and Wall Street deregulation – policies promoted by both Clintons. Neoliberal Clintonism caused the rise of Trump.

“The clock is ticking – on the next Wall Street collapse, the climate meltdown, the expanding wars, the slide towards fascism, nuclear confrontation and more. This is the time to stand up with the courage of our convictions, while we still can. Forget the lesser evil. Fight for the greater good – like our lives depend on it, because they do. The corporate parties will not fix this for us. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”

We agree, and it’s all the more reason why today is the time for building independent politics.

July 19, 2016

Use of anti-terror laws against peasants’ movement

21 July 2016, by **Farooq Tariq**

In the dead of the night on July 17, 2016, the police vans snaked their way into Chak 4-L. At around 2am, several dozens of policemen forced entry into the house of Mehr Abdul Jabbar, younger brother of incarcerated peasant leader Mehr Abdul Sattar. They broke down the front door and opened indiscriminate fire shattering cupboards and other household paraphernalia. They departed 15 minutes later but left behind a cloud of uncertainty and fear that spread among the villagers jolted awake by the gunfire.

Within half an hour, several private television channels broke the ‘news’ that the Okara police had rescued six hostages from Jabbar’s house and had found wads of Indian currency and ammunition including hand grenades.

The charade was necessary to feed the narrative that Sattar was an anti-state agent working for India, that he had a cache of illegal weapons at home and that he was harbouring criminals at his house who had shot at the police. The police were, of course, lauded for

being the heroes who had successfully freed ‘hostages’ from the peasant leader’s house.

Sattar was arrested on April 15, 2016, and accused of being a foreign agent working for the Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). The allegation was tied to Sattar’s visit to Nepal in 2007 where he attended a meeting of the South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) as secretary of Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee. To provide this measly accusation teeth, the police staged a raid at his house on July 17, and claimed that they had found INR 85,000 there. This is, apparently, all the proof required to brand someone a spy and an anti-state agent. Due process be damned.

Hundreds of villagers, on tenterhooks after hearing the gunfire, gathered around the house in the aftermath of the raid. Jabbar’s wife, who was at home with her children when the policemen broke in, explained to them that while they had not harmed her or her children, the cops had taken away clothes and cell phones and had ransacked the house. One of the

policemen, she said, had been taking pictures and making videos of the house.

The raid comes barely a week after the same cops claimed to have killed six AlQaeda ‘terrorists’ at the house of the younger brother of another peasant movement leader in Kulyana Estate on July 12. The narrative in this case was further skewed by the fact that the police had, in fact, murdered the terrorism suspects at another location – the dera (private place for meeting guests) of Major (retd) Faqeer Hussain. Villagers in the area vouch for the time the ‘encounter’ took place (2am) and explain that it was not carried out at Malik Naeem Jhakar’s house. Naeem Jhakar’s elder brother Malik Saleem Jhakar, a peasant movement leader, has been in jail for the last two years. The police did, however, move into Naeem Jhakar’s house in his absence to seize his tractor and animals.

A week after this incident, on July 19, the Shuhda Foundation of the Lal Mosque mullahs claimed that two of those killed supposedly at Jhakar’s

house had been in police custody for over a year. The statement, coming from unlikely quarters, only strengthened what the peasants of Kulyana Estate have been trying to explain all this time - they had nothing to do with terrorists.

The Anjman Mozareen Punjab (AMP) have long opposed brutal Islamist militancy and have called for civilian state intervention to protect the lives of citizens. Events unfolding this month, however, speak of a blatant attempt by the state to box in leaders of the AMP with the same extremist elements the peasants have opposed so far. The attempts have been made in service of the powers that are trying to build a case for the persecution of peasants and to undermine the AMP's struggle for land ownership rights.

This encounter, if indeed staged, is telling of dangerous tactics the police and intelligence officials are employing to implicate and criminalise peaceful political activists.

Furthermore, they speak volumes of the extent and manifestation of the misuse of the National Action Plan and anti terrorism laws. The police appear to have adopted a no-holds-barred approach to somehow prove that the five main leaders of Anjman Mozareen Punjab they have arrested - Mehar Abdul Sattar, Nadeem Asharf, Malik Salim Jakhar, Hafiz Jabir and Shabir Sajid - have been funded by foreign elements including foreign intelligence agencies.

The peasants' struggle is not a recent occurrence nor has the brutality emerged out of a vacuum. The people arrested for leading the movement have been demanding their right to own the land they till for more than 16 years. The peasants of the Okara

Military Farms have lived in and tilled the lands there since 1910. State narrative has been contrived around the movement in a way so as to criminalise their demand of the right to own the 68,000 acres of land they have been tied to for generations.

Since 2001, the police have registered 348 cases against the tenants of Okara. Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act is added to create extra pressure and to tighten a noose around the movement. Most of these cases were registered in the aftermath of protests by tenants against state injustice. Where women are mostly spared in times of war, the women peasants in Okara have been dealt the same hardened blows as the men have.

This is because the women peasants had managed to organise and mobilise in a manner unprecedented in any peasant movement in the Punjab. More importantly, never before had any segment of the have-nots, the oppressed and the financially and politically weak dared to challenge the most powerful institution in the country. The peasant farmers of Okara had stood up to the administration of the Military Farms and the serving military officers there.

Hundreds of criminal charges later, the accusations directed against the peasants have been unable to hold water. As many as 11 tenants have lost their lives to state brutality in their struggle for land ownership rights. Not a single casualty has been reported by those wielding the guns. There has never been attack on the oppressors by those oppressed - yet the brutality continues unabated.

The security agencies' blundering attempts to connect peasants to terrorists in their custody speaks volumes of their desperation to see

the movement meet an early end. The staged encounter on July 12, is one of the tactics the state has employed to turn public sympathy away from the peasants and to snatch away their moral or ethical claims to lands the state elite have their eyes on.

Decimating the peasants' movement would be the first step towards that. The aftermath of the police encounters and the staged raids has created an environment of trepidation among the tenants. With their leaders in prison, the tenants now fear that the wrath of the security apparatus will be turned on them.

The very basis of the movement pits the tenants in opposition with the administration of Okara Military Farms which demands share-cropping rights. The tenants, however, argue that the land does not belong to the military but the provincial government. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, chairman of the political party in power in the Punjab, had earlier promised to extend land ownership rights to the tenants.

It was after the tragic mass murder of children by religious extremists at an army-run school in Peshawar that the security apparatus was given a free hand to rein in terrorists and extremists. Two years after the incident, the National Action Plan has been directed towards the most vulnerable segments of the society to silence those who dared raise their voice for their rights.

Despite warnings and remonstrations from human rights quarters, including the National Commission for Human Rights and the Senate Committee on Human Rights, the violence does not appear to have abated. If anything, it has worsened and the peasants of Okara lie in the heart of this brutal onslaught.

**Against the Military and Erdoğan's Coups
Let's Organize the Democratic Front and**

Build Class Politics

17 July 2016, by **Sosyalist Demokrasi için Yeniyol**

We have witnessed a coup process second by second on 15th July evening with all its uncertainties, hesitations, countermoves of opposing sides and ferocities. This bloody night, which will be remembered with the clashes between the soldiers and the police, occupations in the media channels, images of massacred civilians and lynched soldiers and bombing of the National Assembly as a peak point, appear as one of the last scenes of the power struggle between the old partners inside the state that AKP and Gülen congregation built in cooperation.

Based on the fact that Erdoğan regime does not hesitate to have resort to chaos and civil war atmosphere in order to maintain his hegemony since the elections on 7th June 2015, following the push down of the coup attempt in a very short time and reappearances of the government members on the media channels with refreshed images, many conspirative evaluations, that this attempt was designed for Erdoğan's dictatorial lust to be actualized, had broad repercussion. Under the circumstances where the regime was consolidated with almost 50 percent of the votes in the last elections, a more reasonable interpretation is that Gülen supporters, who faced a huge discharge operation, and some sections in the army they are in cooperation with, have drawn the coup plan forth in a hurry.

Although it is necessary to wait in order to have a detailed information about the motivations, agents of the movement, and the level of information the intelligence services have, it is obvious that the objective result this process will bring is consolidation of the Islamic-autocratic

character of Erdoğan regime.

The first signs of the fact that there will be a new and maybe a final purge in the state apparatus are thousands of layoffs among the judges and prosecutors and detentions among the higher judicial bodies on the morning of 16th July, right the day after the regime supporters saved the democracy with the slogans of "Allahu ekber", (Allah is great), "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan", and "We want death penalty". The fact that the calls made from the state institutions and all the mosques to urge people to the streets to defend the regime against the coup turned into attacks against Syrian population and tensions in Alevi neighborhoods clearly shows how the multi-dimensional polarization within Turkish society ran rampant to an extremely dangerous level. And we have no doubt that the Erdoğan's Palace and the government, who declared academics, journalists, public workers, Kurdish activists and socialists as pro-coup and administered their arrests by associating every word against the regime with terrorism, will take the 15th July coup attempt as the justification of a severer attack against all sorts of opposition. And in the medium term, we can be sure that the 15th July attempt will be the first of the founding myths of Erdoğan regime and make history, not as a failed coup attempt without the base, staff and external support, but as a coup the people climbing on the tanks resisted and stopped.

All of the organizations in the radical left and all parties represented in the parliament declared that they're against the coup. It is a principal task

for us, too, to take a stand against the coup keeping in our consciousness that workers and oppressed people can never gain anything from the military interventions that suspend democratic rights and freedoms to start with. In addition to that, we declare that we also stand and will stand against the coups of the Palace which repudiated the election results to maintain its hegemony, demolished Kurdistan to get the votes of the nationalists, prohibited mass strikes by declaring them "national threats", strove to abolish Kurdish people's right to representation. An anti-coup position that cannot be rid of the "coup or Erdoğan" dilemma in which AKP trapped the politics, will play into the hands of the regime that will suppress not only the coup attempts but also every section of the opposition bloodily on behalf of "national will" and will not hesitate to use the Islamic-fascistic forces we saw at work on 15th July.

The way to barricade against the attacks of dictatorial regime, which seeks an absolute power in political, legal, military, economic spheres through self-victimization due to the coup, against workers, ethnic-religious minorities, women, LGBTI individuals and oppositional elements is to build a unified front of the existing democracy and peace forces. The way to throw both the Islamist-capitalist power block and a bloody military dictatorship possibility into the dustbin of history permanently is the way ignored up until now; patiently constructing the social opposition from below with working class in its heart.

The path is dark; let hope and resistance be our light!

Legacy of Police Impunity Boils Over

17 July 2016, by **Barry Sheppard**

Since 2014 videos taken by witnesses of police murders of Black people spurred the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. In spite of the overwhelming visual proof of the guilt of the police murderers, they have almost all have gotten away with it. This has emboldened the police, as they know they can use force up to and including killing against Blacks with impunity.

This explains why two cops in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, thought nothing of killing 37-year-old Alton Sterling while he was on the ground incapacitated. Two videos were taken of the event, which showed two cops kneeling on top of Sterling, when one of them took out his gun and pumped three bullets into him. This happened on July 5.

The next day, in a suburb of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, a cop pulled over Philando Castille, for a broken taillight. In the car were his fiancé, Diamond Reynolds, and her four-year-old daughter. An earlier victim, Sandra Bland, was also pulled over and arrested for a broken taillight, and she died in custody. Both Castille and Bland were caught "driving while Black" in the wrong neighborhood.

The cop shot Castille as he reached for his wallet to produce his license and registration as the cop demanded. Reynolds, to protect herself and her child, started to video the dying man and the cop, who then pointed his gun at her. What the cop didn't know was that her video was being sent live-streamed to her Facebook friends, who sent it out and soon it became known to millions. More cops arrived, ordered her out of her car at gunpoint, arrested her and took her and her daughter into custody. She kept videoing while she was in the police car. Her anguish as she talked to the cops, along with her presence of mind, made a deep impression.

The police separated her from her daughter, grilled her for hours to intimidate her and see if they couldn't charge her. Someone must have told them that the video was already widely seen, so they couldn't just take away her phone, and they released her and her daughter.

In all these incidents, the police seek to silence witnesses. In the case of the Sterling murder, one of the men who took the video, Abdullah Muflahi, the owner of the store outside of which Sterling was murdered, the police took his phone away, locked him for hours in a police car, and seized the security camera footage from his store, which they are still sitting on.

An Air Force veteran who posted the first video of the Sterling shooting to some 10,000 followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter which then went viral, was subsequently detained at his job at the Dobbins Air Reserve Base. Police then led him from his job in shackles and held him for 26 hours. His job is in jeopardy.

These two police murders sparked largely Black but interracial protests of tens of thousands in cities across the country for days. At one of these, in Dallas, Texas, an African American Army veteran, Micah Johnson, opened fire with military precision from surrounding buildings on officers who were policing the demonstration, killing five and wounding another seven.

The police say Johnson wanted to kill white police officers in retaliation for the police murder of Blacks. Acquaintances and relatives say he came back from Afghanistan a changed man. It is not surprising that an individual with emotional problems in this polarized atmosphere would decide to carry out such an action, however misguided and harmful to the cause. We may see more such incidents.

This then became the major story in the media, swamping the two police murders. In spite of the fact that Johnson was not part of the demonstration and had nothing to do with Black Lives Matter, many jumped on the incident to charge that it was the protesters and BLM that were to blame.

Former Republican Congressman Joe Walsh sent out a tweet that got wide circulation saying, "This is now war. Watch out Obama. Watch out black lives matter punks. Real America is coming after you."

In a televised interview, the head of the National Association of Police Organizations blamed President Obama for waging a "war on cops." On the CBS TV show "Face the Nation" former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani opined, "When you say black lives matter, that is inherently racist," and blamed the movement for the shooting of the police. The blowhard talk-show host Rush Limbaugh, whose show is followed by millions, joined in.

Obama is singled out because he is Black. This is not new. Giuliani for example was speaking for many when he said last year, "I do not believe that the president loves America....He wasn't brought up the way you and I were brought up."

Writing in the Financial Times, Edward Luce wrote, "In response to the Blacks Lives Matter movement, there is now a Blue Lives Matter campaign for the police. A number of Republican figures, including the lieutenant governor of Texas, have blamed the killings on Black Lives Matter at whose protest they took place. The internet is awash with invented stories of how the group incites its supporters to attack the police."

In face of this racist onslaught, the protests of police violence were not

deterred. The weekend and beyond following the Dallas shootings saw tens of thousands of people taking to the streets and blocking roads, bridges and highways in more than a dozen cities, including Chicago, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Los Angeles and Phoenix. Hundreds were arrested.

In this situation of increasing polarization, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump emphasized his previous position that he stands with the police against Black Lives Matter. He says that he is the "law and order" candidate.

President Obama and Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton say that the problem is the result of a lack of communication between the police and the Black community, and urge "both sides" to reconcile. At the same time, Obama takes center stage at the memorial for the fallen Dallas police officers, but has never attended memorials to the growing list of Black victims of police murders, including Sterling and Castille. Neither has Clinton

Of course Obama (or whomever is the next president, Clinton or Trump) is the chief executive officer of the government that is charged with protecting the system that spawns racism.

The problem is not a breakdown in

communication between the Black community and the police. The real problem begins to be seen in a closer look at the situation in Dallas. There has been a massive media campaign emphasizing the "irony" that the killing of police occurred in Dallas, where such great progress has been made. The city even has a Black police chief.

An article in the New York Times dug a little deeper. It begins with how one man has been stopped regularly by police when he is not going to work to his job in demolition, asking for identification - about four times in the last four months alone. So now he wears his hardhat, vest and work gloves every time he goes out. "I got to fake like I'm wearing my work stuff, so they won't mess with me."

The article sums up: "But for all the progress that the Dallas police have made, this remains one of the most segregated big cities in the country, with yawning racial gaps in housing, schools and employment. Decades of discriminatory federal, state and local policies have concentrated the city's black population in deeply poor and underdeveloped neighborhoods south of Interstate 30, which serves as a line of demarcation between opportunity and neglect. While downtown Dallas is flush with glassy skyscrapers and high priced restaurants, large tracts of the city's southern sector are empty and ragged.

" "People look at the Blacks Lives Matter movement as people protesting against police brutality," said Terry Flowers, the executive director and headmaster of St. Phillips School and Community Center in South Dallas. "I think it is much larger than that. People are protesting against a social engineering of inequity." "

What is termed the Black community is in reality concentration of Blacks in ghettos, with high unemployment, poverty and resultant street crime made worse by the so-called war on drugs. The police are charged with enforcing this segregation and keeping the lid on the ghettos, functioning as an occupying force, with daily harassment, arrests, beatings and even murder. While segregation by law was defeated by the mass civil rights and Black liberation movements of the 1960s, de facto segregation is more pronounced today than in 1970.

Blacks who escape from the ghettos and have gotten better-paying jobs, largely the result of the gains of the Black movements of the "Sixties", are also swept up in this institutional, structural racism that is deeply embedded in 400 years of American capitalism. It will take more than "better communication" to break this down.

14 July 2016

The covert drone war in Yemen

16 July 2016, by **Radhya al-Mutawakel**

Death surrounds us in Yemen. Since March 2015, airstrikes from the Saudi-led coalition have led to the death of more than 614 civilians in 44 incidents, as documented here. But the ongoing civil war is not the only violence we fear. The United States' covert drone war in Yemen - at least 15 years old now - continues, killing children, women and innocent Yemenis going about their daily lives. It is unaccountable, ineffective, and

counterproductive, and Europe is complicit. It needs to stop and the European Union can help.

The European Parliament recently discussed the human rights impact of armed drones in Yemen. This is an important first step towards questioning the precision and understanding the human cost of armed drones in counter-terrorism operations. European countries are

indeed directly and indirectly involved in US drone strikes in Yemen and complicit in these extra-judicial killings. British intelligence played a crucial role in the CIA drone program by finding and fixing targets. The US airbases in Germany and Italy are crucial for the program.

We call on the European institutions to take a principled stance on the use of armed drones. We also call on these

institutions to pressure European member states for more transparency and accountability. They must assume their third-party responsibility in the US drone strikes. Germany and Italy should disclose information about the role of US airbases on their soil. The United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark, among others, should disclose the safeguards in place to prevent the intelligence they share with the US being used for these unlawful targeted killings. Germany and Italy should disclose information about the role of US airbases on their soil. The United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark, among others, should disclose the safeguards in place to prevent the intelligence they share with the US being used for these unlawful targeted killings.

Those in favor of drones praise them as precise and technologically advanced weapons that limit civilian harm. We, Yemenis, disagree. Drones do not bring peace or security. They bring death, destruction, suffering, lives lost and irreparably changed for generations. Our perception of drones is shaped by the images of burning bodies and vehicles, of children killed and injured, by the absence of peace, and by an overhead hovering.

The impact of these attacks is not limited to deaths and injuries, but also destroys the families who have lost their breadwinners, and affects the social and psychological state of the

communities impacted. A family member of one victim told us that since the incident her family lives in constant fear, they go to their farms in fear, and the children are afraid to go to school.

As for the strategic impact of the drone strikes, the reality shows that these targeted killing tactics were not able to eradicate terrorism or to limit its proliferation. They have even been counterproductive. In spite of the drone strikes, Al-Qaeda in Yemen turned from fighters whose operations were limited to sporadic sudden attacks into a standing army of militants fighting systematic wars and controlling large territories.

Yemeni locals in regions controlled by Al-Qaeda are stuck between the hell of terrorism and the hellfire of drones. Locals I have met in places where airstrikes occurred and killed civilians are now demanding justice. They consider drone strikes on innocents as an incentive to join Al-Qaeda and fight against the "killer" America. The tribal leader of a targeted village, Mabkhoot bin Saleh al-Obaahah, told me the strike had created terror in the hearts of his people and provoked their anger: they consider these strikes craven operations and some are threatening to take revenge.

Europe, especially as a number of states are developing their own

drones, can learn from this experience. European states must ensure that their policies on the use of drones guarantee transparency and accountability. They can limit the use of these inhumane weapons and the killing of more innocents elsewhere in the world.

The Obama administration released a number of classified documents and civilian casualty statistics related to six years of secret drone operations last Friday. Will European states follow suit? Will they finally disclose information related to their involvement in US drone operations? Are current and soon-to-be drone user states ready to articulate their policies on drone strikes inside and outside armed conflict? The European Parliament should at the very least reiterate their call for a Common European position and for more transparency, oversight, and accountability in the use of armed drones in Yemen and beyond.

Yemenis deserve a chance at peace and not the constant fear of death, from the internal conflict or from the skies overhead. While survivors and families of the victims in Yemen mourn their loss and listen to the distant hum of drones, greater transparency would be a first - and crucial - step towards accountability, compensation and redress.

8 July 2016

All hands on deck to help Jeremy Corbyn win

15 July 2016

It was touch and go through most of Tuesday July 12 if that would be the result. A ferocious dirty tricks campaign was rolled out. Corbyn supporters were blamed because a window was broken in the constituency office of challenger Angela Eagle. None of the journalists covering the most high-profile broken window in recent years managed to point out that the office is a short

distance from three pubs and has a long history of low-level anti-social behaviour. That was typical of the sort of nonsense that the undead Blairite spin doctors were feeding their friends in the press.

Unions crucial

The key to Corbyn's victory at the NEC was the support of the unions.

Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, the biggest union in the British state, was on radio and TV for several days saying:

"we have seen a cowardly attack launched against the party's elected leader which has deprived the country of all parliamentary opposition and let the Conservatives off scot-free in their moment of turmoil."

And the reason for his support for

Corbyn was very simple:

“Jeremy Corbyn has always – always – stood by us, stood on the picket lines, joined our campaigns, argued our case in parliament, advocated for workers’ rights.”

Unison’s Labour Link committee met on Friday July 8 and strongly supported Corbyn – a message that General Secretary Dave Prentis made a special trip to the Durham Miner’s Gala to convey in the strongest possible terms on Saturday. The GMB’s Tim Roache also made a strongly pro Corbyn speech in Durham, while the CWU’s Dave Ward has been consistently speaking out against the plotters.

The votes of union representatives were essential to the decision to permit Corbyn to appear on the ballot paper. This is a massive problem for the parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) which is largely Blairite and overwhelmingly hostile to Corbyn’s radical, anti-austerity, outward looking politics. They know that their candidate is going to be humiliated. Her support for Trident and the Iraq war combined with her reluctance to distance herself from Tony Blair render laughable her claim to be a candidate of the left. In her media appearances before the NEC result she never really gave the impression of someone who was convinced that she was a serious candidate. Now that she is going up against the most popular leader of a party British politics has ever known she has the demeanour of someone who thought they’d bought a ticket to an exhibition of Japanese painting only to find out she’s arrived at an evening class of seppuku for beginners.

And there had been speculation for days that Owen Smith would throw his hat into the ring after talks between Eagle and he broke down in the run up to Chilcot. Now that has happened, making the prospects for both non-Corbyn candidates even worse.

The right’s limited options

The right’s options are limited but explosive. They may choose to split and

realign with the Liberal Democrats now that they know they’ve lost the unions. That will be very damaging because most MPs and councillors are to the right of the membership and in the current undemocratic electoral system, a divided left and very soft left vote ensures a Tory government in the next election. Or they might just hunker down for a war of attrition trying to make Corbyn’s life unbearable in parliament and the media. However as they’ve learned in recent weeks, that very gentle exterior belies a real political toughness.

Corbyn won a big victory at the NEC and it has excited the hundreds of thousands of people who joined the party to back him. But while it was big it was not total. The Mirror reports: “Labour members who have signed up after Tuesday, January 12 will not be eligible to vote.

That means the claimed 100,000 new members the party claims they have attracted since the referendum will be excluded from the process.

But they may still be able to take part in the vote if they’re willing to stump up a “£25 registered supporter” fee.

Applications to be a registered supporter will only be open for two days – and it’s currently unclear whether those who became members since January 12 will also be allowed to sign up as registered supporters.”

It’s unlikely that this was done to minimise the impact of the dozens of Eagle supporters who joined Labour in the last few days. According to one report the right wing of the NEC waited until:

“a couple of pro-Corbyn members had left, and Corbyn himself had gone, a vote was taken on a motion not on the agenda, to exclude from the leadership vote anyone who joined the party in the past six months. So the 130,000 who signed up since Brexit, most of whom are thought to be Corbyn supporters, will be unable to vote.

Now whatever you think of Corbyn, this looks and smells like gerrymandering by his opponents.”

How to help Corbyn

There are lots of things Labour Party members and Corbyn supporters outside the party can do. The task now is to mobilise every vote for Corbyn.

Hundreds of thousands have poured into the party in the past year, with all the evidence being most of them are pro-Corbyn. Many will be people with little culture or tradition in the party, may not have been to meetings and it may be difficult to organise them. However lots of them are getting their information from social media and other networks and that favours the Corbyn campaign. We are really seeing the emergence of social media as an organising tool in British politics.

While the NEC predictably tightened up the rules about registered supporters and also introduced an unprecedented waiting time for new members, that doesn’t mean anyone who wasn’t a full member in January can’t vote. If you are a member of an affiliated organisation listed here or become one by August 8 and ask for a vote here by August 8 you can vote. And this list includes Unite Community which unwaged people can join for 50p per week. And there is still a short window for people to sign up at £25 – we understand from Monday – Wednesday next week though the Labour Party hasn’t updated its website since the NEC meeting so it’s difficult to be sure.

Women and LGBTIQ support

Momentum may well not be capable of organising all these people. It is the best vehicle available and should be the centralising organising focus, it will have to reach out far beyond its existing membership and influence. There are tens of thousands who will vote Corbyn but don’t identify with Momentum. Many constituency Labour parties (CLPs) have already backed Corbyn – more than 80% of those that have met since the attempted coup. A meeting of all such

CLPs and a campaign to get more on board through emergency meetings, along with national unions and well known figures could come together to reach out further perhaps than Momentum could.

If - and increasingly it looks like a big if - Angela Eagle does challenge Corbyn, one of her lines of attack will be the fact that Corbyn is a man. Women who support Corbyn need to urgently discuss the best way of undercutting this. Similarly Eagle has been targeting the LGBTIQ press so there needs to be a more visible LGBTIQ support for Corbyn.

Every single voter needs to be spoken to. This means volunteering the staff the phone banks that were such an important part of the original Corbyn election victory last year. It means going door to door. This is big work. Many wards now have hundreds of members and the left inside the Labour Party has to think about organising its own events as the only thing that will be allowed during the leadership contest is a single item nominating meeting (unless there is a local by election).

All this is happening at the worst time of year. People are taking their taking

summer holidays and internal labour movement meetings have largely closed down for the summer and the agreement from the NEC doesn't allow official hustings so these will need to be organised outside the formal structures - though official lists can as far as I can see be used to mobilise for them and we should fight for that.

Corbyn will carry the membership and in a few months we could have a Labour Party with hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic members ready to fight the Tories and a leadership that is up to the job. These are exciting times in British politics.

Gathering the anti-Memorandum left in Greece

13 July 2016, by **Antonis Davanellos**

Tsipras' actions came at the culmination of a battle within SYRIZA led by the Left Platform to hold the party leadership accountable for acting against the stated program of SYRIZA from the days after it came to power in January 2015. The Left Platform and other SYRIZA members who rejected Tsipras' capitulation left to become the core of a new alliance, Popular Unity, where they joined by other individuals and organizations from the radical left, including several currents from ANTARSYA, the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left, which had remained outside SYRIZA in the preceding years.

When Tsipras set new elections for September, Popular Unity faced the challenge of organizing its new group, preparing an election campaign and mobilizing supporters to vote in a matter of weeks. In the end, the new alliance fell just short of the 3 percent of the vote necessary to get representatives in the new parliament.

Antonis Davanellos is a leading voice of the socialist group Internationalist Workers Left (DEA) and the Red

Network, a former Political Committee member of SYRIZA and leader of the Left Platform, and now a member of Popular Unity's Political Council. Here, he reports on the discussions and outcome of Popular Unity's first conference, in an article translated from Greek into French by Sotiris Siamandouras for the A l'encontre website and translated here into English by Todd Chretien.

Popular Unity celebrated its first national conference in Athens on June 24-26. The meeting brought together an assembly of effective and combative activists whose unity is a critical development on the Greek radical and anti-Memorandum left.

The party numbers some 5,000 members nationwide. Its governing bodies include a Political Council composed of 111 members, who were elected by the 1,009 delegates present at the conference. The large representation of delegates was despite the fact that some faced transportation problems owing to the

economic crisis, and had to leave before the end of the conference.

There are three principal currents in Popular Unity's "political front": The largest, with 55 percent of the delegates, was the Left Tendency [whose main spokesperson, Panagiotis Lafazanis, served as Minister of Productive Reconstruction, Environment and Energy in the first SYRIZA-ANEL government before resigning]. The Radical Renovation current won 19.7 percent of the delegates, and the Red Network secured 12.8 percent.

Popular Unity's first conference demonstrated a difference with and other currents on the so-called radical left that orient mainly on participation in elections—as well as those who believe that it is first necessary to "regroup" the left by putting particular emphasis on a political-theoretical evaluation of the SYRIZA period, implying that political action must be postponed to a later time.

During two days of intense political discussion—with all the difficulties

that come along with developing procedures in founding an organization in such a social and political situation, Popular Unity delegates nevertheless approved a programmatic framework and a political resolution constituting a roadmap for activity for our 180 local and workplace branches.

Of course, these texts are necessarily a compromise between political positions that are, at times, quite far apart. Be that as it may, the great majority of delegates clearly believe these compromises represent progress in the elaboration of a common political outlook.

It could not be otherwise, as Popular Unity is a new alliance—keep in mind that it came together less than a year ago—and there are different tendencies with their own trajectories and political experiences at its heart. A large portion of these emerged from the Left Platform within SYRIZA—which in turn was chiefly composed of the Left Current and Red Network—while another section came from ANTARSYA [the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left] after having drawn conclusions about that coalition's passive, sectarian posture.

Political discussion during the conference centered around a number of crucial questions. Some currents attempted to define the character of Popular Unity as, above all, an "anti-European Union current." This underestimates the need to base our aim of breaking with or leaving the eurozone on the decisive and immediate struggles facing us today against austerity, the Memorandums and neoliberalism.

This underestimation of the need for a clear class content to our opposition to the euro and the EU is linked to an underestimation of the need for an anti-capitalist strategy, which was, in fact, explicitly adopted in the conference decisions. In turn, this is linked to a dismissal of the importance of a general perspective for socialist liberation and emancipation—a reference point that ought to decisively frame all of our politics, placing clear limits on, for example,

what we consider acceptable political alliances.

All this points to the need for strategies that delineate a socialist perspective from one that revolves around a perspective based on "national independence."

After all, today's world is not the same as it was during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Imperialism's policies have not imposed "colonization through debt" by gunboat, but rather by force of the banks.

This difference is not only tactical; in a country like Greece, the local ruling class is linked to centers of European imperialism by a thousand threads. This ruling class has thrown its weight behind agreements with the lenders. It has backed up the pro-austerity Memorandums. It has shown no willingness to conduct experiments similar to the "Nasserist" strategy of the past—that is, to countenance any form of limited autonomy from the international "institutions," even if remaining squarely inside the boundaries of a conservative economic model.

This central fact ought to eliminate any basis for strategies based on a perspective of achieving national independence. Instead, the anti-Memorandum reversal of austerity or an exit from the eurozone under a popular-working class program should be a component of an internationalist transitional program toward socialism. Otherwise, it will not come to pass.

This debate underlines differing estimations regarding the meaning of the "Brexit" vote [on the UK referendum on leaving or staying in the EU]. One stance points to Brexit as proof of the crisis of the European Union and the contradictions facing our adversary, and is delighted by it. The other insists on an independent approach, a policy based on class.

It's one thing to be enthusiastic about the Brexit vote, but it's another thing to underestimate the specific problems of political leadership we find in Britain, let alone the problems that come with searching for a local Greek version of UK Independence

Party leader Nigel Farage—never mind granting them some role as "liberator" from the EU.

Our insistence on the definition of Popular Unity's line as being anti-Memorandum/anti-capitalist can continue without difficulty within the framework of the decisions made at the party conference regarding the planning and activity of its organizations and of its local sections.

We decided to take action against proposed reforms to Greek labor law, to resist attacks on the social security system, to fight against privatization and the auctioning off of low-income and working-class housing, and we will organize solidarity with refugees.

At the crucial level of action—which brings to mind the "French model" of mobilization and the sustained fight against the El Khomri labor law, whose significance was somewhat underestimated in our discussions—what would a strategy of "national independence" mean?

What would be, for example, the specific content of "defense committees of national sovereignty" proposed by some members of Popular Unity? What would be the content of the proposals—fortunately put forward by only a very small minority at the conference—to "control the borders?"

Anyone who really wants to understand the state of mind of Popular Unity's base only need understand that we are now the first official political party in Greece to affirm our rejection of homophobia, and a large majority passed an amendment backing the right of same-sex couples to adopt children.

We have no illusions that all these political questions are settled. We know the debate will continue, and it will subsequently develop in close coordination with Popular Unity's 180 local and workplace branches. In fact, this is what makes us optimistic about the final outcome of the debate, for we are convinced that a large majority of the party's membership is oriented toward radical left politics.

The discussion of Popular Unity's

statutes could not, in the end, be conducted for lack of time. Efforts to achieve the most democratic constitution possible will continue. This debate is closely linked to issues such as the party's growth, the collective functioning of its leadership, and the relationship between the decisions of the "party" and the public statements of its leaders and cadre in the media. All of these questions generated dozens of amendments at the conference, but they will have to be settled going forward.

In our opinion, all of the material generated by the conference should be studied by the newly elected leadership bodies so they can be grouped together clearly by theme.

And it will be necessary to convene a party Congress with sufficient time allowed to make decisions, without discord, about statutes and rules governing our party's functioning. In the meantime, we should follow the guidelines we agreed to "in principle" with a sensibility that takes into account the tasks before us.

In the wake of SYRIZA's capitulation and the disintegration of the left, Popular Unity is the critical site for the regroupment of the anti-Memorandum radical left. The conference was a positive step in the right direction, a path we must follow with determination.

Over the course of the conference, the Red Network demonstrated that it has

taken steps toward its own political consolidation and maturity. We elected 14 comrades to Popular Unity's new Political Council, openly stating our willingness to collaborate with other currents, but also making our own ideological and political choices clear.

We have refused to follow the model of creating "blocs" whose only aim is to secure more elected positions in the party's leadership bodies. These sorts of blocs may be useful in this regard, but they carry with them unforeseen contradictions.

July 13

socialistworker.org

Chilcot report vindicates anti-war movement

11 July 2016, by **Fred Leplat**

Two previous reports into the war by [Butler](#) and [Hutton](#) had exonerated Blair and the establishment. It was only through the persistence of the [Stop the War Coalition](#) and Military Families Against the War that the 7-year long Chilcot enquiry was established. Its report comes close to revealing the whole truth and is sending the establishment reeling. As a result, the US and Britain are blaming each other for the disaster that has engulfed Iraq and the Middle East as a result of the war.

The Chilcot report vindicates what the anti-war movement had been arguing since 2001. The two million who marched behind the Stop the War Coalition in London on 15 February 200, and the millions of others who demonstrated in 600 cities around the world, knew then that Blair was lying and that there was no justification for the war. All the opinion polls at the time showed massive opposition.

Blair and his government showed contempt for democracy by turning their back on the majority of the people in Britain. In this, they were

well supported by the establishment, the Tories and the media. There were some rare exceptions, such as Robin Cook who resigned as Leader of the House of Commons in March 2003, Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector who confirmed that there were no weapons of mass destruction, and Eliza Manningham-Buller, the head of MI5, who warned that an invasion of Iraq would substantially increase the terrorist threat in Britain.

Despite mass opposition in the country to the war, 414 MPs voted for the war in Iraq on 18 March 2003, including most of the Labour and Tory benches. Today, there are 139 of these MPs still serving in Parliament - 66 Labour and 69 Tory. Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbot were amongst the 85 Labour MPs who defied Blair, but Angela Eagle - who is now challenging Corbyn - voted for the war.

The war in Iraq, which started in March 2003, has had much deeper and long-lasting consequences than any other since World War II. The military defeat of the USA in Vietnam

in 1975 brought peace to that country. It also prevented the USA from engaging in any large-scale military interventions until 2001, when, with NATO backing, it invaded Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The attack in September 2001 on the Twin Towers was an opportunity seized by US imperialism, along with its faithful allies such as the UK, to launch the never-ending "war on terror". This was an attempt at providing ideological glue to coalesce support behind western imperialism, which had lost the whip of the Cold War to mobilise states against the threat from the USSR and China. Western imperialism now needed a new justification for military interventions to re-establish its military power alongside its economic power. US President George Bush declared in 2002 that North Korea, Iran and Iraq constituted an "axis of evil threatening the peace of the world". War was therefore necessary against evil and terror. Therefore Military intervention was essential for regime change and to introduce democracy.

The war and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq have had tragic consequences: at least 174,000, and maybe up to 1 million, civilians dead, and 4,491 US and 179 UK military personnel killed. The war and occupation in Iraq cost Britain £10 billion, on top of the £20 billion spent in Afghanistan.

The tragic long term-consequences of the war come on top of the tragedy of the killing and the destruction that occurred during the war. Tony Blair continues to argue that the world and the Middle East would have been worse off if Saddam Hussein had not been removed. He told the BBC: "I don't believe that this struggle was in vain in the end".

Thirteen years after the end of the military operations, the balance sheet is here for all to see. The war in Iraq has spawned the development of the terrorist Al Qaeda and ISIS. The suicide bomb in Baghdad, on the day before the release of the Chilcot report, killed nearly 300 people. The regime change in Iraq has not brought democracy, but corruption, sectarianism and violence.

In the region, the picture is just as bleak. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is undefeated. The people of Syria are enduring five years of civil war from the twin barbarisms of ISIS and the brutal Assad dictatorship. There, maybe 500,000 have died, 5 million have fled the country as refugees and as many again internally displaced. There is still no just peace for the Palestinians as Israel continues its illegal occupation and the building of settlements. The dictatorships of the fundamentalist religious regimes in the Gulf States continue because they are faithful allies of imperialism. The Arab uprisings, which gave hope for democracy and social and economic justice, have stalled. This is most marked in Egypt where imperialism backs the new regime of el-Sisi, who led the military coup d'état against the elected President Morsi.

And in the "West", the war has also had negative consequences. Civil liberties have been curtailed in the name of the "War on Terror", including with the recent the Prevent

strategy which seeks to curtail "extremism". The government has defined very loosely extremism in the Prevent strategy as: "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs." It is easy to see that this could include vocal and active, but not violent - opposition to the Royal Family or the House of Lords, or mass civil disobedience against unjust laws.

Immediately after 9/11, Bush defined the war on terror as a "clash of civilization". This justified Islamophobia and racism, as, in a sweeping generalization, Islam was associated with terrorism. Right wing and nationalist political forces, including in Britain, were able to declare that Islam was incompatible with western society. The racism unleashed following the Exit vote in the Referendum had the ground well prepared in the last 15 years.

Britain also collaborated with torture, rendition, and imprisonment without trial. Although, this was beyond the scope of the Chilcot enquiry, much has still to be revealed in Britain's co-operation at the notorious hellholes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. But we do know, from Libyan opponents of Colonel Gadhafi, that they had been duped by Britain, who was secretly co-operating with the dictator to have then returned to the country for imprisonment and torture.

In the end, western imperialism would rather work with loyal but brutal dictators, rather than democratic but independent and popular states. Britain had co-operated for decades with Saddam Hussein until they lost faith in him. Diplomatic relations had been re-established with Libya following the 20-year long freeze, no doubt for lucrative oil contracts, despite Gadhafi being a brutal dictator.

It is just not credible for Blair to declare that he "acted in good faith" to make the world a better place. He acted to preserve the interests of British imperialism and its role as a strategic ally of the US, whatever the

consequences. Indeed, he wrote to Bush: "I will be with you whatever". The political consequences are now unravelling for him and the establishment. He will never be able to shake off the label of liar and war criminal. He can expect to be pursued wherever he goes. Legal action is a possibility such for misconduct in public office, damages or even impeachment in Parliament.

But the greatest of political consequences as a result of the war is the rejection of the traditional political establishment, in both the Tory and Labour parties, who have been pursuing a bi-partisan policy of support for imperialist wars and austerity for the people in Britain. The massive electoral victory of Jeremy Corbyn as a leader of the Labour Party is undoubtedly, in part, because his consistent opposition to the war in Iraq and his role in the anti-war movement. This included being chair of the Stop the War Coalition and a 50-year long membership of CND. The apology on behalf of the Labour Party for the Iraq war given by Corbyn in Parliament would not have happened had there been another leader. His heckling while giving the statement by Labour backbench MP Ian Austin shows that for many in Parliament, there is no remorse for the war.

There is certainly no remorse from the Tories who backed the war by voting with Tony Blair, with the exception of 16 of their MPs. Unlike Corbyn, Cameron - who voted for the war - has refused to either apologize, or even admit that the war was a "mistake" or "wrong".

The main political task for the left that arises out of the Chilcot report, apart from holding to account all MPs who voted for war and bringing Blair to justice, is to defend Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. His opponents, not only have failed to actively oppose austerity, but they also want to bring back Labour to being a war-party, ready for imperialist interventions, and to support the Trident nuclear weapons system of mass destruction. To prevent a repetition of the tragedy of Iraq, we need an anti-war government in Britain.

Refugees and Capitalism

10 July 2016, by **Shahrazad Mojab**

â€” Shahrazad Mojab

An abundance of reports with sophisticated and well-presented statistical graphs depict the enormity of this human calamity. Stories are told, music and plays are performed, photos taken, paintings exhibited, and feature films and documentaries made â€” all to tell and show us the suffering, resiliency, creativity and resistance of this displaced and disposed population.

Rarely, if ever, will these informational and artistic productions help us, the readers and viewers, to fully understand the cause and depth of this human tragedy.

We read that more than 3,000 refugees from Eritrea, Niger, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea since 2000 â€” a sea that is renamed “the Mediterranean Cemetery.” The UNHCR 2014 study, *World at War*, reports that this unprecedented level of human mobility is not limited to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), rather it is a global phenomenon that will not settle down any time soon.

The International Organization for Migration in its *World Migration Report 2015* estimated the global number of international migrants at 232 million and the number of internal migrants at 740 million. Lastly, about 60 million people across the globe are fleeing the condition of war, poverty and expulsion.

Shouldn't we be curious enough to ask what's responsible for this massive displacement of people? What condition forces people to take such risk in life only for the purpose of seeking food, shelter, sanitation, security, and safety? Who and what has caused this objectionable condition?

Shouldn't we ask what forces are setting the world on fire through drones, bombs, border closures, detentions, starvation and torture, forces that are turning people into “disposable” items?

In this short piece, I intend to offer some answers and think through to the root of this violence, this level of contempt for human life and dignity, whereby lives are stolen and bartered â€” not only now, but also in the past many decades.

Journeys of Death

After around one week of walking in the desert, during which some people died of starvation, we reached Tajoor Mountain, where we stopped in order to have a rest. I was looking around me, I found some people dying, some were sleeping, and others were crying and asking for water or food. I was walking among people laying down, looking at them and thinking they were staring at me, but no answer from their side. There I realized I was going through a journey of death. (Testimony of a 15-year-old Ethiopian boy, Danish Refugee Council, 2012: 23)

The process of escaping violence has turned into a “journey of death” for millions of refugees. For Syrian refugees it is also a journey of “no return.”

The country is in ruin; a quarter of schools are damaged, half the hospitals destroyed or unable to function, and “about 70% of the population is without access to adequate drinking water, one in three people are unable to meet their basic food needs,... more than two million children are out of school, and four out of five people live in poverty.” (BBC, 2016)

The warring factions â€” Syrian Army,

Free Syrian Army, Ahrar Al-Sham, Jubhat Al-Nusra, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant/Syria (ISIS) â€” are engaged in a ruthless destruction of the nation in order to rule over it. These forces, in different ways, are supported by the Western imperialist powers and by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Russia and the Gulf states.

The war has injured the body and spirit of the Syrian people. It has tormented parents who are helpless in dealing with the sleepless child screaming out of agony and fear, who are perturbed by their girls and boys who wet themselves or have gone silent out of the shock of violence. A mother says, “We're just living on the edge of life. We're always nervous, we're always afraid.” (BBC 2016)

Syria is a traumatized nation rapidly realizing the impossibility of a full recovery for generations to come. The story of the ripping apart of this nation will be engrained in the memory of those who survive. Those who are gone will be lucky to be buried with their names engraved on a stone.

Hernandez and Stylianou (2016) recently reported that “More than 1,250 unnamed men, women and children have been buried in unmarked graves in 70 sites in Turkey, Greece and Italy since 2014.” On average 10 refugees bodies a day have “washed ashore” since that year and “at least one person each day has been buried in an unmarked grave.”

Yet Syrian people are also “determined to reclaim their dignity” (Halasa et al. 2014) in order to resist and rebuild a nation free from violence, oppression, and subjugation as in the current experiment in Rojava, the Kurdish region in Northern Syria.

A Product of Capitalism

This human catastrophe is called a "refugee crisis." However, a closer look can reveal a much deeper crisis that is shaking humanity.

The terminology of "crisis" is an ideological masking of the world capitalist crisis. It is "ideological" because it is presented to us as both "unavoidable" and as an "isolated" incident.

This perilous condition, however, is the creation of the capitalist imperialist order in an effort to resolve many of its deep contradictions. Among them, and the principal one, is the global-based mass socialization of production and the anarchy embedded in the privatization of the wealth being produced by millions of laboring women and men.

Millions of people are circulating around the world in search of work. Women from the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are leaving their families behind to look after the families of strangers in the Gulf States, North America and Europe. Their men are recruited by construction industries to build monumental towers under slave-like working conditions.

Workers from Mexico and the Caribbean are entering the United States and Canada as seasonal migrant workers to pick fruits and vegetables to cheapen the cost of labor for corporate agribusiness.

Most of us are affected by this "mass socialization of production" through selling our power to labor. The capitalist owners are in competition in buying, selling and exchanging commodities, ranging from labor power to finance capital or other forms of commodities such as food, garments or technology. Anarchy in the market requires the intervention of the capitalist state to regulate, moderate and control this anarchy on behalf of the capitalist class.

This unjust system has made life intolerable for the majority of the world population. The capitalist state

often resorts to unrelenting wars, invasions, occupations or genocide. The predacious class controlling this state has left open the wounds of colonialism and centuries of slavery that have damaged the social fabric of communities and societies.

Homes, neighborhoods, villages and cities are ruined beyond recognition and, in the process of this unfathomable destruction, other entrenched forces of annihilation such as religious extremisms have emerged.

Western imperialism, now in conflict with its former Islamist allies such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, fights fire with fire: While resources are focused on war, there is considerable effort to also promote "moderate" or "reformist" religious tendencies as an alternative to ISIS, Boko Haram or Al-Shabaab.

In more than two decades of military intervention in the MENA region, the imperialist collusion and collision with religious patriarchy has strengthened the rule of religion and has shrunk the secular spaces and possibilities in most of these societies. Let us consider the impact of these relations in the lives of Syrian refugees.

Among the 10 million displaced Syrians, the majority are women and children. They flee war zones, but cannot escape patriarchal religious violence. Rape and sexual assault are a frequent occurrence at checkpoints, on the borders, or in the camps.

Displacement adds to economic insecurity and therefore forces young girls into early marriage or prostitution. Hibaaq Osman (2016) reports that "the rate of child marriage among Syrians in Jordan" doubled between 2011 and 2012, making "them more vulnerable to abuse." The patriarchal relations under the condition of war and displacement have forced women to effectively live "under house arrest." (Ibid.)

It is well-established that rape and sexual violence are weapons of war. But other forms of violence against women such as domestic violence, abduction, forced prostitution, early

marriage and sexual exploitation are daily experienced by women and young girls in the disruption of life by war.

Osman writes that "an estimated 250,000 Syrians have been killed in the last five years, the slaughter has left thousands of women as head of their household" and that the burden of care for the elderly and disabled is on their backs. Sex trafficking gangs are organized to transfer girls over 16 to the Gulf States.

Continuation of Colonial War

What appear as "civil" wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen or throughout the MENA region are in fact continuations of colonialist wars, reinforcing and realigning patriarchal, racialized and colonized forces. The horrific atrocities committed against women under these conditions leads us to conclude that imperialist wars are symbolically and literally fought on and over women's bodies. Women signify land, nation, culture, ethnicity, religion and community to be captured, controlled, veiled or securitized.

A forgotten group of "refugees" within the border of Syria are Palestinians who have endured displacement for 65 years: from their homeland Palestine in 1948, and now since 2012 with the outbreak of war in Syria. About half a million Palestinian refugees are registered in twelve Palestinian refugee camps in Syria; all are displaced again.

According to reports, in a single day in April 2013, 6000 Palestinian camp residents in Ein al Tal Camp were displaced. The population of Yarmouk camp in southern Damascus, which once numbered some 160,000 people, has dwindled to a mere 30,000 following mass displacement in December 2012. (Al-Hardan, 2012) A total of 235,000 Palestinian refugees are now internally displaced within Syria. (White, 2013)

My point, so far, has been that the "crisis" of refugees is a manifestation of a multilayered crisis of capitalist

imperialism wherein different wars, from Syria to Ukraine, Somalia, Libya or Congo, are overlapping and interacting. In Europe and North America, this "crisis" is hastening the growth of virulent fascist and neo-fascist currents.

Indeed, the sectarian, ethnicized, religious-based wars in the MENA region are spreading into the streets of Europe. Refugee camp workers and volunteers in European cities report the rise of sexual and sectarian violence within the refugee camps. As I have mentioned already, none of these tensions is limited to the MENA region nor is this the first time that it is happening in recent history.

The Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya is a case in point. Ben Rawlence's *City of Thrones: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* (2016) presents a horrifying account of refugee lives. Dadaab literally means "the rocky, hard place;" but it also means a place of violence, brutality, starvation, rape, corruption, suffering and death.

The camp was built in 1992 by the UNHCR to shelter 90,000 Somalian refugees fleeing war and persecution. Today, it is a ravaged metropolis with half a million residents from neighboring countries.

A recruiting ground for Islamist extremists like Al-Shabaab, it is a place where the humanitarian aid agencies, government and non-government forces collaborate with patriarchal religious and secular groups in sexually harassing, financially corrupting, and mentally persecuting the residents of the camp. This is a place of entrapment for generations of migrants who have not experienced anything but violence and dispossession.*

Bartered Lives

The mass-based migration of people is militarized and securitized. In 2013-14, Italy operated its Mare Nostrum humanitarian rescue mission in the Mediterranean. This operation saved the lives of 150,000 migrants in danger of drowning. The plan was canceled under the pressure of the

European Union (EU) because it was deemed to "encourage" people to leave North Africa for Europe via the sea.

The rescue mission was replaced by a punitive and controlling "Operation Triton" conducted by Frontex (the EU border police). Thousands perished in the sea and still dead bodies reach Europe's shores.

The capitalist imperialist Europe put their forces together to solve the "refugee crisis" by "bartering refugees for refugees," this time involving Turkey, the rising religious and autocratic regime in the region.

Iverna McGowan, head of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office, wrote: "EU and Turkish leaders have today sunk to a new low, effectively horse trading away the rights and dignity of some of the world's most vulnerable people. The idea of bartering refugees for refugees is not only dangerously dehumanizing, but also offers no sustainable long term solution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis." (Amnesty International, 2016)

Here is how this "dehumanizing" deal was arranged: In November 2015, EU leaders announced an agreement to offer Turkey three billion Euros over two years to manage more than two million refugees from Syria, in return for curbing the flow of migration into Europe. In March 2016, another plan was finalized between the EU and Turkey:

The EU proposed to the Turkish government a plan in which Turkey would take back every refugee who entered Greece (and thereby the EU) illegally. In return, the EU would accept one person into the EU who is registered as a Syrian refugee in Turkey for every Syrian sent back from Greece. Turkey countered the offer by demanding a further 3 billion Euros in order to help them in supplying the 2.7 million refugees in Turkey. In addition, the Turkish government asked for their citizens to be allowed to travel freely into the Schengen area, i.e., the 22 nations of Europe that have abolished passport controls, starting at the end of June 2016, as well as an increased speed in

talks for a possible accession of Turkey to European Union.

This plan was also "criticized on 8 March 2016 by the United Nations, which warned that it could be illegal to send the migrants back to Turkey in exchange of financial and political rewards." (Nebheay and Baczynask, 2016)

In mainstream reporting and analysis the refugee is reduced to a disembodied person, fragmented into a nation, religion, or ethnic body, functioning and suffering outside of any structure of power such as religious or capitalist patriarchy. This approach cites "pull factors" to explain the mass desire of refugees to arrive in the EU.

In these accounts, Europe is considered to be the place of safety, security, and prosperity, of a much desired "West." Slavoj Žižek (2015) wrote: "The hard lessons for the refugees is that 'there is no Norway;' even in Norway. They [refugees] will have to learn to censor their dreams: Instead of chasing them in reality, they should focus on changing reality."

Then there are "push factors" such as ISIS, Boko Haram or El-Shabab. But poverty, violence, corruption, authoritarianism, legacies of colonialism, and decades of occupation and neoliberal austerity measures do not constitute "push factors."

More importantly, the dependency of these two factors "push" and "pull," even if we attempt to consider them seriously "on each other, and the totality of the unbearable conditions that they create for people, is left out in this analysis.

Imperial/Fundamentalist Symbiosis

My point is that instead of relying on the positivist analysis of "correlating" factors, we should expand and broaden our analysis to understand the conflicting but nonetheless complementary relations between imperialism and fundamentalism. In

reality there is a symbiotic relationship between them.

Defending or supporting either imperialism or fundamentalism will strengthen both. Every terrorist attack is responded to with a rally organized by fascist groups in Europe; more bombings fuel the fire of war, more radicalization of the youth to join extremist groups; more displaced people appear on the borders of the West, more rise in anti-immigrant sentiments, racism and Islamophobia.

Humanity is ensnared by the belligerent forces of imperialism and fundamentalism. The ideology of us/them, civilized/barbaric, tradition/modernity, religious/secular or tribal/cosmopolitan is reinforcing this contradictory but complementary set of relations.

The capitalist imperialist system shows much contempt for the lives of millions, easily expelling them from their homes and lands, bartering them and disposing them through the mechanism of "savage sorting." (Sassen, 2014) This should be a wake-up call "a call that the world needs a completely and radically different social order.

The current crisis is full of real and serious dangers, and the world condition is explosive. But it can bring real opportunities for radical social transformation. The 2011 Arab Uprising raised hopes for the building of a better world, but the millions who engaged in street politics lacked revolutionary leadership and were content with replacing dictators by those who promised fair elections and the rule of law.

Religious fundamentalists and imperialist powers, in collaboration with military, local and regional powers, were ready to impose war and destruction to shatter people's aspirations for democracy, freedom and equality.

Understanding "The Crisis"

Final thoughts: To understand the "crisis" of our time, we should not

limit our analysis to the current events. If we do so, we will never understand the depth of the human misery under the capitalist imperialist condition nor be able to answer why and how patriarchal, racist, nationalist, religious fundamentalist relations are (re)produced.

Humanity does not deserve this life and condition. This level of wretchedness is not limited to zones of war in the world. A characteristic of today's imperialism is the convergence of its domestic and international relations.

For instance, the "War-on-Terror" is an instance of the overlap of domestic and international forms of co-dependency in surveillance, racialization, incarceration or policing. The sex trafficking of women, barbed wire fences along the U.S.-Mexico border or between European nations, or the "separation walls" in Israel and the "normalizing" of the right of the state to securitize citizens in border crossing or in schools, are all forms of racialized and gendered violence.

What I have laid out as a Marxist feminist educator allows us to consider the applicability of theories, policies and practices in building a movement for changing the conditions of war and violence and the aftermath of these conditions. We must build a revolutionary social movement demanding a world without borders and bullets; without nations; without sexual and racial violence; without prison and camps "one without exile, destruction, poverty and fear.

The major challenge remains, however: how to revive a revolutionary movement in an era of theoretical confusion, in the absence of a powerful international movement, without inadvertently supporting racist, masculinist, culturalist, nationalist, religious and colonialist projects.

A revolutionary feminist praxis allows us to understand the complexity of the current global power structure in the context of the history of colonialism and capitalism, in particular its very masculinist, theocratic and patriarchal nature.

*The Guardian reported on May 13, 2016 that after the Kenyan government announced it would send all refugees at Dadaab back to Somalia, both residents and human rights organizations called on the government to reverse its plans.

References

Al-Hardan, Anaheed (2012) A year on: The Palestinians in Syria, *Syrian Studies Association Bulletin*, 17 (10).

Amnesty International (2016) "EU Turkey Summit: EU and Turkish Leaders Deal Death Blow to the Right to Seek Asylum," www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/03/eu-turkey-summit).

BBC (2016) "Syria: The Story of the Conflict," March 11, www.bbc.com/world-middle-east-26116868.

Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2012) "Desperate Choices: Conditions, Risks and Protection Failures Affecting Ethiopian Migrants in Yemen," www.drc.dk.

Halasa, Malu, Zaher Omareen and Nawara Mahfoud (2014) *Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline* (London: Saqi Books).

Hernandez, Vladimir and Nossos Stylianou (2016) "Buried without a name: The untold story of Europe's drowned migrants," BBC, May 10.

International Organization for Migration (2015) *World Migration Report: Migrants and Cities, New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* (Geneva, Switzerland).

Nebhay, Stephanie and Gabriela Baczynask (2016) "U.N., rights groups say EU-Turkey migrant deal may be illegal," Reuters (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-idUSKCN0WA1D4>).

Osman, Hibaq (2016) "This is the Brutal Effect of War on the Women of Syria," *Independent*, January 29.

Rawlence, Ben (2016) *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* (London: Picador).

Sassen, Saskia (2014) *Expulsion: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2015) *World at*

War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014 (Geneva: UNHCR) <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>, 2.

White, Gavin David (2013) "Conflict in Syria Compounds Vulnerability of

Palestine Refugees," *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 44, September: 80.

Žižek, Slavoj (2015) "We Can't Address the EU Refugee Crisis without Confronting Global Capitalism," www.inthesetimes.com.

After Dallas: The Struggle Continues

9 July 2016, by **Solidarity Steering Committee**

Despite the increasingly clear lack of connection between the vigilante shooter(s) and organized protest activity, this tragedy will almost certainly lead to increased repression against Black Lives Matter and other Black political organizations in Dallas and around the country, as well as popular racist backlash. Right wing pundits are already issuing thinly veiled calls for retaliation. Likely,

Dallas will become a popular excuse to call for a hiatus from protest.

We face a difficult period ahead, and now more than ever must remain vigilant and committed to struggle. We must continue to be in the streets and to demand justice. Black liberation remains central to all liberation, and Black Lives Matter as an organization and a movement

needs the support of everyone committed to the fight for a better world. We urge all activists and revolutionaries to maintain or increase our engagement in this fight, and to be prepared to defend those targeted by backlash and repression.

[See also Black Lives Matter statement](#)

July 8, 2016

Whither the "Political Revolution"?

8 July 2016, by **Traven Serge**

Even if articulating these ideas within a social democratic framework, Sanders is impacting millions who were unfamiliar with or had dismissed them as impossible.

Sanders says there is a billionaire class who benefit from the status quo, and we need to take them on. Emphasizing that antagonism is an important part of the campaign, and presents a class perspective that we haven't seen expressed in any mass electoral effort in the United States since Eugene Debs.

A new generation is forming its political identity — large numbers of youth, the majority of whom belong to the working class or a collapsing "middle class," have been shaped by the Sanders phenomenon in ways that

will last long after this election. They are open to socialist ideas, and many have gained experience in organizing.

The contradiction at the heart of this process, of course, is that while Sanders' success has revealed that there is a mass base for a left party, he would not have reached this vast audience if he hadn't run in the Democratic primary.

It is an open question as to whether millions learn through their experience that the Democratic Party is a roadblock to fundamental change that must be removed or split, or whether they end up being sucked into fruitless efforts to transform a rightward-moving, neoliberal party.

Despite reams of strategic advice to

"reform the Democrats" from those who learned nothing from their failure to "realign" the party in the 1960s — when the labor and social movements were much stronger, and the racist Dixiecrats were leaving — as well as various Sanders supporters hoping to build a "party-within-the-party" as either a longterm project or a tactic with a split perspective, I think it's unlikely that many young people who put so much energy into the Sanders campaign will be interested in a Democratic reform effort. Already 43% of voters don't identify as either Republican or Democrat, and this is particularly true of Millennials.

The Convention and Beyond

Sanders' conflict with Clinton and the Democratic National Committee has become more contentious. The Sanders campaign is looking to a contested convention. We don't know how explosive that may become, but there is a likelihood of mass demonstrations both inside and outside the convention hall.

Sanders' plan to press for strong progressive planks in the party platform (though that document usually goes unread and ignored) has potential value.

If delegates get progressive platform language which Clinton ignores, that would help expose Democratic hypocrisy; or if their attempts fail, that could deepen the fissure between the party establishment and its progressive base.

Either outcome could further the eventual possibility of an independent left party. The fissure that's been created between the Democratic base, along with independents, and the Democrats' neoliberal leadership will fester and at some unpredictable time may lead to a split.

However, while Sanders is serious about a "political revolution" that lasts beyond his campaign, encourages social movements, and was a member of Labor Party Advocates, he is not a movement organizer. The question for us, broadly defined, is how to help this movement flourish after this electoral cycle.

There are multiple signs that the Sanders movement, which from the beginning has been more than a one-off electoral campaign, is not going to fold as did most of the Rainbow Coalition or deteriorate into another version of Democracy for America, MoveOn, or Progressive Democrats of America.

One effort, the June National Peoples Summit, has a goal of beginning to assemble a "force" out of the Sanders campaign and other social movements which will "seek to bring together activists committed to a different kind

of agenda: a People's Agenda that can enhance and expand issue campaigns and hold elected officials accountable to popular demands for justice, equality and freedom."

The Summit includes sessions such as "Building Independent Political Power" and "Down-Ballot Political Revolutionaries: Electing People from the Movement to Public Office."

An exemplary local example is the Franklin County, MA Bernie group, mostly independents, some self-identifying as socialists. Dave Cohen, a long time UE union leader, explains, "We have a good core group. We will begin contacting the 2500 names we have in Franklin County who were on the Bernie list, recruiting them to join our organization."

Dave lays out a basic plan: "Its purpose is to implement Bernie's program at a county level — it will have a short platform or statement of principles consistent with Bernie's. It will endorse or work for only such candidates as meet a high standard: they support our principles, are committed to moving people to action, and have integrity. We hope to build a model that can be shared with others; we may later enter into coalition with other groups, or plug into a national post-Bernie structure; but our initial focus is on Franklin County — but always putting local issues in a larger context consistent with our principles (e.g. how military budget affects local resources)."

New Openings

A new period has opened where there will be a lot of partial breaks from the Democratic Party, first in local and then in statewide races. It will occur bit by bit and ambiguously as we already see with efforts like the Richmond Progressive Alliance, Chicago's United Working Families, and Vermont's Progressive Party, and Rights & Democracy, a group formed recently as a response to Sanders' campaign.

For example, the Vermont Progressive Party is fielding 30 candidates in the 2016 election, the most in its history, most of them running on both

Progressive and Democratic ballot lines.

Inevitably, most Sanderistas will support individual Berniecrats who run on progressive or radical platforms, have no loyalty to the Democratic leadership, yet run within Democratic primaries. In partisan races this will involve "primarying" neoliberal Democrats.

In reality, many election districts are basically one-party districts where a left party can compete without facing marginalization as a "spoiler." Predominantly nonpartisan local elections are less problematic as independents are not as hampered by the dynamics of the two-party system.

This is not a time for routinist passivity. In my opinion, these developments require Marxists to rethink our preconceptions about how we might contribute to breaking the stranglehold of the two-party system.

While the "political revolutionaries" doing these campaigns will be skeptical or disgusted with the two-party system, they will not for the most part share our strategic rejection of the Democratic Party.

I think that we should evaluate and work with promising efforts, while being clear that we believe that trying to realign the Democratic Party is a dead end, that we are partisans of creating an independent, mass working-class party.

Yes, we should argue against lesser evilism, and concretize that by promoting a protest vote for Jill Stein (perhaps even resulting in securing ballot lines for future elections). However, it would be self-isolating to break off working relations with people advocating a "vote against Trump."

This election is extraordinary in that while many people will be voting against Trump, our potential base will not be working or enthusiastically voting for the "lesser evil" neoliberal with the worst unfavorable ratings of any Democratic nominee in modern times.

We have an opportunity to work with the militant minority of Sanders

supporters who are in motion, moving left, and becoming increasingly hostile to the Democratic Party. We should encourage them to keep their committees going to work on local issues like \$15 minimum wage, universal healthcare, racial and climate justice, etc., anticipating a rise in social movement organizing, along with these movements recognizing the need for a political expression.

In this process we can recruit the best of them to socialist organization, as socialist groups working with the Sanders campaign are already doing. However, I think it's important that we recruit people to a perspective of advocating for steps that would open up a broader terrain of struggle for a party of our own.

While recognizing the reality of the left's limited capacity to affect events, in this new more favorable situation we should be doing everything possible, against the odds, to open the road to an independent party of the 99%.

Labor for Bernie

The Labor for Bernie network is an all-volunteer independent, grassroots rank-and-file-based network that has already had a big impact on the broader labor movement. The network includes thousands of elected officers, shop stewards, organizers and rank-and-file members.

It has tapped into the widespread disgust with bureaucrat-driven, transactional, business-as-usual

politics, insisting that our unions should only endorse candidates that actually support union values. Pushing back against premature and top-down endorsements by union officials, Labor for Bernie has organized to demand broad membership debate and discussion about the candidates and their stands on the key issues.

While the bulk of the labor bureaucracy is joined at the hip with the Clinton and neoliberal Democratic leadership, the dynamism of the Sanders campaign and Labor for Bernie's organizing, has fostered cracks in labor's slavish alignment with the Democratic Party establishment.

Seven national unions endorsed Sanders (Amalgamated Transit Union, American Postal Workers Union, Communication Workers of America, International Longshore and Warehouse Union, National Nurses Union, National Union of Health Workers, and United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America "UE"), and many locals have endorsed Sanders in defiance of their Internationals' endorsement of Clinton.

From the beginning Labor for Bernie was intended to last past the 2016 elections, with the perspective of creating new grassroots political structures in the labor movement "perhaps even a new party" capable of continuing the "political revolution" in contests for elected office in tens of thousands of municipal and state level races. Already we are seeing more

local unions running candidates.

The last attempt at organizing a labor party during the brief mid-1990s labor movement upsurge was, according to former Labor Party national organizer Mark Dudzic, "premised on the understanding that you cannot have a party of labor that does not have at the table a substantial portion of the actually-existing labor movement. The Labor Party had to start with the assurance that it wouldn't play spoiler politics and that it would focus on building the critical mass necessary for serious electoral intervention."

As the 1990s attempt at labor's revitalization foundered, so did prospects for moving the labor movement away from its lockstep relationship with the Democratic Party.

While many unions and labor activists have had it with "politics as usual," labor is not yet ready to disengage from the political entanglements in a two-party, winner-takes-all system. This is just the beginning of the messy differentiation within the unions; endorsements for Sanders reflect fissures that mark a step forward.

Building a movement for a party of our own is inextricably linked to the project of transforming and revitalizing key sections of the labor movement. The activity of the labor militants brought together around the Sanders campaign can play a key role in the interrelated tasks of promoting independent working-class politics and putting the movement back in the labor movement.

What Is the Next Left?

7 July 2016, by **Johanna Brenner**

Mainstream forces are already organizing to pivot Bernie supporters to a "STOP TRUMP" campaign (Van Jones). The broadly progressive "left" (e.g. National Nurses United, ex-Occupiers, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance) hope to capture the

momentum of the Bernie campaign to build a more permanent national organization around a social-democratic platform (The People's Summit, Chicago June 17; The People's Revolution, Philadelphia, July 27).

While a national network organized around a social-democratic "platform" is appealing "and I would say certainly worthwhile" I am not sure that the social-media and email fueled network that the Sanders campaign has accomplished is sufficient for

creating the kind of organizational infrastructure necessary to turn political ideas into on-the-ground movements that can build power.

In my conflicted state, I am more intrigued by the possibilities of a local electoral political front based in grassroots movement organizations. There is no question that electoral politics is potentially a useful arena of struggle — but the very thing that makes electoral politics attractive is also electoral politics' weakness.

The big advantage of an election is of course that there is the possibility of winning and that it is a relatively short-term effort with a clear end. Election campaigns can therefore energize people who otherwise are not already politically active.

Some people engaged with campaign work do move on into issue-based activism, but they mostly drift away once the election is over. Although Bernie showed that a relatively left set of policies can gather wide and deep support, elections (where the goal is actually to win) also tend to put a certain limit on how radical the messaging can be.

Even more problematic, in campaign mode there is little time for political education of activists or for engaging activists in thinking through how we can connect demands that immediately resonate with the public (e.g. raise the minimum wage) to longer term and more radical ideas (e.g. basic minimum income).

Recognizing these limitations, many revolutionaries counterpose electoral work to "building grassroots power." My experience here in Portland (OR) around legislation (at city and state levels) is that we have built relatively strong movements around particular goals (minimum wage, paid sick leave, defense of the houseless). But once we gain enough traction the campaigns are (to a greater or lesser degree) derailed by big organizations — most notably the unions and NGOs that are so well-connected to the Democratic Party. And this is true even for local organizing in relation to a city government that is putatively nonpartisan.

Missing Political Instrument

One of our biggest frustrations is that our grassroots organizations do not have our own political instrument with candidates emerging from our movements and office holders who have gotten into office based on grassroots fundraising and committed volunteer efforts.

In the long run, only an "on-the-ground" activist organization ready to build and lead movements — organizations that educate, mobilize and disrupt — will shift the political balance of forces. But I'm not convinced that grassroots movements are undermined when they organize their own electoral expression.

The outcome depends on how that electoral organization works, how it draws its horizon of possibility, and how it seeks to penetrate and open up government once its members are in office. (Consider for instance, participatory budgeting established by the Workers Party in Sao Paulo, Brazil; or the experiments in democratizing governance by radicals engaged in the London Council Government headed up by Ken Livingstone).

I think it is going to be very difficult to build national organizations that function under the control and as an expression of grassroots movements at this point; however, I think there is some real possibility for accomplishing this at the local level. And if we start locally we could also from the beginning support and call for similar efforts in cities within our region and state, with the longterm goal to leverage the power of multiple city governments at the regional and state level.

The other advantage of working at the local level is that we have more of an opportunity for committed revolutionaries to collaborate in a project broader than ourselves. No matter how many individuals may be recruited to existing revolutionary groups, the vast majority (and it is growing) of people who are anti-capitalist have not been and will not

be attracted to existing left organizations.

I think the possibilities to build something new for the revolutionary left — whether we think of that as new forms of revolutionary organization and/or new kinds of politics — are much greater at the local level. Certainly working within a local project that is broader than ourselves, we are more likely to create the relationships of respect, trust, and appreciation that I believe are crucial for the left to break free of our baggage and boundaries.

I think also that at the local level it is more possible to develop the creatively intersectional politics that has been lacking in national campaigns. It is not surprising, for example, that a radical Black activist organization with intersectional politics, like the Black Youth Project 100, was not part of the originating groups for the People's Summit and the People's Revolution.

Organizers say they are committed to bringing organizations like BYP 100 into the planning and hopefully they will. Still, real tensions between discourses of class and race politics have been an ongoing problem. (See for example Sanders' stumbles on reparations, and struggles at Occupy). Local organizing built on acts of solidarity are necessary to overcome this tension in practice, as in the Chicago Teachers Union's engaged defense of schools that face closing in Black/Latino communities.

Positive Examples

An organization capable of mounting an effective and principled electoral campaign will not be built overnight. It will not be built through immediately going out to run individual candidates for office.

Instead, we on the left could help to establish urban coalitions that are based in existing grassroots organizing, where activists from the base run for election not as individuals with the right politics but as representatives of a platform that they pledge to implement in office.

There are several efforts we can learn from. Just two are Richmond Progressive Alliance in Richmond CA, and Guanyem Barcelona in Spain.

Richmond Progressive Alliance was formed in 2004 as a collaboration between the local Green Party and progressive Latinos from the Democratic Party. Since then, RPA has organized to elect members to the city council and organized many successful issue campaigns that span environmental, social and economic justice. At the moment they are organizing a ballot measure campaign for a rent control/just cause eviction ordinance.

RPA will not endorse any candidate accepting corporate funding nor do they accept any for their organization. RPA functions with a fairly minimal framework of political agreement; supporters may be members of any party. It draws its strength from members of local grassroots

organizations who are part of the Alliance as well as engaging individuals as members of RPA. [20]

In May, 2015 Barcelona en Comu (Barcelona in Common) won the mayor and 11 positions on a 41-member city Council. Capturing the energy of both the M15 movement and social justice organizations. It employs a horizontalist organizational model and its original "platform" emerged from a neighborhood-by-neighborhood and sector-by-sector process through which each group outlined its ideas for action based on its arena of organizing. When the 2015 elections rolled around, the radical left party Podemos chose to support the candidates of Barcelona en Comu rather than running.

The Guanyem Barcelona platform is both practical and visionary. It calls for a transformed city, ecologically sustainable, focused on the needs of the people, and radically democratic

in its political structure. The shorter-term urban policies and governmental changes Guanyem Barcelona advocates link to these broader goals.

In their founding call, [Guanyem Barcelona](#) captured some of the optimism and determination that we on the left might draw on to take a leap into heretofore uncharted territory:

"Our most successful experiences show us that, if we organize around specific objectives and practices, we can reach goals that may have seemed impossible."

While the economic crisis has been tough, a historic opportunity has opened up that we can't and won't let pass by. We are living in an exceptional time that demands brave, creative initiatives. If we are able to imagine a different city, we will have the power to transform it.

[Against the Current](#)

Reactionary Tide in Latin America

7 July 2016, by [Michael Löwy](#)

1) Social-liberal coalitions, which do not break with the fundamental "Washington Consensus" but implement several progressive social measures. The basic principle of this sort of government is to do what is possible to improve the situation of the poor "on the condition not to touch the privileges of the rich. The left, or center-left governments of Brazil, Uruguay and Chile are the most obvious examples.

2) Anti-oligarchic, anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist governments, who set as their historical horizon "Socialism of the 21st Century." Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador belong to this category.

Other leftist governments, in Paraguay, Nicaragua, El Salvador or Argentina, seem to be somewhere in between, or on the margins, of these

two types. Substantial gains were made by the popular layers in most of these countries, thanks to the social redistribution of the rent, particularly from oil and gas extraction (Venezuela and Bolivia). But none of these governments effectively confronted the basic structures of the capitalist system, and no real attempt was made towards a transition to socialism. So far, socialist Cuba with all its shortcomings remains the only such experience.

There were also no attempts to move beyond dependency on fossil fuels, except for a short period when the government of Raphael Correa in Ecuador decided to accept the Park Yasuni Project of the ecological and indigenous movements.

The proposal was to leave, in this forest area inhabited by peasant

communities, the oil in the soil, but require the rich countries of the North to pay half of its value as a compensation to the Ecuadorian people. As one would expect, the rich capitalist governments were not interested, and Correa finally gave up, and opened the Yasuni Park to the oil companies.

Rightwing Backlash

Since the beginning, there have been several attempts of the oligarchies to re-establish their traditional rule, by various sorts of coup d'état, with the blessings of U.S. Imperialism, but in most cases "Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador" these efforts failed, thanks to massive popular mobilization against them.

However, in Honduras in 2009, the democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya who tried to implement some progressive measures was overturned by a pseudo-legal procedure of the Supreme Court, with the support of the Army.

Something similar happened in Paraguay with President Lugo, who was accused in 2012 of supporting the peasant movements and was deposed by the Senate.

Authoritarian, right-wing governments replaced the progressive leaders in these two countries, with diplomatic support of U.S. imperialism.

In fact, the oligarchic reaction against the leftist governments never ceased during the past 15 years, but now it has achieved some very substantial victories.

In Argentina, the left Peronist experience of the Kirchner government (Nestor, and after his death his wife Christina) came recently to an end with the election of the right-wing, pro-imperialist and neoliberal candidate, Mauricio Macri. And in Venezuela, the oligarchic opposition won the parliamentary elections, thus seriously challenging the power of Hugo Chávez's successor, Nicolas Maduro.

These defeats certainly have to do with a) the difficult economic conjuncture, due to the fall in the prices of commodities and b) the limits and contradictions of the processes of change in the two countries. But they also document the capacity of the reactionary bourgeois forces to manipulate, deceive and mislead significant sectors of the population, thanks to their quasi-monopoly ownership of the mass media.

The most successful Leftist government in Latin America is probably the Bolivian one of Evo Morales, the indigenous peasant leader who defeated the neoliberal oligarchic forces with massive popular support. But even here there has been disappointment with several decisions of the government, opposed by

workers' unions and indigenous movements.

This probably explains why a majority refused, in a recent referendum, to grant Evo Morales the possibility of presenting himself for a third period as president although this vote also expressed a more general rejection of excessive personal power.

In the present international conjuncture following the end of the Cold War, it is not very likely to see the return of the murderous military dictatorships of the 1960s through the 1980s in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay although this possibility cannot be entirely excluded.

Brazilian Confrontation

Considering the economic and political weight of Brazil in Latin America, the present confrontation in this country is decisive for the future of the continent in the next years.

Dilma Roussef, the candidate of the Workers Party (PT - Partido dos Trabalhadores) won the elections against a neoliberal coalition in 2012, and was elected president, for the second time. Although she ran a (moderately) leftist campaign, as soon as elected she took a series of measures following a clear economic neoliberal agenda.

In the context of economic crisis, inflation and recession, more and more concessions were made to the banks, to financial capital, and to the big landowners, whose main leader was nominated to be Minister of Agriculture.

Using as a pretext the scandal of corruption connected to the state oil company Petrobras, the reactionary forces - neoliberal bourgeois parties, mass media, conservative magistrates - began a violent campaign for the impeachment of Dilma Roussef, with significant support among the middle classes. Some of the more reactionary speakers have been calling the

military to seize power again!

Several leaders of the PT, but also of the right-wing parties - the neoliberal PSDB (Brazilian Social-Democratic Party) of former President Cardoso, and the "centrist" PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) - were involved in the corruption scandal, including the presidents of the Assembly and of the Senate, the leaders of the campaign for the impeachment.

Dilma Roussef is in fact one of the few political leaders not involved in the scandal: the pseudo-legal motive for the impeachment was some irregularities in the calculation of the state budget! Some payments were delayed, in order not to transgress the limits of the approved budget: a trick routinely used by most Brazilian governments....

A broad coalition in defense of democracy and against the impeachment has been formed, called the Popular Front, including most progressive parties from the PT to the far left PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom), the unions, the peasant and other social movements. This popular coalition opposes the impeachment but also criticizes the neoliberal policies of the Dilma government, and calls for a radical change of orientation.

With the recent vote (April 2016) for the impeachment of Dilma by the Brazilian Parliament, by more than two thirds, the issue is practically decided. The Senate and the Supreme Court still have to vote, but there is little hope that they will take a different course.

This is clearly a "legal" coup d'etat! The whole procedure has a strong ridiculous, tragicomic flavor, since the leader of the impeachment procedure in the Parliament, Eduardo Cunha is - unlike Dilma - heavily compromised in the Petrobras scandal.

Latin America is clearly entering a period of "low intensity democracy."

[Against the Current](#)

Time for an Independent Party

6 July 2016, by **Howie Hawkins**

"Where but to the Socialist Party can these progressive people turn? They are now without a party and the only genuine Democratic Party in the field is the Socialist Party, and every true Democrat should thank Wall Street for driving him out of a party that is democratic in name only, and into one that is democratic in fact."

That's the kind of appeal that Jill Stein of the Green Party (www.jill2016.com) is making in 2016 to Bernie Sanders supporters who are chilled at the prospect of voting for Hillary Clinton. More than in most presidential cycles, there is reason to hope for a mass breakaway in 2016. Sanders' campaign has revealed that a mass base exists now for an independent party of the left.

For decades, public opinion polling has shown majority support for policies like universal public health insurance, fair trade, higher minimum wages, paid family leave, expanded Social Security benefits, Wall Street regulation, renewable energy, infrastructure spending, public campaign finance and progressive taxation. Sanders' campaign has now demonstrated that millions of people will vote for a candidate advocating a progressive economic policy platform.

The campaign is helping this quiet majority find its voice in the electoral arena, especially among its younger cohorts, which bodes well for the future. Sanders' campaign has also revealed that the 99% has the capacity and willingness to fund the campaign with small contributions from millions of people at a scale sufficient to compete with the big contributions of the 1%.

Sanders has not raised as much as the corporate-funded candidates when SuperPAC and 501c4 "dark money" funds are included. But it is enough to reach to the voters with a ground war of field organizing and a sizable air

war of campaign ads.

The people and the money are there. The question for the independent left is how to draw this base out of the Democratic Party.

Too many on the left overthink this question with all kinds of proposals for transitional formations that try to work both inside and outside the Democratic Party at the same time. That has been tried many times in many forms, and now many Sanders supporters are going to try again.

All previous reform Democratic movements have ended up neutralized as agents of change inside the Democratic Party. The price for entry inside to party committees, campaign organizations, and primary ballots and debates is to forswear outside options. That is the price Sanders paid to get on the ballots and debates stages of the Democratic primaries.

I think there is a simpler and more straightforward way to draw progressive Democrats to an independent left party: Build it and they will come. A mass breakaway from the Democratic Party has to have somewhere viable and strong to go.

When there is a critical mass of effective local and state independent left parties, progressives in the Democratic Party will see independent politics as a practical option. Until we do that, most progressives are going to keep voting defensively for socially liberal but corporate and militarist Democrats in order to stop the even worse socially reactionary corporate militarists of the Republican Party.

Don't Waste the Opportunity

With a McClatchey poll in April finding that one in four Sanders supporters

were unwilling to vote for Clinton, the independent left has a big opportunity in 2016 to enlist significant new forces for independent left politics.

The immediate step is to encourage these Sandernistas to enlist in the Green Party campaign of Jill Stein. To one degree or another, the Stein campaign will continue to raise Sanders' demands "and more" in the general election.

But whatever degree of influence the campaign may achieve in the 2016 political debate, there is also the longer lasting and very practical objective of securing ballot status in more states. That will lay the basis for future local races for municipal, county, state legislature and congressional races where the "political revolution" can continue, with independent progressive candidates using Green ballot lines to be shape the debate and quite possibly win office.

The Green Party started the campaign with ballot lines in 21 states. It expects to be on the ballot in over 40 states representing upwards of 85% of the electorate. Successful lawsuits in which the Green Party participated in Georgia, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania have lowered petition requirements in those states significantly this year.

Adding Georgia to Green ballot lines will be an important advance in the South for left politics. North Carolina now has the highest petitioning requirement in the nation of 89,366 signatures. The Greens are hard at work petitioning there, at least to strengthen the basis for their lawsuit against unfair ballot access requirements.

The Green presidential vote can secure or retain ballot status in 25 states for between one and five percent of the vote (0.5% " NM; 1% " CO, CT, GA, MD, OR, WI; 2% "

CA, IA, KY, MO, NC; 3% AK, AR, ID, MA, OH; 5% IL, LA, MN, NE, ND, TN, TX, WA).

A five percent share of the national presidential vote would qualify the Green Party for about \$10 million in public funding for the 2020 presidential election. If the Democrats are roughly half of the national electorate and Sanders is roughly half of the Democratic electorate, then if 20% of Sanders supporters vote for Jill over Hillary, the Green vote would be 5% of the national electorate. Qualifying for public funding, as well as increasing Green ballot lines, are practical goals that are within reach and worth shooting for.

The next step beyond 2016 is to transform Stein campaign committees that are not based on Green party organizations into local parties that will be active on local issues and run independent candidates.

A mass party on the left will not be started by a big national founding conference. That will be the final step in bringing together a third party movement that is built town by town, city by city, county by county, and state by state.

The Greens, other left third parties, and indeed, Bernie Sanders career before this year, all show that this can be done and replicated at the grassroots across the country.

Filling a Void

Most third parties that have been successful have been in areas with a large progressive middle class based in the well-educated "helping professions" such as teachers, social workers and nurses in university towns (Madison), liberal cities (Kshama Sawant in Seattle), liberal states (Vermont Progressive Party), and most of the cities and towns where more than 100 Greens hold office across the country.

This demographic has been the core of Green support in Europe, which mobilized around peace and environmental issues when the social democratic left was wrong on those issues and moving rightward on

economic policy in the neoliberal era.

U.S. Greens have also shown they can fill the red void left in the absence of a labor party in the United States, as well as the green void left by the anti-environmental and militarist Democrats and Republicans.

In Richmond, California as part of the Richmond Progressive Alliance, Gayle McLaughlin since 2004 has served as a Green city councilor and mayor in a working-class city with over 80% people of color, defeating corporate Democrats heavily funded by Chevron, which has a large refinery in town.

My home town of Syracuse is a working-class rust belt city where, as in most cities, real estate interests rule through a "business-friendly" Democratic machine. Due to virulent race and class segregation, Syracuse has the highest concentrations of Black and Latino poverty, and the fifth highest concentration of white poverty, of all U.S. metropolitan areas.

No Greens have won office here, but I received 48% in a 2011 city council race and in 2015 the five Green candidates for city offices all received between 25% and 35% of the vote. The Greens here are now the city's second party, the strongest opposition to the Democrats.

The structural obstacles to third parties "winner-take-all, nonpartisan local elections, restricted ballot access, private funding, corporate media, inherited major party loyalties" are real. But they are nothing that a relatively small core of activists cannot overcome. The successful third party efforts around the country prove that.

Indeed, we can turn some of these obstacles to our advantage. Nonpartisan elections were promoted by corporate municipal reformers in the early 20th century Progressive era to undercut Socialist Party advances as well as corrupt major party machines. They wanted to depoliticize local politics in favor of technocratic efficiency for governing on behalf of "modernizing" business interests.

In nonpartisan elections today, traditional major party loyalties become less of an obstacle. It is in

nonpartisan elections that Kshama Sawant, Gayle McLaughlin, and most Green Party candidates around the country have won office. Today 27 states have nonpartisan local elections. In eight more, it varies by county.

In the 23 states and D.C. with partisan local elections, most election districts are effectively one-party districts due to partisan gerrymandering of safe seats. In most of those election districts, the major party in the minority does not seriously compete. That leaves the field open to a left third party to quickly become the second party in that district, the major opposition party seeking to become the first party.

The Role of Socialists

Socialists often provide key leadership in labor, community, peace and environmental movements. They should now do the same in building local independent political parties that give those movements' demands uncompromising expression in elections.

Some socialists object that the Greens, or the Vermont Progressive Party, or Progressive Dane have progressive populist agendas that are not explicitly socialist. I would remind them that Marx and Engels counseled their socialist followers in the United States to work inside the farmer-labor populist parties of their era because they had taken the key step "class independence from the capitalist parties. That experience fighting the capitalists for immediate reforms would open them up to fully socialist perspectives in good time.

There is no more receptive audience to socialist thinking today than among the third party activists who are fighting the capitalist parties on the issues, and for their very right to run independent candidates against them.

One perspective that socialists could advocate that would be especially helpful in building a third party movement is a mass-membership party structure based on dues-paying

members organized into local party affiliates. That invention of the labor and socialist left in the 19th century created working people's parties that had the money and organization to compete with the top-down capitalist parties funded by the rich to represent them.

The Greens got away from that structure as they started securing ballot lines in the late 1990s and adopted the same structures as the

Democrats and Republicans, which are adapted to primary elections where candidates are pre-selected by corporate funders and then offered to atomized voters who have no local organizations where they could discuss issues, choose leaders and nominate candidates.

A network of local parties built on this mass-membership party structure won't be a mass party at the outset.

But it will have the funding, organization and locally elected officials to provide a realistic refuge for progressive Democrats whenever, as this year with the Sanders campaign, the differences between progressive challengers and entrenched corporatists in the Democratic Party become too sharp for progressives to continue tolerating.

[Against the Current](#)

Despite Progress, LGBTI Latin Americans Still Fighting for Their Lives

6 July 2016, by **Sandra Cuffe**

Recent years have seen significant advances in LGBTI rights, particularly in South America. However, people in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be criminalized and killed because of who they are and who they love.

Homophobia and transphobia manifest in a range of ways in the region, including violations of basic rights to identity, health, education, work and housing, according to Josefina Valencia Toledano, co-secretary of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) for Latin America and the Caribbean.

"In addition to the obstacles to the exercise of all rights, extreme violence also occurs in our region. Hate crimes, murders due to homophobia and transphobia, and 'corrective' rapes of lesbians are among the most unfortunate expressions of the violence," Valencia Toledano told teleSUR English.

A decentralized campaign and day of action, the International Day Against Homophobia was established in 2004 to draw attention to the violence and discrimination against LGBTI people around the world. Transphobia was explicitly added to the name in 2009, and Biphobia followed in 2015.

May 17 was chosen to commemorate the date in 1990 when the World Health Organization declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder.

Stigmatizing medical classifications related to gender identity and expression, however, continue to be used as a basis for harmful forced treatments and criminalization, United Nations and other international human rights experts denounced last week.

"We are deeply concerned that transgender children and adults continue to be pathologized based on international and national medical classifications," the experts wrote in their May 12 statement ahead of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

The day is now celebrated in more than 130 countries worldwide and is increasingly recognized by multilateral institutions and national governments.

Last week, on May 12, Venezuelan National Assembly legislators unanimously passed a bill declaring May 17 the Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. Presidential decrees in previous years

in Brazil and Mexico established the date as a National Day Against Homophobia.

In Chile, the presidential palace will be lit up with rainbow colors Tuesday evening. According to the Movement for Homosexual Liberation and Integration (MOVILH) organizing the event with the permission of Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, the only other country ever to do so was the U.S. after last year's landmark Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage.

LGBTI organizations and movements throughout Latin America and the Caribbean have organized marches and a myriad of other activities this month to commemorate May 17. Celebrations in Cuba include a symbolic mass wedding of same-sex couples, who do not have the legal right to marry in the country.

There was good news for marriage equality in Colombia last month, when the Constitutional Court ruled to definitively legalize same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage is also legal in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

Valencia Toledano hopes the momentum will continue and that

other countries will follow suit.

“To start off, I think it could happen in two countries: Ecuador, because of the closeness between the LGBT movement and public institutions and the government; and El Salvador, because of its international politics that increasingly tends to speak of the recognition of LGBTI rights,” Valencia Toledano told teleSUR English.

Marriage equality is unlikely anytime soon in much of the English-speaking Caribbean, where nearly a dozen countries still have laws criminalizing the LGBTI community.

“All of the legislation that criminalizes consensual sexual relations between adults in the English-speaking Caribbean has its origin in the British colonial era,” said Valencia Toledano.

“They left a legacy of laws that in many cases equate sexual relations between people of the same sex with bestiality, and often don’t distinguish between acts that are consensual and non-consensual, commercial and non-commercial, [and] private and public,” she said.

The type of conduct deemed illegal, the legal consequences, and whether the laws are ever enforced varies country by country, said Valencia Toledano.

With the exception of the Bahamas, all of the English-speaking Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member nations - including Belize in Central

America and Guyana in South America - still have laws on the books criminalizing LGBTI people in some way.

The laws in the English-speaking Caribbean aren’t limited to the criminalization of sexual activity between people of the same sex.

“Guyana has legislation that criminalizes cross-dressing. This statute reinforces gender stereotypes and constitutes discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression,” said Valencia Toledano.

Transphobia in Latin America and the Caribbean is all too often fatal, even in countries where same-sex marriage is legal. At least 48 transgender women were murdered in Brazil in January 2016 alone, according to media reports.

A Trans Murder Monitoring project update published by Transgender Europe this past March documented 1,573 killings of trans and gender diverse people in Latin America and the Caribbean between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2015. The region accounts for more than 75 percent of the global total.

Brazil retains its notorious number one spot in the world for trans and gender diverse killings in absolute terms, with 802 during the eight-year period. It is followed by Mexico (229), the United States (132), Colombia (105), Venezuela (98), and Honduras

(79).

“While Brazil, Mexico and the United States have the highest absolute numbers, the relative numbers show even more alarming results for some countries with smaller population sizes. Honduras, for instance, has a rate of 9.56 reported trans and gender diverse people killings per million inhabitants,” Transgender Europe stated in the project update.

Despite the ongoing violence, there have been recent advances in transgender rights in South America and even in Central America, said Valencia Toledano.

“Costa Rica is also taking steps forward on the issue with a proposal for a law for trans people. In Panama, there was recently the first name change for a trans woman,” she said.

The advances that have occurred in terms of LGBTI rights in the region have not appeared out of nowhere. They are largely the result of the decades of nonstop work by LGBTI groups and movements up and down the hemisphere.

When the pride flags come down and the rainbow lights on the Chilean presidential palace are shut off, those same organizations and movements will be fighting for change the other 364 days of the year.

May 16

[Telesur](#)

Britain - 10 days of political turmoil

5 July 2016, by Terry Conway

Prime Minister David Cameron resigned, as was inevitable after a victory for Brexit - but made clear that Article 50 won’t be triggered before his successor is in place in the autumn. Though formally Cameron remains in post until after the leadership contest, effectively there is no government in place.

A bitter succession battle in the Conservative Party has ensued, with Boris Johnson, who led the Leave campaign for the Tories and seemed the frontrunner for the leadership, withdrawing at the last moment after attacks from other Brexiters.

There are now five contenders; leave

campaigners Liam Fox, Michael Gove and Andrea Leadsom and remainers Steven Crabb and Theresa May. Conservative MPs will have a series of ballots over the next few weeks until two only contenders are left, then party membership will get to vote between them. Home Secretary Theresa May currently has far more

MPs supporting her than the others put together - though only around 50% have shown their hands.

Whoever is elected will be committed to further attacks on worker's rights and whipping up further racism, blaming migrants for shortages which actually result from their austerity offensive.

Massive increase in racist attacks

Police report a fivefold increase in racist attacks - undoubtedly an underestimate - after a campaign which saw the normalisation of a vile racism, particularly but not exclusively, from the Leave campaign. Jo Cox, a Labour MP who strongly supported refugees, was assassinated by a fascist a week before the referendum.

A Polish community centre was attacked, Turkish and Spanish shops had windows broken and children are being taunted in schools and told to go back home. The communities under attack are not only those who have come to Britain under the free movement directives of the EU, but include people whose families have lived in Britain for generations.

Antiracist organisation, The Monitoring Group has received 112 reports since the Brexit vote - compared with four it would get in an average week. Campaigner Suresh Grover, the charity's director, said:

"We seem to be experiencing a wave of xenophobia and racial incidents. "We've had calls about neighbour disputes, people being called the 'P' word, the 'N' word, people who have had leaflets through doors."

There has been resistance with significant protests in defence of migrants and against hate crime and acts of solidarity across communities.

Attempted coup against Labour's Jeremy Corbyn

The majority of Labour members of Parliament were never reconciled to the election of left wing leader Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the party, after an extraordinarily vibrant campaign last summer which saw a doubling of party membership - especially amongst young people.

They hoped to be able to act after an expected defeat in an important parliamentary by election in the North West seat of Oldham in December 2015. Labour won. They then expected that Labour would do badly enough in the local elections in May 2016 but the results did not go their way.

Finally they used the fact that there was a leave vote in the referendum to try to force Corbyn to resign. Not confident that they could defeat him in a leadership contest, they orchestrated mass resignations from the Shadow Cabinet and moved a vote of no confidence through the

Parliamentary Labour Party.

But Corbyn is going nowhere - and as their bluff has been called. Labour membership is rising rapidly again (60,000 this week), they have not even an agreed candidate. Meanwhile huge meetings and demonstrations in Corbyn's support are taking place across the country and most trade unions are supporting Corbyn.

Meanwhile over 50,000 marched in London on July 2 in a "March for Europe". The politics of this gathering were undoubtedly incoherent, with many uncritical of the EU and some calling for a second referendum - which would only give the right a further opportunity to pour out their racist bile. Never the less there were slogans in defence of refugees and Left Unity's poster defending free movement was hugely popular.

Corbyn and his team are trying to lay down a number of red lines in terms of defending the position of existing EU nationals in Britain, defending workers' rights and opposing austerity as well as access to the single market. Of course this attempt is getting very little coverage with the media being much more focused on the political vacuum rather than policies to defend the rights of working people.

In this volatile situation, Labour would have had a real opportunity to take the fight to the Tories, but the right in the party are well prepared to throw all that away - not because their fear Corbyn will lose the next election - but because they think he would win.

True colors - What does Orlando mean?

4 July 2016, by **Chlo Moindreau**

Mateen claimed to be motivated by Islamic fundamentalism, but his statements showed only the most superficial understanding, in fact a crude ignorance, of the different Islamic fundamentalist currents. His earlier visits to the bar and his use of

a gay meeting app has led some people to assume that he was gay himself, though there is nothing to confirm this - these facts might "merely" show that he was obsessed with gayness or that his crime was premeditated.

The Orlando killings are the worst massacre of LGBTIQ people in the West to date since the Second World War. They are also the deadliest shooting in the history of the US over that same period. In other words, the deadliest shooting in the last over 70

years of US history took the lives of LGBTIQ people of colour. It was an act of heteropatriarchy and racism.

I won't dwell on the attempts that are being made to use this massacre for racist, Islamophobic, reactionary and imperialist ends. Nor will I dwell on the fact that the killer is being seen as a representative of Islam, while white fascists who attack birth control clinics and kill members of parliament are considered "unstable lone wolves". Other people have made these points better and at greater length than I can.

Instead I would like to discuss what Orlando means to us as LGBTIQ people, and what it will mean to us in the future.

First of all, there is a risk that Orlando will be whitewashed, as the Stonewall rebellion was whitewashed in the recently released film on it. You can bet that Hollywood will rush to produce a film on the Orlando tragedy, because this is apparently the way the US manages its collective traumas: by converting them into smooth, brutally homogenized collective history.

So it will be up to us as LGBTIQ people to preserve the truth about Orlando in our collective memory. We must remember that this wasn't a massacre of handsome young white men, but an attack on LGBTIQ people in all our diversity - and in great majority on Blacks and LatinXs. This is our collective responsibility.

It is also up to us to struggle within our LGBTIQ communities against the temptations of Islamophobia and racism. We must not allow this massacre to be constantly cited as an example of the greater virulence of homophobia among people with Muslim cultural backgrounds. For us in France, it's easy enough to remind people of the huge demonstrations sponsored by the Catholic Church opposing opening marriage to same-sex couples.

But what Orlando means to us goes deeper than this. It calls on us to remember what gathering places like Pulse mean for us.

It's all too common to portray the

LGBTIQ community as a bunch of party animals, of people whose way of life is based on getting wasted, dancing and consuming: commodities, alcohol and sex.

And we're too noisy, too flamboyant, too decked out in feathers and glitter. Entertaining, maybe, but only in small doses.

Some of us rebel against these cliches - and sometimes respond by succumbing to others. Some people's rejection of social practices that they don't identify with - which is their good right - too often ends up as a moralistic condemnation - and even as approval of repression.

So we have to remind people: being visible and audible, finding some human warmth, talking, laughing, drinking, dancing, hanging out - and yes, caring for one another and having sex - all of this is a direct response to the very nature of the oppression that we endure.

Our oppression consists precisely in having to be discreet and hidden, in solitary weeping and self-cutting and even suicide. Or some of us get killed by others, as in Orlando, but also as an everyday reality that strikes hundreds of us. Trans people especially pay a heavy tribute in blood.

Our oppression consists in having to constantly be on guard, to be on the lookout, to run the risk of being insulted, attacked, beaten up, raped, in the streets of these precious "free Western countries". In having to efface ourselves as best we can, to be invisible, to disappear.

So when we're among ourselves, enjoying some human warmth, in our spaces, we blossom, we burst out, we cut loose. And those of us who are bold enough carry this magnificence, this refusal to deny ourselves and efface ourselves, into the public eye, onto the streets and elsewhere.

That's why Orlando was the ultimate act of violence against us. We were killed in our own sanctuary, our own ghetto, that we had so painfully won. Orlando told us: you will never be safe, anywhere.

So what can we do?

As a community - as LGBTIQ people in the global North, and as a political movement - we have only two choices. We can give up, disperse, flee our safe havens and isolate ourselves. This would very probably mean even more suicides and a weakening of our collective solidarity. Or we have another choice, action: to strengthen our community and our movement.

For too long, we have been on the defensive. After the HIV/AIDS pandemic and our thousands of deaths, we have not been able to reform our ranks. AIDS drew a line between the high-risk populations (gay men and trans people) and the rest of us. And sexism, racism and class differences have divided us as well. Nor have we had serious discussions about the political implications of the emergence of different gender identities over the last several years, about how we need to organize ourselves in response. Bisexuals are still stigmatized in our community. And different choices of political strategy - lobbying, support for politicians, street action, popular education, prevention - have drawn still more dividing lines between us.

Nevertheless, the great majority of us are still subjected to everyday terrorism. There is more to terrorism than just a man with a machine gun. Terrorism is also the insults and attacks that rain down on us, a permanent deluge that keeps us closeted. This homegrown terrorism - in cities and the countryside, on the TV and radio - this small, quiet, everyday terrorism is the main threat we face. It's this terrorism that isolates us from our LGBTIQ sisters and brothers, that creates a distance between us, when it should unite us.

So yes, faced with all this, our most urgent priority is to rebuild a strong community and a strong political movement. We need to go back to basics, and if necessary ask fundamental questions about our assumptions and our history. We need to accept the necessity of self-criticism. Develop respect and understanding for one another. Insist on solidarity between those among us who are most privileged and those

among us who are least privileged - which sometimes means exposing ourselves to discomfort. We need to work together at local, national and international level to develop strategies and tools that will allow us to move forward together, without leaving a single one of us behind along the way.

Strengthening our community and our movement also means questioning the way we urge others to join us, and on the way we welcome them. There are so many of us! And yet so few of us show up at our spaces - why?

Here in the West we commonly pressurize one another to come out. Coming out is considered a founding act, it's a rite of passage that's part of

our personal stories, and it's perceived as a decisive political act. Clearly we need to question this, and above all to question some people's tendency to insist on it as a universal imperative. We need, more than we have so far, to welcome people without demanding a public coming out. There are so many reasons why so many people still can't come out. And in fact, very few of us are 100% out (especially at work).

For those who do want to come out, we need to be with them along the way, giving them the time they need to truly be ready. At the same time we need to accept others who do not want to come out, helping them to be fully part of, and active in, the community. And we need to ask questions about how our groups function. Like any

oppressed minority, we often work in small groups, even in big cities. Ties of affinity, friendship, love and sex are woven and broken among a limited number of people. In these conditions, tensions can spring up quickly. We need to bear in mind that despite everything, we are a family. A community. For many of us, our community is the only thing that stands between us and isolation and death. So let's be more welcoming, more empathetic, more self-aware and self-critical of our own privileges.

It's our love that makes us strong. It's not an easy love, not a love we can take for granted. It is nourished by everyday solidarity and by our shared pain. It is what enables us to survive. Chloé Moindreau

Political Revolution — What Is It?

4 July 2016, by **Against the Current**

At the same time, the horror of the Orlando massacre and the toxic poison spread by Donald Trump seeking to exploit it shockingly reminds of us all of how sick a society this really is, and how desperately "a true revolution of values," in Martin Luther King's memorable phrase, is needed to cure the diseases of homophobia, Islamophobia and so much else.

Here, we'd like to step back from these immediate events to look at the content of a "political revolution." Most of what Bernie Sanders calls "democratic socialism" is terrific for openers: Make "the billionaire class" pay for the destruction of the financial system its greed caused, and end its domination of politics through its massive campaign cash. Bring the United States into step with every other advanced economy with guaranteed health care through single-payer "Medicare for all." Expand Social Security not destroy it make public university education tuition-free; end mass

incarceration and racist police abuse; raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour now; stop the plague of corporate-written "free trade" deals that drive global wages and workers' rights to the bottom.

But how is any of this going to happen to say nothing of more radical changes? As many observers have noted, most of Sanders' program represents traditional New Deal policies that used to be mainstream Democratic politics. But after three decades of a massive capitalist assault on the working class and social programs, defending and expanding them has a genuinely radical edge in today's political context.

That's exactly why Sanders has stimulated so much excitement and energy among people who have been on the sharp end of the vicious neoliberal stick. And of course, in one crucial respect Sanders has gone beyond the old New Deal formula, in correctly identifying the biggest "global security threat" of all: runaway climate change.

As more and more people recognize, stopping the climate disaster requires action on every level, from "above" and from "below" including political action through national and state legislation, effective executive action, and popular mobilizations with solidarity all the way from our neighborhoods to indigenous peoples and the entire global system.

Confronting the crisis of the environment encapsulates everything that a political revolution needs to be. It's not only about voting on policies proposed by elites, but about active engagement that changes policies and transforms our own communities and lives.

But how to actually pay for universal single-payer health care, tuition-free public university education and the monumental transition to a carbonless renewable-energy infrastructure, among other things? Health care and education for all must be properly funded, not starved the way so much of the public sector has been. (The Canadian single-payer

system for example, while vastly superior to the mess in the United States, doesn't cover prescription drugs and is afflicted with inequalities and budget shortfalls.)

Creating an equitable tax system where the wealthy pay a reasonable share, eliminating the absurd waste and public health failures of the private health insurance system, wiping out mountains of unpayable student debt and creating the millions of jobs needed for sustainable energy conversion are all surely a necessary start "but far from sufficient.

The War Machine

To make such promises viable, a political revolution surely must be about massive cuts in military spending and stopping the U.S. mission of policing the world's peoples. It's bizarre when the reactionary economic nationalist Donald Trump, amidst his semi-coherent rants and posturing, states that the United States "can't afford to be everyone's protector" and gets a positive popular response to a demagogic "America First" message while the debate on the Democratic side evades the whole issue.

Aside from rightly criticizing the "regime change" adventures that have created such catastrophic results in places like Iraq and Libya, even Sanders has chosen to leave the issue of the bloated military budget out of his message. Criticizing Israel's rampages in Gaza as "disproportionate" is an astonishing and most welcome break with the Israel-uber-alles consensus in U.S. political campaign discourse. Sanders, however, has not questioned the bipartisan policy of delivering ever-greater weapons systems to Israel. Nor has he proposed ending military sales to the likes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which have brought about the near-destruction of the country of Yemen.

All these and many other horrors, with the civilian carnage they inevitably bring, are structural manifestations of a violent, destructive and ultimately insane "global security architecture."

For any hope of "political revolution," issues of militarism and the permanent war economy "its costs and its consequences for the whole structure of society" can't be passed over.

A political revolution is about coming to grips with the full costs of the war machine. Beyond the burden of direct expenditures alone are the physical and mental destruction of soldiers and civilians and families, hollowing out of communities, and after-effects ranging from domestic violence to mass shootings.

Class and Race Injustice

Nothing has touched a raw nerve in the popular mood more than Bernie Sanders' observation that almost all the increase in wealth in the past two decades "has gone to the top one percent" while the wages of living standards of working Americans "called "the middle class" in this country's uniquely backward political discourse" have stagnated or declined.

Clearly a political revolution must put this issue at the top of its agenda, but that requires getting at its roots. Yes, a \$15 minimum wage with further increases indexed to inflation would help, as would a reformed tax structure not designed to transfer wealth upward to the rich. But these are bandaids, not cures for rampant rising inequalities that no tax structure in a capitalist economy can overcome.

Mitigating, let alone reversing, the growth of inequality is about rebuilding and renovating an activist labor movement. Political action to reform labor laws stacked against workers and unions is required, but the heavy lifting of a labor revival can only happen at the base. The Labor for Bernie project, continuing beyond the primary season and the electoral cycle, could contribute significantly, along with the growing network of rank and file-based efforts.

Many may object that today's weakened and nearly-paralyzed union

movement is in no shape to spearhead any kind of political revolution. That is true, and social movements can't and shouldn't "wait for the working class" quite the contrary. But the inescapable reality is that the state of working-class organization effectively sets the ceiling on the level of structural reforms that can be won and maintained, and the degree to which wages and working conditions can be raised.

There is simply no shortcut or substitute for working-class organization. It was the explosive rise of industrial union organizing that underpinned the New Deal reforms of the 1930s and their extension during the postwar capitalist boom. The anti-labor onslaughts of the past three decades have gone hand in hand with the weakening of labor organization, reducing union membership in the private sector to well under ten percent.

At the same time, no political revolution is possible unless it's about facing the reality of the United States' racial capitalism. The fact that African-American unemployment is always double the national rate; that the systematic destruction of public education is gutting the futures of children, families and communities of color; that police forces in Black and Brown neighborhoods feel empowered to harass, brutalize and ultimately kill unarmed people "none of these are accidental, or relics of bygone racist practices. They are rooted in the structures of the economy and society from the time of slavery to the present.

That's why Black Lives Matter has blossomed across the country. It took the Sanders campaign a while to understand that this movement's concerns were not side issues, but rather go to the heart of the devastating social crisis of African Americans and the entire society. To Sanders' credit, he has subsequently embraced racial justice issues, which must remain central to what the "political revolution" is about "whether Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump or whoever else sits in the White House.

Democracy and Moving Forward

Political revolution must be about democracy. Many Sanders supporters are outraged by the unfairness of the Democratic Party's system of superdelegates, the exclusion of many voters from the primaries, the party leadership's manipulation of the debate schedule to Sanders' disadvantage, premature media announcements of Clinton's victory and other examples of "a rigged process."

But it's absurd to imagine that the decision-making process of a party of corporate capital could somehow be an expression of grassroots popular democracy. And in any case, Hillary Clinton did not "steal" the Democratic nomination. Her cynical corporate centrism and militarism is the very core of what the Democratic Party stands for.

The denial of democracy in U.S. politics is much more fundamental. The "duopoly" of the capitalist parties is sustained by keeping third parties and independent candidates off the ballot. Voter suppression laws are deliberately designed to keep away African Americans, Latinos and the poor. District gerrymandering assures that the House of Representatives in particular has a rightwing Republican majority. And of course, wiping out

election financing laws gives billionaires' dark money and SuperPacs an overwhelming advantage in federal and state elections.

All this is where a supposedly "democratic process" becomes the tool of the one percent. Democracy itself is a revolutionary concept in a political system that's become an effective plutocracy. But the economic and ethical issues at the core of Sanders' appeal "the destruction of the financial system and of people's lives by corporate greed, the utter corruption of politics by billionaire donors and lobbies in their service, state legislatures' brutal attacks on women's reproductive rights" are fundamentally not separable from the deeper structures and the far-from-random stratification of American capitalism.

There is every reason to hope that the "political revolution" will proceed. The Bernie Sanders campaign by its very nature is unique and not reproducible, but this upsurge did not emerge in a vacuum. It's been a new manifestation of the same spirit that surfaced in the Occupy upsurge, the Fight for \$15, the mushrooming campus movements to divest from fossil fuel industries (and from corporations profiting from the Israeli occupation!), Black Lives Matter and many more struggles.

Whatever their problems of

organizational sustainability and continuity, all these are fuelled by a common and intractable crisis of capitalist production and rule. Neither Donald Trump's walls and tariffs nor Hillary Clinton's corporate centrism will solve inequality, racial injustice or environmental disaster. The polar ice caps continue to melt, northern Canada is burning up and horrifying droughts are devastating the Horn of Africa and Indian subcontinent. Even Trump can't work out a deal with nature, let alone by denying it.

The political revolution is essential, and the most central responsibility for socialists right now is to help build it. To do so, we've argued repeatedly in these pages, requires among other things, finding a route to break away from "not into" the Democratic Party. A political revolution will need political organization, at the local, statewide and national level, that responds to the movement's objectives rather than obstructing and burying them.

Beyond that, as the struggle advances it will confront not only the political power of "the billionaire class," but the need to take apart a system that creates billionaires and privilege at one pole and mass insecurity, oppression and misery at the other. The political revolution will need to turn, ultimately, toward social revolution too.

[Against the Current](#)

Valls doesn't see the end of the tunnel

3 July 2016, by **Léon Crémieux**

That is the conclusion that must be drawn by Socialist leaders on the evening of June 29, after the meeting of the government with trade union leaders from the CGT and FO.

However, over the last two weeks, everything has been done to reduce the movement to silence.

After the huge demonstration on June

14 in Paris, the government mounted a very strong campaign of propaganda in all the media to create the impression that the country was ablaze, that every demonstration was becoming a battlefield of civil war. In particular, the dozen broken windows of a children's hospital in Paris were used to support a media frenzy whose aim was to put pressure on union leaders to end the protests, and in

particular the one planned for June 23. What was at stake was to break the movement by negating its main expression, the Paris demonstration. To this end, the government was trying to turn public opinion against the demonstrations by highlighting the state of exhaustion of the police, portrayed as heroes of the nation since the attacks in November 2015 and permanently placed on a war

footing with the state of emergency, Euro 2016 and the social movement. Needless to say, according to Valls the only way to change the situation lay in the demonstrations, which by being stopped, would have relieved the CRS and the gendarmes.

In this logic, Valls wanted to force the trade unions to accept cancellation of the demonstration on June 23 and its replacement by a simple rally. Faced with the refusal of the Inter-union coordinating body, the Prime Minister thought he had the necessary relationship of forces to take a gamble and simply ban the Paris demonstration. The ban was announced on the morning of June 22, the day before the demonstration. In a top-level consultation, he imposed his views on Hollande against the advice of Cazeneuve, the Minister of the Interior.

The banning of a trade union demonstration is a rare occurrence in France. You have to go back to February 8, 1962 to find such a decision, when, during the Algerian War, the Prefect of Police of Paris, Maurice Papon, banned a demonstration of the left parties and trade unions for peace in Algeria. The attacks of the police against the protesters caused, that day, the death of eight people at the Charonne underground station in Paris.

The decision by Valls sparked a general outcry, from the trade unions and on the political level, going well beyond the radical left and ecologists. Even the CFDT protested against this decision, as did many leaders of the Socialist Party.

Olivier Besancenot was the first to announce in the media that he did not respect the ban, followed in less than an hour by representatives of the Left Party, the Communist Party, the representatives of the Inter-union coordination... and even several "dissidents" of the Socialist Party. Once again, since February, Manuel Valls had underestimated the strength of the movement, the strength of the rejection of the labour law, and he had greatly overestimated the relationship of forces that he had at his disposal. Very quickly, Hollande and Cazeneuve retreated, disavowed Valls and offered

the Inter-union coordination a symbolic victory by lifting the ban and accepting a demonstration, even though it was only authorized to follow a route that was reduced to a minimum.

This episode reflects the contradictory aspects of the present situation: the movement has not the strength to block the government. There has not been, and there will not be in the coming days, a general strike capable of blocking the economy and imposing, through a direct relationship of forces, the withdrawal of the law. The activists mobilized in workplaces and localities and the activists of Nuit Debout were strong enough for that. But to succeed, it was necessary not to disperse the mobilization and that a leadership of the movement could build up a real confrontation over time. The union leaderships of the CGT and FO did not want this prolonged and offensive confrontation. Since March they have constantly accompanied the movement, without providing it with a leadership on the offensive. Workers in many sectors came out on strike over several days in March. But the movement has now exhausted its real forces mobilizing major professional sectors. If, despite this, we have reached the end of June maintaining a high level of confrontation, it is because tens of thousands of activists are still mobilized, imposing their radicalism on the trade union leaders and basing themselves on the profound discredit of Hollande, Valls, the Socialist Party and on a rejection of the labour law. The level of popularity of Holland is constantly falling (88 per cent of negative opinions in the latest poll released on June 30; Valls is on 80 per cent). Similarly, the possible use of article 49.3 is disavowed by 73 per cent of the public in another survey. That is why we have reached the end of June with continued protests and strikes in many private sector enterprises, in particular on the days of inter-union demonstrations. New strikes and demonstrations will take place on July 5 and many people are promising not to stop there, despite the summer holidays and the possible passage of the law.

These contradictions are still alive

and, so to speak, the government only succeeds in wearing down the movement by wearing itself out.

The obstacle that Valls is faced with is the return of his draft law before the National Assembly on July 5. Drawing lessons from the discredit caused by the use of article 49.3 in April, the Socialist Party is trying to deactivate the internal opposition which may cause the same scenario next week, causing a deepening of the discredit of the government.

That is the explanation for the political game that led Valls to receive the CGT and FO leaders on June 29 and to give the image of a government willing to engage in dialogue. It was simply a posture, since Valls does not want to negotiate about any fundamental aspect of his law. The sole purpose was to show that he had an attitude of openness, wishing to improve the haughty and arrogant image that he has shown for several months. It is likely that the operation will have fallen flat. Although Mailly and Martinez were willing to go quite far, by not putting forward the demand for the withdrawal of the law, which is however the position of the Inter-union coordination, it will turn out to have been to no avail... Valls wants to give the image of flexibility while not wanting to give any ground. However, the leadership of the CGT had even given a sign of appeasement to the government by refusing to exercise its right of opposition to the agreements signed by the CFDT and UNSA at the SNCF. If the CGT rail workers' federation CGT had added its voice to that of SUD Rail, those agreements would have been void, restoring momentum to the mobilization. So far this little game has failed to persuade the rebellious Socialist members of parliament to make a present of their votes to Valls and all parliamentary scenarios are still possible.

Meanwhile, despite this blockage and its growing discredit, as the days go by the government is sinking deeper into a policy of police violence, violating democratic rights. While not banned, the last two Parisian demonstrations have taken place in corridors closed by the police, each demonstrator being obliged to pass through several barriers, with body

searches, and able to reach the starting point of the demonstration only by a prescribed route. Again, this is an attack that is without precedent for decades; even during the 1970s, demonstrations involved less violence and a lower level of confrontation with the police. The pressure and the provocations are ubiquitous. On June 28, more than a hundred activists were banned from demonstrating. In Paris, 2,500 police surrounded a route of 2.8 kilometers for the demonstration, weapons (teargas grenade launchers, flash balls, etc....) at the ready. Worse, the police went even further that day by searching the homes of five activists in Paris, confiscating their computers and taking them into custody. The same day, 200 activists (casually employed workers from the theatrical world, postal workers....) who had assembled in a trade-union centre before the demonstration, were blocked for several hours and de facto banned from demonstrating by CRS riot police and gendarmes. After the demonstration and the lifting of the blockade of the trade-union centre, more than 800 activists gathered there as a protest. Other cases of police brutality were seen in cities across the country, particularly in Lille, where several activists were arrested.

Such escalation by the police in the

violation of basic democratic rights is easily made possible by the state of emergency and the arsenal of draconian measures that the government has implemented since the attacks of 2015.

A few days after the homophobic attack in Orlando, the government even tried unsuccessfully to cancel the Gay Pride march held in Paris on July 2. The march had already been postponed... so as not to hinder the Euro 2016 matches.

Since the beginning of the movement there have been many articles, surveys and records of police violence, signaling the use of offensive arms, the beating up of demonstrators who were already on the ground, etc... A recently released report by an independent commission of inquiry centred on journalists of the ecologist newspaper *Reporterre* is unfortunately eloquent. Here is a short quote from the introduction: "The report that you will read below confirms that law enforcement action in France has taken a very dangerous turn, which threatens the physical integrity of many peaceful citizens, sometimes minors and even children. The use of launchers of defensive projectiles has become a regular occurrence, whereas it should be exceptional, or indeed prohibited. Grenades being fired into crowds has become unacceptably frequent. The

use of unidentifiable plainclothes police to arrest people or carry out acts of repression has become systematic. Failure to respect the right of journalists to cover demonstrations without fear has become customary ... [Among police who have been interviewed], some say that they are being manipulated and used by the government, not to restore order, but to produce images that impress our citizens, as if France was threatened by "wreckers" as violent as they are anonymous, and foreign to the body of society". [21]



An artist, Goin, recently gave a good illustration of Valls and Hollande's policy in a mural ("The state clubbing freedom") on display as part of the "Street Art Fest" in Grenoble, featuring Marianne, the symbol of France, bludgeoned to the ground by two CRS, one having a shield marked "49.3". The mural caused a wave of outrage from leaders of the Right and the Socialist Party, first of all Cazeneuve. The anti-republican blasphemy was intolerable to those who were proud to support the insolence and the freedom to express themselves of the *Charlie Hebdo* journalists.

30 June 2016

A midsummer's night's bewilderment

2 July 2016, by Josep María Antentas

Some thoughts, therefore, hasty as they are and without having yet had a detailed analysis of electoral behaviour:

1. The view that Rajoy and the PP are the real and symbolic winners of the elections is unanimous. The traditional right has been shown to have a robust electoral grounding. The causes of this, beyond short-term issues, can be sought in substantial sociological trends, in the cultural field and in

mutations in the social structure, after decades of neoliberal capitalism and consumerism and property speculation, without forgetting the weight of political clientelism in many regions. It should not be forgotten, however, that in terms of generations the electoral support to the PP is especially strong among the oldest layers, which shows its loss of contact with the younger population and poses a key problem for the future. The

campaign of fear directed at Podemos by the right had an effect and allowed for a consistent mobilization of its electorate, much more than the reverse. The effect of Brexit, right in the final stretch of the campaign, presented in apocalyptic tone on the part of the media, undoubtedly reinforced a vote of order and fear. The capacity of the PP to concentrate "useful votes" on the right at the expense of Ciudadanos, on the other

hand, shows that the “Podemos of the right” has been from the beginning a phenomenon much more superficial than real, without strong social roots and an active social base.

2. The PSOE, despite obtaining its worst result in history (22.66%, 5,424,709 votes and 85 seats against 22%, 5,545,315 and 90 seats at the December 20, 2015 elections), nevertheless avoided what could have been an irreversible catastrophe, what seemed an inevitable *sorpasso* by Unid@s Podemos which would have placed it in an impossible situation. It has avoided a serious immediate internal crisis, but this does not hide the fundamental problem it faces: its absolute lack of an economic project differentiated from austerity and the right within the framework of the historic exhaustion of European social democracy. In a scenario where a majority is not necessary in order to be the first political force in the country, its lack of real project pushes it into a subaltern relationship to the PP and prevents any real discussion with Unidos Podemos. If the predicted new government under Rajoy is to work with the abstention of the PSOE, it will face the future dilemma of whether or not to support the new round of cuts and neoliberal reforms that Rajoy will undertake under the supervision of Brussels. If it does, the PSOE will pay a political price for this. And if it does not, the legislature will be politically unstable. The PSOE can withstand an electoral campaign against Unidos Podemos well enough, but it is not clear that it can succeed also in a daily parliamentary confrontation in a new legislature marked by cuts which it has to in some manner be partially “understanding” of for the sake of governance.

3. In the short term the scenario that seems most likely is a PP government facilitated by the abstentions of PSOE and Ciudadanos. The latter does not agree about new elections which might be lethal for it if a new batch of useful votes goes to the PP. The PSOE could face another electoral cycle with greater confidence, after having reaffirmed itself before Unidos Podemos, and perhaps its leadership would dare to go toward this horizon. But their party interests collide here

with reasons of state which require a government rapidly in a scenario of European instability. There may be an internal tension, real or staged, between the party apparatus, less directly and organically linked to financial capital and more prone to put party interests first, and those sectors most closely interwoven with the economic world and the state apparatus. But what is predictable, barring any surprise (and we live in a time of shocks), is that in the end the PSOE passively facilitates a Rajoy government, abstaining on the vote for a government. If this is its orientation, the most intelligent thing to do would be to previously renew its offer to Podemos of a “progressive” government including Ciudadanos, so as to claim that it has been forced to promote the PP into government because of the alleged intransigence of Unidos Podemos and through a sense of responsibility, to avoid new elections. Be that as it may, the PSOE needs to build a narrative and a staging of their decisions in a scenario it did not expect

4. Unid@s Podemos failed unexpectedly in its goal of overtaking the PSOE and challenging the PP for victory. The alliance between Podemos and Izquierda Unida obtained the same number of deputies as both had obtained separately (71, 69+2), but lost 1,100,000 votes (21.1% and 5,049,734 votes compared to 24.28% and 6,139,494 votes on December 20th). The causes are multiple and, admittedly, identifying them is a complex task. However, we should banish those interpretations that attribute the bad election results to the alliance between Podemos and IU, with the argument that this created an image of a radicalized “left front” that frightened moderate voters. Although it is not possible to make a counterfactual history the most reasonable thing is to imagine that, without such an alliance, the results for Podemos and IU would have been much worse. A first explanation of the unexpected fiasco can be found precisely in a very watered-down campaign, empty of real proposals and intended not to mobilize and stimulate the actual and potential social base of Unidos Podemos, but not to frighten voters who were more distant. The “patriotic campaign” was light in content,

characterized by anachronistic references to social democracy, puzzling many and not seeming to raise the necessary emotion and mobilizing dynamic. A second explanation is to be found in the limits of the politicization aroused by the cycle opened in 2011 and in the fluency of a situation where the old loyalties are dissolved but the new have not crystallized irreversibly. Many who voted for Podemos and IU on December 20th may have stayed at home, voted for extra-parliamentary options or gone back to the PSOE. And all this for a number of contradictory reasons between “right” and “left”: apathy, in particular on the part of the electorate originating from IU, before a loose campaign, bewilderment at the “social democratic” and moderate turn by Iglesias, incomprehension at the refusal of Podemos to support Pedro Sanchez against the PP in the case of more moderate voters or a shift to a PSOE which appealed to the left before a patriotic Podemos by the more traditional left base. In sum, Podemos has opened an important political-electoral space that is here to stay, but not all of it is solidified and its peripheries are still unstably faithful and faithfully unstable.

5. Podemos has issued too many contradictory messages. Since its foundation, the voters have seen Podemos say and do one thing and its opposite. Left unity has been forcefully rejected and then agreed with IU, governing with the PSOE as a minority partner was ruled out and then a proposal of government was made, the label of “left” was rejected and finally embraced in a barely credible “social democratic” form. This generates a double problem. First, the multiplication of contradictory messages causes misunderstanding in the most diverse ends of its own electorate and, in the case of these elections, it is likely that Podemos generated confusion on “left” and “right” at the same time, with the combination of disengaged messages and barely articulated gestures. Second, the contradiction and the permanent change of message finally reinforced the perception that Podemos is a force of fickle principles that adapts its speech according to need. This not only affects Podemos as such, but also Iglesias in particular

who, facing a scenario of permanent media harassment against himself, appears more as an excellent communicative robot programmed to convenience than as a leader with principles. Far from being a flaw only attributable to the tactic carried out in the last six months since the elections of December 20th, the problem of Podemos is of longstanding origin and it is the result of a political strategy based only on communicative techniques subordinate to opinion polls, not giving any centrality to its changing and fluid electoral program and policy proposals.

6. The transit from December 20th to June 26th was marked by the negotiations on forming a government and the coalition offer from Podemos to the PSOE. This contained one great success and two errors. It was wise to have an offensive attitude to the PSOE based on a unitary approach, something decisive if you want to overtake a force with which you are already tied.

No one ever had defied the PSOE with a unitary offer in this way. Proof of that was the internal turmoil in Pedro Sanchez's ranks after the assault from Podemos. However, the proposal had two important defects. First, the concrete proposal for the formation of a coalition government with the PSOE was a mistake. It would have been far better to offer an agreement to vote in a government as a basis for a programmatic agreement. The unitary effect would have been the same. And the hysterical reaction among the PSOE barons similar, since they could in no case tolerate a parliamentary agreement with Podemos involving opposition to austerity and a referendum on independence in Catalonia. In turn, an offer of investiture "to kick out the PP" would have enabled it to continue to mark its distance from the PSOE as a party of the regime and maintain consistency with what was said before December 20th.

The governmental proposal to the PSOE implied an unnecessary rehabilitation of the same as a party of change as well as a break with the "pro-regime forces and the caste vs. constituent and popular forces" axis which had functioned well, in favour of

an uncritical and sudden recurrence to the left-right axis in its more superficial aspect, i.e. on the basis of relations with the PSOE as structuring element of that axis. The second problem is that, with the single exception of the referendum for Catalonia (put there in black and white thanks to En com^o Podem), Podemos failed to articulate a concrete and concise list of measures on the basis of which to articulate a negotiation with the PSOE to make it clear that the latter is opposed to any serious anti-austerity measures and a constituent dynamic. Beyond an error of staging in the negotiation with the PSOE this showed a problem of substance in the policy of Podemos: the underestimation of program and the refusal to enter into clear and firm programmatic commitments. The communicative-discursive concept of politics has relegated program to an irrelevant matter with the purpose of always having hands free to permanently readjust what the party says and proposes. The result has been an inability to popularize demands that can become a lever for mobilizing the masses (such as payment in kind in the case of the mortgage crisis, the referendum in the sovereignty movement in Catalonia, or, in its day, the eight hours demand on the part of the labour movement). Precisely, to have concretized a project of "change" in clear "common sense" demands that the PSOE could not accept would have facilitated the public understanding of a refusal to support it in government and would have reduced the space for the demagoguery of Pedro Sanchez to present himself as an advocate of "change" who had been the victim of the sectarianism of Podemos. It is not self-evident that having averted these two errors would have had a positive impact on the electoral outcome, but at least avoiding them would have contributed to politically and strategically arming the Podemos social base.

7. The fiasco of June 26th is an expression of the limits of the model of the party understood as an "electoral war machine" built under the baton of ^oErrejón, after the founding assembly of Podemos in Vistalegre in October 2014 and which closed the

door to any attempt at political/organizational experimentation in a democratic and innovatory sense and innovative channelling the legacy of 15M. Podemos was reconfigured as a party focused on electoral competition and political communication, and it completely neglected the organization and structuring of the rank and file activists below, as well as the work of social penetration and intervention in the social movements and trade unions. This has not contributed, precisely, to solidifying or rendering loyal its electoral base. The correlative at the organizational level to the electoral-communicative war machine was the adoption of a highly centralized and hierarchical structure in which the local and regional/national leaderships were very subordinate (materially and symbolically) to the central leadership, and in which the circles played no role and had no function. The majoritarian and plebiscitary method for the election of the internal bodies served only to exclude minorities, converting the instances of the party into an expression of the majority fraction everywhere rather than spaces of pluralist synthesis. The inability of some regional/national leaderships, politically weak and often appointed only on the basis of loyalty to the central leadership, often led to organizational-political paralysis. The result has been an organization with an inoperative and locked structure, plagued by recurring crises of the territorial Citizen's Councils, with very little dynamism at the base and with hardly any activity outside of the social networks and the electoral campaigns. Undoubtedly the non-pluralist "electoral war machine" model is not responsible for all the problems, but it contributed to aggravating them.

8. Faced with the limits of the "electoral war machine", Errejón has announced several times the need to move toward a second stage of "popular movement". The main problem in the future promises of moving towards a "popular movement" which does not exist today is that this is designed essentially in terms of cultural and social work complementary to the electoral process. The risk is of going from an

(electoral and communicative) war machine to a popular movement, that re-balances electoral work with cultural work and implementation, but that does not serve to correct an electoralist conception of political-social change and allow the building of a less fickle base. We would then have an electoral war machine built on a passive and hierarchically structured social-cultural work turning on a political-electoral vortex. The result could be something not very different, but even more limited than the great reformist parties of the historical workers' movement: a mass political organization (but in this case with the masses as potential audience and not as an organized force), complemented by a network of social and cultural associations... but without the trade unions (or any type of movement that replaces them) as a lever for mobilization. The weakness of this approach is that, between the electoral war machine and the people's movement understood in a socio-cultural sense, the role of social mobilization is conspicuous by its absence (not to mention self-organization).

It does not play a strategic role, beyond mobilizations internal to the popular movement (like the "march of change" of January 31, 2015). Although Podemos understood that 15M opened a new period and new possibilities, paradoxically it did not integrate the social struggle as a variable of its strategy, as if the dynamic of 15M was destined to last forever or could be replaced eternally by electoral marketing. The mobilizing

and self-organizing thread that links the electoral and the cultural is lacking. The model of the party that would derive from this is no longer the "electoral war machine" centred on electoral campaigns and flanked by a network of cultural athenaeums, but rather a socially rooted "party-movement" oriented toward participation in the social struggles and the independent social movements, active in the cultural battle and not self-centred in institutional-electoral work (without this implying in any case underestimating the latter).

9. The political-electoral cycle initiated in 2014 has reached its peak and has given everything it could give. It has not been negligible. First, a drastic transformation of the party system and a crisis of the traditional system of governance in turn by the PP and PSOE, inasmuch as bipartisanship has been holed but not sunk. Second, the consolidation of an alternative force with five million votes, not far from the PSOE. And thirdly, the electoral victories in the municipalities of change on May 24, 2015 in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Cadiz, La Coruña and other cities. But the thrust of the political phase of the crisis opened after May 2014 has not been enough to take a force like Unidos Podemos into government. The challenge after June 26th is to open a second phase of the political crisis and, to do this, the determinant variable is the relaunching of the social struggle before the battery of adjustment measures that lies ahead.

A new push is necessary for the completion of the path that still remains. The outcome of the battle on the social front will be decisive, although not in a mechanical manner, for the outcome of the general political struggle.

10. Podemos, even if it were to take a conventional structure, is not a conventional party. The parameters that the likely internal debate might take after the disappointment of June 26th are unpredictable, given the framework of a political structure which is highly centralized and hierarchical, an authoritarian political culture, and the lack of a tradition of real political discussion in the organization beyond the narrow leadership bodies. In this regard, the main challenge for the formation is to manage the debate on its future in a pluralistic, democratic manner, respectful of all positions. If it manages to do this, it will emerge strengthened and will be in better condition to oppose the new Rajoy government that will have to manage the next round of cuts demanded by Brussels and manage the new economic recession predicted by all international organisations. Then, maybe yes, we can start the real second round. The path toward social and political change is not a straight line, by way of a triumphal march along the (electoral) highway of history. It is full of setbacks, successes, slowdowns and accelerations. The question lies in understanding the difficult times in order to leave them quickly and prepare for the next round.

Superbugs to kill 10 million a year by 2050

2 July 2016, by James Plested

Superbugs are strains of bacteria that are resistant to treatment by antibiotics. In the early years following the first widespread use of penicillin in the 1940s, such resistance was rare. But as the use of antibiotics has increased, so too has the

prevalence of drug-resistant strains.

Around 700,000 people currently die every year as a result of drug resistance in cases of bacterial infections, malaria, HIV/Aids and tuberculosis. Most of the deaths occur

in developing countries such as India and China. But countries like Australia aren't immune.

Renee Scott, an 81-year-old Melbourne resident, contracted the bacteria Carbapenem-resistant

enterobacteriaceae (CRE) following routine hip-replacement surgery at St Vincent's Hospital in November. CRE can be carried without causing an infection, but once it does, there is little that can be done to treat it. The death rate is about 50 percent. In June last year, St Vincent's revealed that dozens of patients had been affected by the bacteria since 2012.

Investors won't put their money into developing the new antibiotics that we need because not enough people are dying yet.

In a world of widespread antibiotic resistance, the report, titled "Tackling Drug-Resistant Infections Globally", notes:

"[W]e stand to lose the immense ground we have gained in the last century. This includes: 1) our fight against life threatening infectious diseases such as pneumonia, TB, HIV and malaria; 2) our battle against conditions such as cancer, where antibiotics are crucial in helping chemotherapy patients avoid and fight infection; and 3) huge advances in surgical procedures like organ transplants and caesarean sections, which have now become routine and relatively low risk, thanks to our ability to effectively stave off or treat acute infections with antibiotics."

So what can we do? First, we need to stop using so many antibiotics, so that the rate of adaptation of bacteria into resistant strains slows down. Second, we need to speed up the development of new classes of antibiotics that can tackle the resistant bugs.

If we do both these things, we can very likely avoid the nightmare scenario outlined in the report. Problem is, as the decades of inaction on climate change show, we don't live in a world where decisions are made based on what is sensible and good for humanity. We live instead under the rule of global capitalism, where things that won't make someone a quick buck are given short shrift.

Take goal number one: reducing current overuse of antibiotics. Our society is awash with antibiotics, both those prescribed for the treatment of human illnesses and those (between 70 and 80 percent globally) that are

used in animal agriculture. This creates ideal conditions for bacteria to develop resistance.

Much of this use is unnecessary, but it's making people money. Pharmaceutical companies have some of the highest profit margins of any industry. These profits depend on moving product - and having doctors prescribe their drugs is central to this.

Paradoxically, the sales of antibiotics are also helped by the under-funding of health care. Doctors, pressured to get through as many patients in as little time as possible, will often prescribe antibiotics as a precaution, rather than send patients for further testing.

In agriculture, the misuse of antibiotics is even more glaring. Only a tiny fraction of the drugs administered to farm animals are prescribed by vets to treat illnesses. The vast majority are simply injected, en masse, into factory-farmed cattle, chickens and pigs to pre-empt any possible infections and to boost growth.

What, then, of goal number two: developing new drugs capable of treating the new, antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria? The report explains: "For antibiotics, the commercial return on R&D investment looks unattractive until widespread resistance has emerged against previous generations of drugs, by which time the new antibiotic may no longer have patent protection or may soon lose it".

Translation: investors won't put their money into developing the new antibiotics that we need because not enough people are dying yet. Once more people are dying, and there is, therefore, a bigger market for the new drugs, they might think about it.

The report itself comes out with the rather chilling observation: "This will not change until we align better the public health needs with the commercial incentives". As far as its authors (led by Jim O'Neill, a former Goldman Sachs economist and current commercial secretary to the UK Treasury) are concerned, the problem isn't with "commercial incentives" that

put short-term profits ahead of human lives. The problem, as they see it, is with the kind of "public health needs" that are difficult for people to make money from.

In line with this, their proposed solutions are all about helping big pharmaceutical companies invest in R&D without threatening their fat profit margins. They propose, among other measures "a system of market entry rewards of around one billion USD per drug for effective treatments".

So much for the free market - as in so many other areas, it seems big business can be enticed to do anything in the public interest only with large quantities of free money.

The report makes the bold suggestion that maybe some of this money could be raised via an "antibiotic investment charge" which would be "applied on a 'pay or play' basis, meaning companies could either pay the charge or invest in R&D that is deemed useful".

Predictably, this suggestion has been met with howls of outrage by Big Pharma. A joint statement released by trade associations representing pharmaceutical companies in Britain, Europe and internationally, complained that the charge would "undermine current goodwill" and "voluntary investment" and that it "ignores the universal responsibility for finding a solution that all of society relies on".

Such is the reality of capitalism today: a tiny clique of super-rich individuals can hold the whole of society to ransom in the name of their own selfish interests. And, in all likelihood, governments will let them get away with it.

We can, and should, do better. The science is up to it. The money is there. What's lacking is any conception among political leaders that when it comes to human health, it is the economy that should align with our needs, and not the other way around. The future of our society, of our health and well-being, depends on our doing something about it.

Red Flag